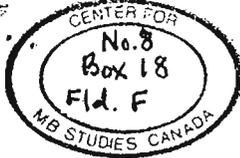


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RESPONDING TO JACOB LOEWEN'S  
"THREE MODELS/STRATEGIES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION"

Allow me briefly to report on the evolution of this response. Since I first had access to Loewen's paper only a few days before my response was to be back to him, I replied immediately in a three-page letter, but my response to Loewen arrived the day after he submitted his initial draft to Fresno. Nonetheless, he graciously responded to my critique. The first section of my response will, therefore, incorporate a summary of both my response and his reply. Since the receipt of Loewen's reply, I have taken time to reread his initial draft, ponder my first response and his reply, and read current missiological literature on the subject. Hence, my second section will be an addendum to my initial response, hopefully in a more reflective manner. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the implications for our own mission, if Loewen is to be taken seriously.

Allow me further, at the outset, to thank Brother Loewen for consenting to participate in this consultation. This enables all of us--the seminary community, the participating mission agencies, and the larger brotherhood--to benefit from his many years of cross-cultural experience in other than Mennonite settings. As a result, we are enriched by his sensitivity to the non-North American scene, his analytical insights as a social scientist, his love for God and the church, and by his creative imagination and gift for communication.

I. Initial Response: Commendable Features and Cosmetic Correction

A fore word. I welcome Loewen's paper, because I view it as a necessary and prophetic corrective at a critical time in our own mission history when we are about to set the direction for the subsequent decade. Along with Loewen, I lament our tendency to join the bandwagon of those Western missions which see it their mandate to "evangelize the world in this generation" (to use the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement). Not that there is something wrong with the watchword, but there is something wrong if it becomes the task of one segment of the church, namely, the West. Loewen cautions us implicitly against turning back the clock of history to reach that goal simply by enhancing our recruitment techniques, increasing the number of Western missionaries and the ill-prepared short-termers, assuming the mandate belongs primarily to the church of the West. Instead, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to unleash the vast resources among God's people now scattered among the 223 political units of the world, as we have seen happen in recent years in the most surprising places (USSR, China, Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia--Marxist countries with very limited foreign missionary activity). With this general affirmation of Loewen's paper, I then become more specific.

Some commendable features. It is not difficult to identify the following favorable aspects of Loewen's presentation.

1. He communicates well. By lumping together several related, though distinguishable strategies, he is able to build a strong

case against inadequate, or in favor of preferable, strategies. By use of such hyperbole, that is, overstating the case, Loewen makes his point. He unmistakably elicits a response. In this instance, he is grateful that he was able to elicit a reply from someone associated with "our own mission board."

2. He salvages the good elements of some not-so-good strategies. Hence, it cannot be said that he opposes "soul-winning" and "church planting." It is how these come about, or do not come about, that concerns him. Loewen incorporates these necessary missional components into his catalyst strategy.

3. He optimistically sees potential for the church for the future, in spite of the "chilling" picture presented by Hiebert and Kasdorf. He capitalizes upon the presence of God's people in most, if not all, countries of the world and seeks to mobilize the largest numbers of Christian witnesses; however, not necessarily North Americans. Loewen makes a strong case for becoming world Christians and recognizing world Christians elsewhere. His paper should not be viewed as a negative approach.

4. He maximizes the potential for witness by recognizing the "that of God" in humankind and becoming sensitive to, and responding to, the felt needs of humanity. By appealing to the image of God in humankind, Loewen does not minimize the need for the "special" revelation in Christ which gives to the Christian faith its unique dimension. Loewen does, however, recognize the Spirit of God at work long before a missionary arrives on the scene. And who can deny such a presence of God?

5. He identifies the following essential components of mission theology and practice:

- the good news of the Gospel which is freeing and forgiving;
- the full-orbed Gospel which addresses all of human needs-- physical, social, environmental, and spiritual;
- the importance of the larger Christian community, rather than competing conventicles;
- the need for catalytic facilitators, who do not impose Western models and structures in arbitrary and arrogant fashion;
- the spontaneous emergence of Christian beliefs and practices, unhindered in their contextualizing process.

Some reservations, questions, and corrections. In the light of the commendable features of Loewen's paper, the following questions and reservations may appear as cosmetic. Yet, from the perspective of the practitioners of mission, these responses are not merely defensive replies, but necessary modifications for a fuller understanding of the realities.

1. By grouping the short-termers, the tentmakers (who work under governments or for corporations), and the "faith" missions as representative of the "soul-winning" types, does Loewen not do violence to the individual components? While they all may believe in "soul-winning," do they not in fact do much more? Would these mission groups not cringe at Loewen's stereotypes? And would the "faith" missions not fit more the self-replicating modes? In his reply, Loewen corrects my deduction that he is

referring to tentmakers. He explicitly has in mind mission agencies, like SIL/WBT, working under government contracts, not tentmakers who are individually employed by governments and who in fact can be catalysts. Moreover, he maintains that "faith" missions are not denominations and in that sense replicating the denominational mold.

2. Despite the weaknesses of denominationalism, as long as we represent denominations here in North America, are we not simply being honest by acknowledging our affiliations? I tacitly accept Sidney Mead's definition of a denomination as "a voluntary association of like-hearted and like-minded individuals, who are united on the basis of common beliefs for the purpose of accomplishing tangible and defined objectives." Certainly that is much preferable to rank individualism, and the diversity of human cultures and understandings militate against a uniformity and organizational unity worldwide, however ideal that may seem. I realize Loewen does not argue against denominations, but against the wholesale exportation of our denominational differences. We have observed that where missionaries played down the Anabaptist heritage in favor of mere evangelicalism, our nationals have pushed them to explain their heritage and exhorted them for failing to share their faith distinctive. In his reply, Loewen admits some advantage to denominational distinctives, but emphasizes that such teachings should not further divide us from other Christians. As soon as a group becomes fully "like-minded," it becomes a mutual admiration society and sees others as wrong, rather than seeing people at different stages of development or attracted by different facets of truth. This was a helpful modification by Loewen.

3. By grouping MBs among the self-replicating "church planting" types, is Loewen not distorting the reality of MB mission? Certainly MBs are also of the "soul-winning" type, and surely they also have their catalysts. Perhaps we simply do not feel comfortable with being stereotyped as one kind. Loewen admits that he has lumped the MBs with other denominations in order to make a point, and he acknowledges that he does not know the details of the current MB mission scene.

4. Loewen refers solely to the emergence of the Iglesia Evangelica Unida (IEU) of Panama in terms of MB models of the catalytic strategy. Is he adequately informed of other successful catalytic models where MBs have been involved, such as the African Independent Churches (AICs) in Botswana (through AIMM), the Mennonite Muria Synod of Indonesia (through PIPKA), or the presence of G. W. Peters or John N. Klassen at Freie Hochschule fuer Mission in Korntal, W. Germany? Perhaps it makes us appear defensive to note this, but it is a reality. In reply, Loewen reminds us that MBs were reluctant to enter the work among AICs and failed to respond when he first informed us. However, other Mennonite groups responded. He probably correctly notes that we were willing to go under the AIMM umbrella because we "were not willing to accept that strategy." He notes, "The Panama situation is the only model where a work has been conducted along these lines all the way and I don't think I am stretching the truth."

5. Is the catalytic strategy the only model for the future? Is there not some room for a confrontational, proclamatory witness, such as Paul also engaged in? By observing only the catalytic strategy, are we not abdicating our role in taking the initiative to those people groups yet unreached? In responding to Alle Hoekema of the Netherlands, who lamented the importation of North American denominationalism, I was recently asked by the Europe Area Committee of CIM which of the three evangelistic strategies we might use: working among existing churches, forming house churches, or establishing new clusters of churches of a denominational type? I answered that we use all three. Our newly established churches in Europe ask for a denominational identity outside of the state church alternative. In his reply, Loewen allows for proclamatory witness within the catalytic type, when called upon. He certainly does not admit to abdicating his responsibility to the unreached, but creating friendships and trust to expedite the same. Loewen allows for the threefold approach in Europe, as long as it is meeting the felt needs of these people, not determining in advance which strategy to use, and then using that only. Again, his clarifications are helpful.

## II. Addendum: Reflecting Upon Loewen's Major Concerns

Since first reading Loewen's paper, I have read two of his recent essays to gain a further background to my understanding of his major thrust. The first has to do with theology: "Which God Do Missionaries Preach?" (Missiology 14:1, Jan., 1986); and the second with strategy: "Missionaries: Drivers or Spare Tires" (International Review of Mission 75:299, July, 1986). Reading these has helped me see that Loewen is attempting to get us out of the "groove" he identifies at the outset. He is enabling us to make a paradigmatic shift both theologically and strategically. Hence, it has a somewhat unsettling effect upon us. I wish to respond to what I perceive to be a twofold major shift which Loewen is consciously or unwittingly seeking to expedite.

The theological issue: our notion of God. The agenda of this consultation, and particularly the topic of strategy, does not allow a lengthy discussion of a theological/anthropological issue. But the more I reflect on Loewen's paper, the more I am convinced that he is dealing with an underlying theological issue: our notion of God. Unfortunately, I cannot assume that you have read his treatise, "Which God Do Missionaries Preach?" In the interest of brevity, I will come to the conclusion of his article and restate four of his seven insights:

1. That the concept of God/gods of many third world peoples is more similar to the one expressed in the Bible (especially the Old Testament) than is our own Western view.
3. That even in Western Christendom God is not fully universal. Tribal, national, and denominational gods still control many situations.
5. That accepting one God is not a once-for-all act. As culture and circumstances change, all people are prone to develop new God substitutes.
6. That we as missionaries from the West need to be a lot more critical of the shortcomings in our God concept. We have often been blindly overconfident that we were approximating the ideal

in our worship of God.

Coming back to the strategy paper prepared for this consultation, I note that repeatedly Loewen is concerned that in our communication with people of other societies, we do not short-change God. As indicated above, Loewen is not opposed to "soul winning" and "church planting." What concerns him is our sometimes simplistic, ethnocentric notions of God and salvation. More than one-quarter of Loewen's paper is devoted to the discussion of the "soul-winning" strategy. Loewen observes that "such short-term witnesses usually are fully convinced that they have the truth, the whole truth, and that they are communicating nothing but the truth. They approach the biblical message as a-cultural and, by the same token, they view their message as culture and language free and thus applicable to any person anywhere." Moreover, he notes, "their training does not include any instruction in the values, worldview, and thought patterns of the people to whom they are to witness." Similarly, concerning "faith missions," he states, "Like the first group, they view the biblical gospel as largely culture free, but in contrast, they often view the tribal culture as being 'largely of the devil' and thus to be destroyed totally." Loewen's caution is against communicating a distorted notion of God.

Quite to the contrary, concerning the catalytic strategy, Loewen alerts us to two significant premises: that God and his Spirit are at work long before the missionary arrives, and that there exists the "that of God" in every person and culture. Loewen does not indicate to what extent such an image of God in humankind has salvific value. Nonetheless, I do not interpret his statement to connote a universalism in which all are saved on this basis. He simply wishes to sensitize the missionary to God's prior work in humankind, thus providing touchstones to witness to a fuller understanding of God and salvation. And he wishes to alert the missionary to the limits of his own understanding. Hence, Loewen's strategy paper contains these theological components. And we are grateful for his caution.

The strategy issue: our manner of communication. Like Paul, Loewen seems to ask the same question, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?" Loewen's essay, "Missionaries: Drivers or Spare Tires?", clarifies for me the importance of his catalytic model, both with reference to the sending church and the missionary. Concerning the sending church, Loewen suggests the following: a) The church often has erroneous conceptions about the mission task (that is, to reproduce themselves instead of planting a gospel "seed" and letting it develop indigenously). b) It prepares its candidates for leadership roles that often are not in the indigenous church's interest. c) The sending church sees its helping role as a one-way street. d) It loads a series of problem expectations on the candidates it sends ("he who pays the piper calls the tune"). In regard to the candidates, Loewen suggests: a) In order to be useful on the field, the workers themselves will need sensitivity to discover the specific "mender-of-tires" role in which the indigenous church needs them. b) They will need an extra dose of courage to fulfill that role, especially when the latter goes

against the sending church's expectations. Here I would include the expectations of the mission administrators (which of course represent the sending church) simply because of the difficulty administratively of working with such "lone rangers." Somehow, as a sending church and administrators, we still expect missionaries to be in the driver's seat and to model leadership roles, not, as Loewen suggests, a victim role, totally vulnerable, as Jesus allowed himself to be.

Returning to the strategy paper, Loewen's catalytic model fits the "spare tire" role, more so than the "driver's." Such a strategy does not approach the task with a ready-made agenda, but allows for the flexibility that Hiebert and Kasdorf call for. Unlike the self-replicating model, it does not import the church structures from abroad, but allows the local church to assume the contextualization of the gospel. Further, the catalytic approach presupposes a functioning cultural framework within which God can speak and operate, and resists importation of worship styles from abroad. Interestingly, Loewen finds such spontaneity among the Anabaptists, who refused to allow outside authorities to impose a belief system on anyone.

As indicated, implementing such an open-ended system could be an administrative night-mare, and yet, I do not believe that Loewen is advocating anarchy. He is suggesting that this approach is needed today especially where there is a group response to the gospel, such as we have experienced in India and Zaire. It is needed, also, among independent, indigenous movements, such as the AICs in Africa. How is it that we simply have not been able to help the Kimbanguists of Zaire, the largest of the African Independent Church groups? Encouragingly, Loewen suggests a third need for this strategy is for the self-replicating models which call for more whole-person application of the gospel. Hence, there is ample occasion for the use of the catalytic strategy. We come, then, to the final part of my response to ascertain what are the implications of Loewen's paper for our mission.

### III. Conclusion: Implications for MBM/S

If Loewen is to be taken seriously, then there are implications for Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services both at the attitudinal and structural level, as well as at the strategy and implementational level. Without fleshing these out in any detail, I will outline the essentials.

Some needed changes at the attitudinal and structural level. Such changes do not come easily. In his editorial to the recent issue of IRM devoted to "Sharing on One Mission: Partnership in Practice," Eugene Stockwell reports that one church leader at the world consultation on ecumenical sharing at El Escorial, Spain, October, 1987, predicted that the consultation was doomed to failure, because, he said, it called for nothing less than a radical change of human nature (76:304, Oct., 1987). Indeed, we are prisoners of structure, and change will not come easily.

1. Attitudinally, we must be prepared to relinquish the control of power, both the mission organizationally and the

missionary individually. In the WCC study guide on "Ecumenical Sharing of Resources" (IRM 73:290, April, 1984), Philip Potter maintained, "The structures of giving and receiving between the churches do not facilitate real sharing because they are caught in the vicious circle of domination and dependence." Robert Ramseyer has shown that this domination through power must be overcome at the personal level of each missionary, since Jesus carried on his mission from a position of powerlessness (IRM 69:273, Jan., 1984). To be a catalytic facilitator will require such relinquishing of power.

2. Further, both attitudinally and structurally, we need to allow for greater openness. First, an openness at a personal level will free from precedents and tradition, making the ambiguities and inconsistencies of such a catalytic role tolerable. In his essay on "Reason, Religion, and Decision-making in Mission" (Missiology 14:3, July, 1986), Ramseyer notes that such openness enables the missionary to respond to the local situation even as Jesus in his incarnation was accessible through his proximity to the local situation. At the structural level, it may necessitate broadening our ecclesiastical comfort zone and participating in more joint projects, such as MBM/S has done in recent years with AICs in Botswana, with PIPKA in Indonesia, and with CEE in China.

3. Structurally, there will need to be partnership at the decision-making level. As long as non-Westerners are simply working for a Western owned and controlled mission, they may be viewed as paid Western agents. For this reason, L. D. Pate and L. E. Keyes see the internationalization by Western agencies as not a viable option (see "Emerging Missions in a Global Church," IBMR 10:4, Oct., 1986). The proposed meeting of international Mennonite Brethren leaders in Brazil in February of 1988 is a step in this direction. In "CWM's Partnership in Mission Model" (IRM 76:304, Oct., 1987), Maitland Evans reports on such a successful structural change in 1977 by the Council of World Mission, the churches of the former London Missionary Society.

4. With such structural change, there will need to be a decentralized administration, otherwise, the catalysts will not have the freedom to minister, since each society will have a unique constellation of needs and resources to meet these needs. In his report on the CWM, Bernard Thorogood recommends for the future that groupings for such sharing must not be too big, lest the participants lose intimacy and trust (see "Sharing Resources in Mission," IRM 76:304, Oct., 1987). In yet another example of such structural change in the former Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, Samuel Ada emphasizes the importance of being multi-centred (see "CEVAA: From a Missionary Society to a Community of Churches in Mission," IRM 76:304, Oct., 1987).

5. Finally, there will actually need to be a sharing of resources, where, as in a true trading relationship (see Loewen "Missionaries: Drivers or Spare Tires," IRM 75:299, July, 1986) each participant gives of the surplus and receives what is needed. No longer will there be the donor/recipient relationship among the international participants in mission. Like Paul in

distributing the collection of the Macedonian churches for the church in Jerusalem (II Corinthians 8 and 9), the catalysts will be sensitive to what the host society needs and can provide for others, and be instrumental in the sharing of resources.

Changes at the Strategy and Implementational Levels. The foregoing changes of attitudes and structures will facilitate the following specific stages of implementing a catalytic strategy.

1. Ascertain the felt needs of the target group. Only by being present and identifying with the poor, victimized, oppressed, and suffering will the catalyst be able to "scratch where it itches," to use Loewen's frequently-quoted aphorism. Looking to the future, H. A. Snyder and D. V. Runyon, after polling more than fifty leaders about the "Ten Major Trends Facing the Church" in the next fifty years, identify the widening gap between rich and poor among the three major world realities threatening planet earth. Recognizing this worldwide felt need must remain part of the church's agenda.

2. Become task-oriented. As indicated above, in their study of "Emerging Missions in a Global Church," Pate and Keyes do not see the internationalizing of Western agencies as a viable option, but recommend instead task-oriented partnerships in the area of research, strategy development, motivating pastors and leaders, and in training leaders. Such task-oriented partnership would forego the need of organizational amalgamation and would avoid indefinite resource commitments which could create dependencies. Such specific tasks would more easily be decentralized and locally controlled (see IBMR 10:4, Oct., 1986).

3. Mobilize appropriate resources. Such mobilization will occur both in the host country of the catalyst, as well as by his sending church. Frederick Wilson maintains that "the economic imbalance of this global society is such that at least through the rest of this century there will continue to be need for material resources in great abundance to be transferred from Christian communities within a context of affluence to those in a context of poverty" (see "Mission with Empty Hands: Exhortation or Experience?" IRM 73:290, April, 1984). However, no longer dare this be a unilateral giving, no longer a unilateral receiving. Once pooled, the participants have equal power in the distribution of those resources that belong to the one body, the church.

4. Orient the sending church and the candidates to new expectations. Such orientation must begin with the mission board and administrators and permeate the sending constituency in order that the erroneous conceptions about the mission task, identified by Loewen above, do not occur. The sending church must no longer see its role as a one-way street, the donor and expert, but be a recipient as well, acknowledging its own needs. No longer will the prayer letters and deputation reports feature primarily the success stories to legitimate the expected support. From the outset, while still in their formal training, even before recruitment, the new role of such workers will be clear. The final, in-house orientation will simply be to fine-tune the new

expectations.

5. Enlarge the scope of ministry. Such expansion to new areas of need, instead of perpetuating institutional dependencies which long since should have terminated, will go beyond the denominational boundaries. It will risk the working together in joint projects with other confessional groups, perhaps even beyond our Anabaptist-oriented sister conferences. It will demonstrate to the world that denominations are not simply an "institutionalized manifestation of a missionless Christianity" in which they seek shelter of the like-minded, content with others believing what they want (see David J. Bosch, "Vision for Mission," IRM 76:301, Jan., 1987). Such expansion of ministry beyond present boundaries will admit that truth is greater than one formulation of it.

6. Anticipate mission-in-reverse. This notion finds considerable resistance within North American evangelicalism. Does that reflect our ethnocentrism, our confidence that we have the final answers and simply need to share these with the rest of the world? Lesslie Newbigin, following his life of ministry in India, upon his return to his native UK asks the question, "Can the West be converted?" In his recent work, Foolishness to the Greeks: the Gospel and Western Culture, he argues persuasively that western Christianity has become captive to Enlightenment rationalism and in the process abdicated its biblical roots and nature. Perhaps the church of the non-West has a mission to us in this regard. Are we willing to listen and learn from those who come to us from non-Western traditions? A catalytic strategy will call for such openness.

7. Identify with the pilgrim church. Becoming a catalyst will require seeking out and identifying with the believing community, however scattered, oppressed, victimized or hidden and small it may be. One of the prognostications for mission in the future suggests increased totalitarianism, anything but a compatible environment for mission. Andrew Walls' exhortation points to the necessity of a "pilgrim" principle for such times: "Along with the indigenizing principle which makes his faith a place to feel at home, the Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society: for that society never existed, in East and West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system" (see David J. Bosch, "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission," Missiology 11:4, Oct., 1983).

The catalyst strategy proposed by Loewen is probably more biblically rooted, experientially tested, and missiologically sound than the first reading may have suggested. We do well, therefore, to examine our mission strategy closely in the light of such a catalytic possibility.

Peter M. Hamm  
January 1, 1988

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