

The Lausanne Movement's Missiological Implications for Theological Education in Koreaⁱ

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Abstract

This study seeks to understand how the Lausanne Movement's impact can continue to inform and shape evangelical efforts within the global Church, with a specific focus on missiological implications for theological education in Korea. The study will explore the factors driving the Lausanne Movement's inception and growth through an analysis of the historical, socio-economic, and political contexts that have shaped its development and its impact on the Korean Church. By examining these contexts, this research aims to highlight strategies by which the Korean Church can respond to emerging challenges presented in the Fourth Lausanne Congress, thus ensuring a sustained evangelical impact within theological education and broader Church initiatives.

Key Words: Lausanne Movement, Evangelical Movement, theological education, socio-economic and political contexts, historical influence

Introduction

Prior to the Fourth Lausanne Congress held in September 2024 in Seoul-Incheon, South Korea, the Chair of the Preparatory Committee, Rev. Gi-seong Yu, underscored the significance of hosting the Lausanne Congress in Korea during an interview with *The Korea Daily*:

For a long time, the Korean Church was preoccupied with external, numerical growth. In our pursuit of church growth, we grew lax in self-reflection and in making concerted efforts to establish a thoroughly biblical church. During turbulent times, the Church then failed to respond wisely to social challenges, remaining confined within its own walls. This has given the younger generation a negative impression. The message that Lausanne theology conveys is crystal clear: it calls the Church to occupy a healthy and constructive place within society. I believe this Congress will have a very positive influence on Korean Christianity (Yu 2023).

In line with Rev. Yu's expectations, this article examines whether the recently convened Fourth Lausanne Congress has, in fact, played a highly beneficial role not only for the global Church but also for the Korean Church. This study seeks to understand how the Lausanne Movement's influence can continue to inform and shape evangelical endeavors within the global Church, with a particular emphasis on the missiological implications for theological education in Korea. To achieve this aim, this study will analyze the contexts that have influenced the rise and development of the Lausanne Movement. By exploring these contexts, the study suggests ways in which the Korean Church may respond to new challenges that have emerged from the Fourth Lausanne Congress, thereby ensuring sustained evangelical impact within theological education and broader Church ministries.

Accordingly, this article first explores the historical background and development of the Lausanne Movement and its impact on the Korean Church. The study then discusses the impact of the Movement on the Korean Church's theological education and considers the challenges that lie

ahead.

For this research, the primary sources are the official declarations published by the Lausanne Movement. Secondary sources include academic papers featured in scholarly journals, newspaper articles, and books.

The Lausanne Movement and Its Impact on the Korean Church

The First Lausanne Congress (Lausanne, 1974) and Its Reception in Korea

Largely due to a broadening focus among the ecumenical World Council of Churches, the evangelical perspective on mission began to crystalize around the time of the 1966 Berlin World Evangelical Congress, becoming more precisely defined through subsequent gatherings in Singapore (1968), Minneapolis and Bogotá (1969), and Australia (1971). Spurred by these developments, Evangelicals recognized the need for a more comprehensive approach, ultimately convening the First International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 under the theme “Let the Earth Hear His Voice.” Drawing 2,700 Christian leaders from 150 countries, the Lausanne Congress was one of the broadest and most representative events in modern missionary history (Kim 2014, 113).

More than simply a mission conference, the First Lausanne Congress established the theological foundation of evangelical mission through the Lausanne Covenant—arguably the most significant outcome of the Congress. Spanning 15 articles, the Covenant addresses a broad spectrum of theological issues, from God’s overarching purposes to the Second Coming of Christ (Stott 2012). The Covenant does not merely restate traditional evangelical beliefs but adapts them to the realities of global evangelization in a contemporary setting (Cho 1989, 46).

The seminal Lausanne Congress and the resulting Lausanne Covenant, however, exerted minimal influence on the Korean Church. According to Seong-hwan Kim, one key factor was that the Lausanne Covenant was neither introduced nor translated into Korean. Consequently, World Council of Churches (WCC) publications, rather than Evangelicals’ achievements, dominated the era. A second impediment stemmed from Korea’s military dictatorship and its restrictive political climate, which hindered the recognition of the Lausanne Congress. A third reason was that mainstream media paid little attention to Lausanne, further limiting its visibility in Korea (Kim 2014, 112-13).

Nonetheless, the evangelical leaders at the helm of Lausanne did have a noteworthy impact on theological developments within Korea. Among the key figures at the First Lausanne Congress, Billy Graham proved instrumental in founding ACTS (Asian Center for Theological Studies and Mission) University, donating USD 100,000 collected during his 1973 evangelistic rally in Yeouido, Seoul—an event attended by approximately one million people. This contribution was crucial in establishing ACTS in 1974 (Kim 2024, 32-48). Another notable link involved Dr. Samuel H. Moffett—ACTS’s inaugural president—and Ruth McCue Bell, Billy Graham’s wife, both alumni of Pyongyang Foreign School (Lee 2024, 190-98). Additionally, Carl Henry—leading evangelical theologian and the founding editor of *Christianity Today*—visited ACTS frequently in its early years, offering lectures and instilling in students a robust evangelical consciousness, helping them withstand the surge of liberal theological currents. Although unable to serve as president due to Korea’s harsh winters, Henry consistently referred to himself as its “founding lecturer” (Park 2006, 254-57; Lee 2024, 190-98).

The Second Lausanne Congress (Manila, 1989) and the Mobilizing Impact of the 10/40 Window

The Second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization took place from July 11 to 20, 1989, in Manila, Philippines, where 4,300 participants from 173 countries gathered—making it one of the largest evangelical gatherings to date. Upholding the spirit of the 1974 Lausanne Congress, Lausanne II adopted the Manila Manifesto, a renewed strategic commitment to world evangelization. This declaration emphasized the paramount importance of gospel proclamation and offered practical directives for global mission, thereby contributing significantly to the reorientation of international evangelical outreach (Conard 1989).

One factor that powerfully impacted the Korean Church was the concept of the “10/40 Window” which Luis Bush, an Argentine-born US-American missiologist, presented for the first time during the opening ceremony of Lausanne II. Bush contended that “The core of the unreached people of our world” is concentrated in “a rectangular-shaped window,” between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude, explaining that this region was densely populated, suffered from poverty and underdevelopment, and was dominated by non-Christian world religions (Korte and Onnekink 2020, 110-111). Bush advocated for focusing global mission efforts on this area as the new millennium approached. His proposal garnered widespread enthusiasm among global Evangelicals and served as a pivotal framework for mission strategies leading up to the year 2000 (Bush 1989, 58-62).

Nevertheless, Bush’s 10/40 Window concept attracted criticism on three main counts. First, some evangelical writers and missionaries argued that it marginalized missions outside the Window, maintained a Western-centric perspective, and exacerbated tensions between Christians and adherents of other religions in that region (Korte and Onnekink 2020, 110-44). Second, some have noted that the 10/40 Window notion overlapped uncomfortably with U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s and 2000s, often singling out the Middle East and Islamic contexts as “problem areas.” Anthropologist-theologian Michael Rynkiewicz specifically criticized the idea for mirroring a militaristic and organizational rhetoric prevalent in certain streams of US-American Evangelicalism (Rynkiewicz 2007, 232). Third, more fundamental critiques concerned the anthropological underpinnings of defining “unreached people groups” according to ethnicity, language, religion, social class, and geography (McAlister 2018, 152). Korean cultural geographer Ju Hui Judy Han, for instance, pointed out that such “racial taxonomies” find scant support in contemporary social science (Han 2010).

Despite the criticisms, Korean churches, seminaries, and Evangelicals—moved by Luis Bush’s appeal—committed to sending 2,000 long-term missionaries and 2,000 short-term workers specifically to the 10/40 Window (McAlister 2018, 145). Han notes that, even in some Korean American immigrant churches in the United States, the 10/40 Window idea significantly influenced their missionary momentum (Han 2010, 183-85). Hence, Bush’s message arguably shaped Korean mission endeavors more powerfully than did any other aspect of the Lausanne congresses to that point.

In terms of theological education, by the Second Lausanne Congress (1989), only a few Korean seminaries had established mission studies (missiology) departments. As previously noted, in 1974 ACTS University introduced a department akin to missiology, labeled “Asia Department,” while Chongshin University followed suit in 1980 by instituting a mission studies track. That same year, Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary (later renamed Presbyterian

University and Theological Seminary) also established a missiology program. In other words, by the time the 1989 Manila Congress was held, mission studies in Korean seminaries were still in their formative stage (Kim 2014, 113-14).

The Third Lausanne Congress (Cape Town, 2010) and Growing Korean Missionary Leadership

From October 16 to 25, 2010, the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization convened in Cape Town, South Africa, drawing approximately 4,000 participants from 198 countries. The gathering also commemorated the centennial of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, establishing the Cape Town Congress as a milestone in the development of the evangelical missionary movement.

In this Third Congress, approximately 200 Korean representatives attended, affording an opportunity to build up the Korean Church's leadership in international missions. Following the Cape Town gathering, the Lausanne Korea Committee facilitated the establishment of the Lausanne Professors Association—comprised of faculty members of 13 seminaries—in May 2012 and hosted the first Lausanne Club Camp for seminary students November 23-24 that same year. By 2020, the student-initiated Lausanne Campus Clubs had expanded to 18 seminaries. The Korean Lausanne Professors Association has focused on systematically articulating and disseminating the theological underpinnings of the Lausanne Movement through scholarly research. Meanwhile, Lausanne Campus Clubs have created vibrant communities within universities and churches where seminary students and laypeople may collaborate to pursue a shared mission vision (Choi 2021, 387-389). Through lectures, seminars, and workshops, these groups continue to promote holistic mission, integrating gospel proclamation with social action. Consequently, between the Third and Fourth Lausanne congresses, the Korean Church's theological foundations for mission and evangelism were strengthened and expanded (Lee 2014, Preface).

The Fourth Lausanne Congress (Seoul–Incheon, 2024) Addressing Global and Local Challenges

The Fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization convened September 22-28, 2024, at the Songdo Convensia in Incheon, South Korea. Building on the legacy of the First Lausanne Congress and the Second Manila Congress, the Fourth Lausanne Congress reaffirmed the core ethos of the Lausanne Movement—"The Whole Church Brings the Whole Gospel to the Whole World"—under the slogan, "Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together."

Particularly in this Seoul Congress, 222 national delegations grappled with how the Church can maintain its transnational and universal mission amid rising nationalism and hegemonic competition. In a world increasingly shaped by war and conflict, the Church was challenged to resist confinement to the interests of any single nation or region and instead embrace a broader vision of God's Kingdom and global evangelization. Furthermore, with the intensification of economic polarization in the post-pandemic era, the Congress recognized the Church's burden to serve marginalized and vulnerable communities, thereby embodying social justice. The necessity of responding to the climate crisis was also highlighted, emphasizing the Church's responsibility to care for creation as an essential element of faith and a divine mandate to address environmental degradation.

What did the approximately 5000 international delegates encounter in Korea's local Christian context at this Fourth Lausanne Congress? One highlight event was the "Twelve

Stones” performance on Thursday evening, which featured 140 years of Korean Church history. This event illustrated the hardships and struggles the Korean Church has faced against the peninsula’s broader socio-historical backdrop. Numerous international participants who shared a small group table with the author commented that only after seeing this performance did they truly comprehend the depth of suffering endured by Korean Christians. “Twelve Stones” vividly showed how the persecution and difficulties experienced by Korean believers were transformed by God’s grace into a lasting passion for evangelism and a flourishing mission movement.

The Fourth Lausanne Congress also addressed the dismantling of entrenched spiritual powers that have hindered the Korean Church since its founding. During the closing ceremony, a joint communion officiated by Rev. Lee Jaehoon (Chair of the Fourth Lausanne Congress) and Dr. Masanori Kurasawa (Chair of Japan Lausanne) provided a visible display of unity and reconciliation for the global Church (Goropevsek 2024). Similarly, the protracted hostility and armistice separating North and South Korea—rooted in ideological conflict from more than 70 years ago—was recognized as the critical sphere where Korean Christians today must foster renewed unity in Christ. The call to move beyond generations of animosity highlighted the transformative power of Christ’s love and forgiveness—an incomparable force of the gospel. Practically, this focus on North and South Korea offered an opportune moment to spotlight global interest in peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula and to develop missional responses accounting for the peninsula’s distinct geopolitical context and longstanding division. Unfortunately, in the broader program, this issue seemed somewhat peripheral. For many attendees, the more prominent distraction unfolded outside the venue, where certain ultra-conservative Korean Christians protested in opposition to the Lausanne Congress based on misunderstandings. Consequently, the topic of Korean reunification and peace may have received less attention than some initially anticipated.

Missiological Implications of the Lausanne Movement for Theological Education in Korea

Billy Graham strongly desired that the Lausanne Movement remain a *movement* characterized by spontaneity and autonomy, rather than a centralized or institutionalized organization (Choi 2013, 231-232). He envisioned creating a forum where global evangelical leaders could collaborate on world evangelization, cultivating a dynamic movement rather than a single, tightly controlled entity. Similarly, John Stott described the Lausanne Congress as “a movement that continues to ignite, rather than a momentary spark,” highlighting that it is far more than a one-time event; it has, in fact, consistently shaped global missions over time (Birdsall 2014).

Because the Lausanne Movement was conceived as a flexible movement—evident in the Fourth Lausanne Congress—it remains open to diverse influences from participating mission agencies and other groups, each pursuing its own objectives. Nevertheless, Lausanne’s core priority is to preserve its foundational mission without diluting the dynamic energy contributed by varied stakeholders. Building on the historical trajectory of the Lausanne Congresses, what follows specifically examines the Movement’s influence on the Korean Church’s theological education, identifying relevant challenges and outlining potential missional applications.

Lausanne Movement’s Impact on Korean Theological Institutions

ACTS University, where the author is affiliated, arose in response to Christian mission efforts and the broader evangelical movement in Asia—two key catalysts for the Lausanne Movement. Notably, the institution traces its origins to developments stemming from the 1966 World Congress

on Evangelism (WCE) in Berlin and the 1968 Asia-Pacific Evangelism Conference in Singapore, where international church unity efforts took shape. During the Singapore Conference, Asian leaders resolved to establish a graduate school of theology to foster the growth of the Asian Church and advance missions in the Third World. Concurrently, parts of Africa were undergoing decolonization, occasionally prompting a missionary moratorium in some regions. They also introduced the vision of founding an international institute for advanced theological study in Asia. Following these discussions, the Asia Center for Theological Studies (ACTS) University officially opened in Seodaemun, Seoul, in 1974.

While the Lausanne Movement during its first decade had only a marginal influence on the Korean Church, it was the Second Lausanne Congress (Manila, 1989) that had a more substantial and practical impact. In Korea, 1989 followed a long era of military dictatorship and coincided with overseas travel liberalization after the 1988 Seoul Olympics, allowing the Korean Church to engage more actively in international missions. Domestic organizations such as “Mission Korea” formed during this period. In this context, the Second Lausanne Congress indirectly guided Korea’s missional direction, sparking broader interest in cross-cultural outreach and unreached people groups, thus aligning with the sociopolitical realities of the time. Manila’s global mission strategies encouraged many Korean churches and mission agencies to prioritize unreached people groups, marking a transformative shift in Korean missions.

The Third Lausanne Congress (Cape Town, 2010) influenced Korean theological institutions more directly. As noted earlier, the Lausanne Korea Committee appointed Lausanne liaisons at various seminaries and founded Lausanne Campus Clubs to impart the Movement’s theology and ethos and to train leaders for Korean and global Lausanne endeavors (Choi 2021, 387-389). Regular meetings of the Korean Lausanne Professors Association since Cape Town underscore continuing theological work aimed at safeguarding the essence of the gospel and refining missional approaches.

Nevertheless, although certain academic outcomes have been achieved, the Lausanne Professors Association and Lausanne Campus Clubs have yet to integrate fully their insights into seminary-wide curricula. This shortcoming calls for reflection on how the Korean Church—through the graduates these seminaries have produced—has not adequately fulfilled the whole gospel mandate pursued by the Lausanne Covenant and subsequent Lausanne Congresses in Korean society. Consequently, by the time Korea hosted the Fourth Lausanne Congress, Christian influence on society had visibly declined, revealing the limitations of these initiatives. Hence, a more robust impetus and deeper theological reflection are needed to ensure a lasting impact.

Future Challenges: Contextualizing the Fourth Lausanne Congress for Theological Education in Korea

Korean seminaries now face declining enrollment, and the country’s missionary workforce is aging, with fewer new recruits. These twin phenomena parallel increased secularization that has contributed to the rise of the unchurched population, especially among younger age groups. At the same time, extremist factions and ultra-conservative Christian voices have further generated anti-Christian sentiment in the general public, hindering mission and evangelism. Another significant social change that calls for change in the Korean Church’s mission is the evolving ethnic composition in Korea. By October 2024, the proportion of immigrants in Korea exceeded 4.8% of the national population, indicating that Korea is no longer ethnically

homogeneous (Ministry of the Interior and Safety 2024). Hence, mission efforts can no longer be confined to overseas outreach; reaching international students, business owners, and laborers within Korea has become increasingly vital. One example of such an effort is by Onnuri Church, led by Rev. Lee Jaehoon, which established the Onnuri M Center to address these growing needs (Onnuri M Center 2024). Similarly, Sooyoungro Church in Busan has proactively ministered to foreign residents (Sooyoungro Church 2024).

In this multifaceted changing context, Korean seminaries are likewise reevaluating their pedagogical approaches and seeking more innovative strategies. Many professors from ACTS University participated in the Fourth Lausanne Congress, and international students from ACTS volunteered. Inspired by a desire to renew their focus on evangelism and mission—consistent with the school’s legacy of emerging from the Lausanne vision—ACTS University organized the ACTS Theological Forum after the Congress to discuss how the newly addressed themes and perspectives might be integrated into seminary curricula (ACTS University 2024). At the forum, participants concluded that current seminary course offerings diverge significantly from contemporary needs, with many core subjects reflecting the contexts and dilemmas of 20-30 years ago rather than tackling the urgent issues raised at the Lausanne Congress and by modern society. Armed with these findings, ACTS University and other seminaries seek to restructure their academic frameworks so that future church leaders can address the evolving demands of mission and ministry in today’s world.

Conclusion

On the final day of the Congress, in a concise but impactful address, Chair Michael Oh reaffirmed the Lausanne Movement’s primary concern by stressing that approximately 1.5 billion people in unreached communities have yet to hear the gospel. In so doing, he redirected attention to the gospel’s centrality—an emphasis that appeared to wane amid a variety of issues following the Third Lausanne Congress.

Within this context, the Korean Church now faces the task of placing the “new wine” received from the global Church at the Fourth Lausanne Congress into its own theological and ecclesial wineskin. For those who participated in the Seoul Congress, and for all Korean churches, an urgent question emerges: Can they effectively mature this new wine, allowing it to ferment into a new taste worthy of the Lord’s banquet? Or will certain elements remain unfermented and—like a sharp awl—burst the wineskin from within?

Hence, the Korean Church stands at a decisive crossroads: whether it will abandon its old wineskin and adopt a new one to contain the contemporary mission conferred through the Fourth Lausanne Congress or preserve traditional structures at the expense of meaningful transformation. In the same vein, seminaries and other institutions of theological education must consider ways to adapt curricula and nurture future leaders who can foster a missional ethos in step with the Lausanne Movement’s global vision. Only by choosing renewal—through both ecclesial and educational reform—can the Korean Church faithfully respond to the Lord’s Great Commission and fully integrate the lessons gleaned from the Fourth Lausanne Congress.

Endnote

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