

Editorial

Lausanne IV: One More Epilogue

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, April 2025

Most readers are well acquainted with the Fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, held last September 22-28 in Seoul-Incheon, South Korea. Many of you attended physically or participated virtually. Several of you have published blogs or articles about Lausanne IV (L4). Pre-Congress material, including videos, is still available on the Lausanne website (Lausanne Movement 2025a). You can also find an abundance of material through such online searches as “Lausanne Congress” or “Lausanne Congress reflections.”

Our *Global Missiology* - English editorial team planned this April 2025 issue on the theme of L4 to encourage further research and study that would supplement the many reflections published immediately after last fall’s Congress. We are grateful for the three featured contributions carried here, all composed by L4 participants. Even without other L4-related pieces that had been scheduled for publication but were not completed, you will find a great deal here to encourage further consolidation of the Congress’s meaning and impact.

I was grateful to attend L4 physically—my first Lausanne Congress, actually. I have read, studied, and even taught about the previous three Congresses in Lausanne (1974), Manila (1989), and Cape Town (2010). I have known personally for many years several in Lausanne leadership and others who have been involved in Lausanne circles. Attending this Congress, along with several thousand others from around the world and from throughout Korea, was a privilege, encouragement, and inspiration.

Seeing old friends and making new ones was of course a running series of highlights. Also, there was no greater blessing for me personally than watching the Korean hosts sacrificially prepare for L4, then actually welcome and care for all us participants. Some readers know that I served with the lead host megachurch, Onnuri Church, for over six years starting in 2015. To have a front-row seat to both the Congress preparations and on-site activities (including follow-up) was deeply moving. Thank you, thank you, 감사합니다.

As a mission analyst, I couldn’t help but notice a number of Congress elements and features that others have already highlighted elsewhere. The sheer scale of the event was astounding. The fellowship and worship were encouraging and inspiring. The emphasis on participant collaboration, both at L4 itself and more importantly in its aftermath, was central. As I continue to access the “State of the Great Commission” report compiled leading up L4, I am impressed with the extraordinary amount of information gathered, collated, and presented there (Lausanne Movement 2025b).

In the remainder of this Epilogue-Editorial, I wish to explore four additional themes that I found striking and worth a bit more analysis.

First, L4 marked another transition point in the Lausanne Movement’s ongoing 50+ year history. Financially, non-Western support seems to contribute an ever-growing portion. Linguistically, English remains the foundational and most common language, but other tongues are also being used more than ever, including online. Leadership is coming from throughout the

world, e.g., in the authorship of the State of the Great Commission report. Musically, at the Congress there was a mixture of Western and non-Western styles, enabling the wide range of participants to enter whole-heartedly into worship.

These financial, linguistic, leadership, and artistic transitions reflect not only the Lausanne Movement's historical journey but those of Christian traditions in general. The worldwide Anglican Communion, for example, is on the front-end of exhibiting demographic shifts in their makeup. The same could be said for Roman Catholicism, particularly since Vatican II. The Lausanne Movement, like worldwide Christianity, is more widely distributed than ever before.

Setting the L4 and Lausanne Movement against the backdrop of the worldwide Christian movement helps to put into stark relief a second theme mentioned throughout L4, namely that of "the global church." This catch-all phrase has become common in many evangelical circles, and leading up to and throughout L4 the phrase rang out with regularity in expressions like, "'The global church' has gathered here in Seoul-Incheon," or "Thousands representing 'the global church' are here in Seoul-Incheon." A quick look at the Lausanne Movement's homepage and website shows the phrase's regular usage there as well (Lausanne Movement 2025c).

Shorthand phrases are useful for communicating a general sense of what would otherwise, in the name of accuracy, require cumbersome and verbose repetition. A more precise meaning of Evangelicals' intended meaning of "the global church" is something like, "certain traditions, denominations, local churches, ministries, and individual Christians around the world." Clearly a constant articulation of such a mouthful would quickly become tiresome for everyone involved. "The global church" is much easier to remember and, as its frequent use suggests, gets the basic point across.

The situation has become problematic, however, since "the global church," as shorthand, keeps getting repeated independently from adjoining qualifications. The phrase's unexplained connotation has taken on a life of its own and conveys more than the actual referent in which the catch-all phrase was originally anchored. By itself—which is how the phrase has come to be used—"the global church" has left its moorings and become a comprehensive term that ostensibly encompasses *all* (not just "certain") "traditions, denominations, local churches, ministries, and individual Christians around the world." Such phrases as "God's work through the global church," "How could the global Church [sic] respond," and "sharing inspiring God stories from the global church, with the global church" (Lausanne Movement 2025c) convey a sense that *all* Christians, collectively and individually, are involved.

Clearly, however, in actuality it was *some*, not all, traditions and Christian groups who were represented at L4. Even from a more exclusive viewpoint of who "Christian" groups and individuals are, only parts of worldwide Christianity were represented at L4, but the entire "global church" was not. Anecdotally, most Christian people I know have never even heard of the Lausanne Movement, much less L4, and have a hard time understanding what "Lausanne" is all about.

There is no question, and it is cause for much celebration, that a wide swath of Christian churches, ministries, and people are connected to the Lausanne Movement. It is also true that a noteworthy representation of mission leaders gathered in Seoul-Incheon at L4. At the same time, caution must be exercised so that God-honoring celebration does not slide into unintended exaggeration through an unexamined, continued repetition of Evangelicals' overuse of the

shorthand phrase, “the global church.” Simply put, the phrase claims too much and needs clarification.

A third theme that was evident at L4 relates to both the Lausanne Movement’s historical evolution and, perhaps, to the Movement leadership’s underlying self-perception. That theme is the Movement’s organizational and corporate development.

The Lausanne Movement has always walked a tightrope between being an organization with ongoing structures and a network that simply serves to connect others. The label “Movement” connotes both aspects. Organizational structure has necessarily ramped up with the coming and going of each Congress: planning, execution, and follow-up require intentional collaboration and mechanisms for funding, publicity, communication, and a bevy of other logistic matters. Increased use of electronic communication and scheduling demand additional staff with expertise and experience, especially for an international assembly as complex as L4.

The fact that L4 marked the Movement’s fiftieth anniversary contributed to an even more noticeable increase in organizational emphasis. Theoretically speaking, one option would have been to make the judgment that as an organization the Lausanne Movement had run its course over 50 years and that its structural existence would end with thanksgiving—again, theoretically speaking. Instead, the Movement reinforced its ongoing role in world evangelization by unveiling a new logo the year prior to L4. Clearly the Lausanne leadership determined there was a need for a “refreshed brand identity” that would be visually displayed in a “a new logo, colour palette, and typography that is more modern, dynamic, and versatile.” That the eye-catching new logo was “rolled out across all [the Movement’s] touchpoints, including its website, social media channels, marketing collaterals, and gatherings—both online and in-person—” demonstrated further the Movement’s reinforced structure.

Moreover, the consistent appeals at the Congress for missions commitment in L4’s wake were made in such a way as to entail commitment to involvement in Lausanne networks and activities. Those appeals conveyed a strong message that the Lausanne Movement’s leadership sees the Lausanne organizational structures as important as ever for world evangelization.

A final theme I wish to highlight might be the most obvious of all, namely the Congress theme: “Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together.” Speakers regularly circled back to this carefully crafted statement throughout the Congress, drawing participants’ attention to word and deed ministry—“declare and display”—and to unity—“the Church ... Together.” Most importantly, the statement’s Christ-centered focus, including divine empowerment and direction for mission, also rang out loudly and clearly.

An accompanying emphasis was largely absent, however. That missing area was what the world outside the Church is doing, thinking, and saying. On one hand, what Christians believe the world needs, in particular the good news about Jesus, was a regular Congress feature. The massive, pre-Congress “State of the Great Commission” report includes all sorts of information and analysis about demographics, values, and affiliations. Also, innovative means by which Christians can convey the gospel message were constructively presented at L4, including creative stresses on AI and especially on Workplace Mission. Even so, what are non-Christians, fellow human beings with their own agency as divine image-bearers, actually saying in their own terms? What are they thinking? hoping? feeling? Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus and a fellow blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Matthew 20:32; Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41). While it might have seemed

obvious enough what those two blind men needed and wanted, Jesus still affirmed their dignity, treated them as subjects (not just objects of his compassion), and asked them to articulate what they thought, wanted, and needed. How are we as Jesus's followers to emulate Jesus's approach of asking people, who are not passive objectified research targets but active subjects worthy of respectful inquiry, how *they* understand the world and their own needs and hopes? What can we who are actively involved in the Christian missions movement genuinely learn from others, for example by listening to their assessments of religious traditions (including Christianity), as well as to their ambitions and struggles to achieve them?

To ask a related question, how might we shift our evangelical understanding of who the primary agents of "contextualization" are? The seemingly self-evident assumption is that we Christian communicators are the "contextualizers" who make the good news of Jesus understandable to others. Is it not the case, however, that the *recipients* of the Christian message, guided by the Holy Spirit, are the primary agents of contextualization? *Hearers* are the ones who understand, process, respond to, and incorporate the good news of Jesus Christ. Indeed, over the long-haul it is all people, including me and the group(s) to which I belong, who continually "contextualize" the Christian gospel by how we understand and live out our faith. Those who give witness, who "declare and display" Christ, are indeed responsible to give faithful, appropriate, and relevant witness. At the same time, it is everyone who hears, sees, and responds to gospel witness who are the primary agents involved in contextualizing the Christian message.

What "the global church" does in world evangelization is crucial but not the whole picture. "Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together"; and, "What and how do people who are not in the Church understand, think, and say about God, the world, Christianity, their needs, and their hopes? How do they, as sin-infected and responsible subjects, hear, understand, and respond to God as their Creator and Redeemer when he brings the gospel to them?" As the Lausanne Movement continues to serve the cause of world evangelization, may its scope of attention expand even further in the wake of L4 and in eager anticipation of Jesus's visible return.

Kyrie eleison. Maranatha.

References

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