

# COMIBAM at the IV Lausanne Congress: A Reflection on Missionary Collaboration<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

More than 400 Latinos were among the over 5,000 Christian leaders, along with thousands of people connected virtually, that the IV Lausanne Congress brought together from around the world, including significant participation from the workplace sector. COMIBAM (Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana) was represented by the Board of Directors, members of the National Missionary Cooperations, the executive team, its executive director Cristian Castro, as well as denominational and church leaders who participate in the missionary movement from their pastoral roles. This article presents an overview of the main topics addressed during the seven days of the event, concluding with a missiological reflection on the role of the Ibero-American movement.

**Key Words:** collaboration, congress, gospel, Spirit

The IV Lausanne Congress, held in Incheon, South Korea, from September 22 to 28, brought together over 5,000 Christian leaders from around the world, including significant participation from the workplace sector. Among them were more than 400 Latinos, along with thousands of people connected virtually, in an effort to promote unity and the mission of the global church in a challenging and complex context.

COMIBAM (Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana) was represented by the Board of Directors, members of the National Missionary Cooperations, the executive team, its executive director Cristian Castro, as well as denominational and church leaders who participate in the missionary movement from their pastoral roles. During the seven days of sessions, plenaries, and workshops, various aspects of how the global church can fulfill its mission were explored under the theme: "Let the Church Proclaim and Display Christ Together."

The format of IV Lausanne was designed as a strategic and collaborative process focused on analyzing work environments, discerning the direction to follow, and seeking solutions in prayer to close the gaps in fulfilling the Great Commission. The backbone of the content was the State of the Great Commission Report, which, as expressed by the Report's Director, Matthew Niermann, "brings together the best global data and key strategic thinkers to understand where the greatest gaps and the greatest opportunities are for fulfilling the Great Commission" (Niermann 2024).

Participants committed to collaborating and taking action through organic teams. During the four days of the congress, the workshops included plenaries called "Acts Lessons," "Missiological Commitments" sessions, forums, and panels in the morning. In the afternoons, the pending gaps were addressed, and groups were formed based on language and topic affinities. The evenings were dedicated to "Lessons of the Global Church," celebration, and reflection.

The format aimed to catalyze the vision of the Lausanne movement, which is:

- The gospel for every person
- Disciple-making churches for every people and place
- Christlike leaders for every church and sector

- Kingdom influence in every sphere of society.

The affinity groups of the congress were: Kingdom Impact, World Religions, Mission Strategy, Contextual Mission, Integral Mission, Least Reached Peoples, and Justice and Advocacy.

Below is an overview of the main topics addressed during the seven days of the event, concluding with a missiological reflection on the role of the Ibero-American movement.

## **Summary of the Seven Days of the Congress**

### **Day 1: Opening and Call to the Global Church Together in God's Mission**

The first day began with a call to unity under the theme "Let the Church Proclaim and Display Christ Together." It was an unprecedented event: the first post-pandemic congress, bringing together four generations. The event was a tribute to what began 50 years ago by figures like Billy Graham, John Stott, and Samuel Escobar: a movement to accelerate the mission and fulfillment of the Great Commission, or as it was called, a Church for World Evangelization.

However, the enthusiasm waned for many when the Seoul Statement (Lausanne Movement, 2024) was presented on the first day. This document, which adds to those from previous events like the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, and the Cape Town Commitment, addresses seven priority issues for the church today: the Bible, the Church, Reconciliation, among others. Although its purpose is to guide the Church, some criticized the lack of dialogue and the gap between the "polycentric" discourse and the imposition of this declaration. Various organizations, regional movements, and participants agreed that a deeper dialogue was needed and that it was not appropriate to present this document on the first day of the congress.

### **Day 2: God's Mission Empowered by the Holy Spirit**

On the second day, Femi emphasized that the Christian mission is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit came," he affirmed, "and the early Christian community opened their hearts to receive Him. The result was to go out into the world to proclaim the Gospel, uniting that proclamation with the living experience of the third person of the Trinity. Because there is no mission without that power." This emphasis on dependence on the Holy Spirit was presented as a key foundation for both ecclesiology and missiological commitments.

Although this day stood out for its pneumatological contribution, the sessions, while profound, were brief, and perhaps lacked time for collective silence to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God. Additionally, we had the participation of Sarah Breuel, who, with a prophetic approach directed at each region, made a call to the church present, stating: "This is a call to global repentance. We are His bride, and we have been grieving His heart" (Breuel 2024).

"‘Let the Church declare and display Christ together’ can only be fulfilled if we recommit and submit ourselves to the enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Today, we cannot and must not replace fervent prayer with strategies and plans" (Adeleye 2024).

### **Day 3: The Missional Community and God's New Society**

The third day focused on the theme of the Missional Community. Participants and leaders from different parts of the world took part in small groups, focused on intentional listening and reflecting on existing gaps and topics of interest. Throughout the day, themes such as the need for

authenticity, transparency, and collaboration within the church and broader communities were highlighted.

The day concluded with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Lausanne Movement, with balloons and festive elements. Five panelists from diverse cultural backgrounds shared testimonies about how their experiences at Lausanne congresses had transformed their mission in the world.

Here are some notable quotes from this day:

“To establish meaningful unity in the body of Christ, we must avoid duplication, eliminate competition, and foster collaboration” (Tendero 2024).

“I believe that every missional community will pay a cost, whether by remaining silent in the face of false teachings that divide us, or by breaking the silence with true teaching that should unite us” (Zaki 2024).

#### **Day 4: Persecution and Mission**

The fourth day focused on the persecution faced by Christians in different parts of the world. Moving testimonies, such as that of Farshid Fathi, showed how, despite persecution, the church continues to grow. The reflection centered on how mission amidst adversity requires courage and how the suffering of persecuted Christians is a powerful testimony of Christ's love and commitment.

Dr. Patrick Fung pointed out that the church in the book of Acts, though persecuted, remained faithful to the Gospel. “It was a movement without social or economic power, but with firm convictions and trust” (Fung 2024). He reminded us that persecution will never end the church, but a false gospel could. The “China 2030” movement was also presented, which seeks to expand the gospel in the country and send missionaries globally. A defining phrase was, “In severe persecution, the church expands. But persecution will never end the church; a false gospel could” (Fung 2024).

#### **Day 5: The Christian Witness in the Workplace**

The fifth day focused on the role of Christians in the workplace. It was emphasized that the gospel should not be limited to the local church but brought into all areas of daily life. Julia Garschagen highlighted that most Christians work outside formal ministry and that all are called to be witnesses of Christ in their respective work contexts. “What will reach people's hearts are not programs, but people,” Julia stated (Garschagen, 2024).

The final plenary included a special time of reflection led by the Korean Church. Their 140-year history and their “12 stones” were represented with great passion during the time of prayer, music, and artistic representations. Prayers of thanksgiving, repentance, and renewal were offered, concluding with everyone singing “Amazing Grace,” according to the daily Lausanne report.

#### **Day 6: Christlike Service**

The sixth day was dedicated to intergenerational discipleship, emphasizing the importance of forming leaders who model service, following Christ's example. Jocabed Solano Miseli, from the Kuna community, highlighted the richness of diversity in intergenerational and intercultural discipleship, using the illustration of a “mola,” a reflection of the collectivity and diversity of her

culture. Phillip Ryken emphasized that, despite all our diversity, there is only one type of Christian capable of carrying forward the Great Commission: one who adopts Christlike service as a way of life (Ryken 2024).

Sam Cooper encouraged veteran leaders to support the emerging generation, underscoring the need for their covering and prayer. The global community was also called upon to engage intentionally in mentoring and collaboration. “It is impossible for this emerging generation to fulfil the call of God without experienced leaders who are willing to be a shade over our boldness and who will intercede for our healing.” (Cooper 2024).

### **Day 7: The Gospel to the Ends of the Earth and Commitment to Collaboration**

The seventh day concluded with a call to joint action, inviting everyone to sign a “Collaborative Action Commitment” to fill missionary gaps and promote unity. Allan Matamoros reflected on how COMIBAM has contributed to the mission from Latin America, emphasizing the need for an integral mission and cooperation with other global actors. Ronaldo Lidorio stressed the importance of bringing the gospel to the most remote places, trusting not in our own strategies but in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion was marked by a symbolic act of reconciliation in Christ, as bread and wine were shared, led by a Korean and a Japanese leader.

This closing was accompanied by a summary of the day, where the voices of Matamoros and Lidorio resonated strongly, along with others such as Rick Warren. Matamoros highlighted that “it is estimated that perhaps 30,000 Ibero-Americans have become cross-cultural missionaries,” reflecting the shift in mission from Latin America. He also noted that “the transformation began primarily among the marginalized classes of our societies,” demonstrating how the Latin American missionary movement has brought about profound and positive changes (Matamoros 2024). Lidorio, for his part, emphasized the “five waves to reach the unreached,” calling the Church to “preach with all boldness and without hindrance,” affirming that the gospel “will face opposition,” but by God's power, it will reach all nations (Lidório 2024).

In the final moments of the congress, it became clear that mission is about being a blessing wherever one is and sending only those who are already a blessing to the church. The echoes of this day reflected a common conviction: missionary work needs courage, unity, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the commitment of each participant to collaborate in bringing the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth.

### **In Practice: How Can Our Ibero-American Missionary Movement Proclaim and Display Christ Together?**

The congress theme, “Let the Church Proclaim and Display Christ Together,” presents a profound challenge for the Ibero-American missionary movement. To make this vision a reality, it is essential first to recognize that mission should not be an isolated effort nor guided solely by human strategies, but must depend on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This congress reaffirmed that without dependence on the Spirit, our mission will lack the necessary power to impact the world and will be condemned to be fragmented and weak.

The challenge of being a missional community implies revisiting what this identity means and how we can live it out together, reconciling our diverse ministerial understandings. The congress was a reminder that mission is not limited only to the proclamation of the gospel, but also extends to displaying Christ through our concrete actions and social justice, transforming structures and

creating more just and humane societies. It is here where we honor the legacy of Samuel Escobar and René Padilla, who, with their defense of integral mission, have inspired us to see the human being as a whole.

Moreover, the commitment to collaboration is essential. We must recognize that mission is a work that requires the whole church, from the 1% in formal ministry to the 99% who live their faith in daily life. Breaking down historical barriers, overcoming our differences, and uniting under one purpose is key to advancing the Kingdom of God. Signing the “Collaborative Action Commitment” is an important starting point, but it will only have value if we bring it to our communities and turn it into actions that transform our reality.

Finally, each word of the congress theme must be analyzed and deepened. We need to dialogue about what it means to proclaim and display Christ together, considering all the existing gaps—including divisions between North and South, political positions, and doctrinal differences—and seeking how to truly unite under the centrality of Christ. The question that arises is: How can we, in such a polarized world and in such a fragmented church, work together to declare and display Christ? This congress reminds us that unity in mission is only possible if we focus on God and act with humility, love, and a true commitment to the call of Christ.

### **Aspects to Improve: Participatory Space and Missional Depth**

It is necessary to acknowledge the shortcomings and missed opportunities during the congress. One of the points that generated dissatisfaction was the lack of a more participatory space for the voices of the “Majority Christian World.” Although there was extensive talk about “displaying Christ,” the practical focus on world evangelization—the fundamental reason for the Lausanne movement—was relegated to a few minutes, leaving a sense of superficiality regarding the strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission. This lack of depth contrasts with the origins of the movement, which was born precisely to accelerate global evangelization.

Another significant challenge was the handling of controversial topics, which generated a “collective noise” among participants. Communications between organizers and certain groups of theologians reflected the difficulty in reaching a consensus on issues such as sexuality and social justice. While such conflicts are part of the diverse ecosystem of the Lausanne Movement, they highlight the need to better manage diversity and foster an open and inclusive dialogue that allows all voices to be heard equally, but not placing consensus above the authority to which all of us who are redeemed are subject: the Bible.

In the context of this article, I would like to leave some practical ideas that we could take as a movement from the experience in Incheon:

#### **1. Develop a Critical Mass of Reflection**

One of the greatest needs in our current missional context is the formation of a solid and spiritually mature group capable of engaging in deep biblical and missiological reflection. This “critical mass” is not merely a collection of thinkers, but a spiritually grounded and theologically articulate community that can discern the times, respond to the challenges of global mission, and offer contextual perspectives rooted in the Ibero-American reality.

During Lausanne IV, it became evident that there is a growing gap between institutional structures and grassroots movements. If we want the Ibero-American voice to resonate globally,

we must move from participation to influence. That will only happen if we intentionally develop forums, networks, and research initiatives that allow for sustained theological reflection and collaborative missiological analysis.

Such developments involve:

- Creating intergenerational and interdisciplinary platforms for discussion.
- Documenting and sharing our theological and practical insights globally.
- Equipping new leaders with the tools to think critically and biblically about mission.

We cannot afford to be passive observers. We must become thoughtful contributors, rooted in Scripture, responsive to the Spirit, and faithful to our calling as part of the global body of Christ.

## **2. Study the Seoul Declaration**

The presentation of the Seoul Declaration at the beginning of the congress stirred a variety of reactions. While some welcomed its intent to provide direction, others expressed concern over the lack of prior consultation. This moment offers us an opportunity—not to reject or accept the document outright, but to engage it thoughtfully, communally, and prayerfully.

The call here is not just academic. We are invited to discern spiritually what the Declaration affirms, what it omits, and how it aligns—or diverges—from our collective convictions. Examining the Declaration also provides an opportunity to involve churches, networks, and leaders in a shared process of evaluating key priorities like Scripture, reconciliation, and justice.

Practically, such a process means:

- Organizing discussion groups and theological forums around the Declaration's themes.
- Identifying areas where the Ibero-American perspective can enrich or challenge global assumptions.
- Producing a collective response that expresses unity without sacrificing integrity.

Rather than positioning ourselves as outsiders to the process, we are called to engage as active participants, offering our insights and concerns in a spirit of love and shared mission.

## **3. Understand the Implications of the "Majority Christian World"**

The global shift in Christianity's center of gravity toward the Global South has profound implications for how we understand and engage in mission. Latin America is no longer just a recipient of mission but a vital contributor. However, this new role must be embraced with humility, responsibility, and spiritual maturity.

There is a risk of falling into triumphalism—celebrating growth without critically assessing our attitudes—or isolationism, where we close ourselves off from the rest of the Church. Instead, we must commit to Christ-centered leadership that models generosity, cooperation, and humility.

What does this approach look like in practice?

- Avoiding paternalism or “reverse colonialism” in how we send missionaries.
- Embracing mutual learning with churches in Africa, Asia, and other regions.
- Centering our theology and strategy not on cultural identity but on the person and mission of Christ.

We must resist the urge to replicate old paradigms of power and instead foster a new model of global partnership grounded in love, trust, and shared purpose.

#### **4. Manage Tensions and Diversity of Opinions**

The IV Lausanne Congress laid bare the deep tensions within the global church—over theology, ethics, culture, and methodology. But rather than fearing these differences, we must recognize that they are part of a vibrant, diverse, and complex global body. The key is not to eliminate differences, but to learn how to navigate them faithfully and graciously.

Unity does not mean uniformity. The challenge is to model a kind of community where we can hold our convictions firmly while engaging others respectfully—where truth and love are not in opposition but held together.

To manage this challenge well, we must:

- Develop leaders with emotional intelligence and theological depth.
- Create safe spaces for dialogue, even around controversial issues.
- Maintain the authority of Scripture as our shared foundation, while recognizing that application may look different across cultures.

The way we handle conflict is itself a missional witness. If we reflect Christ's character in our disagreements—humility, patience, kindness—we can show the world a different kind of unity: not built on conformity, but on love rooted in truth.

At COMIBAM, we understand that controversies are an inherent part of a movement that seeks to represent the global church. The challenge is not to avoid differences but to learn to manage them in a way that reflects the love and truth of Christ. The Lausanne congress should remind us, if it was not already clear, that we must keep Christ at the center, seeking reconciliation and unity even amid our differences, while upholding the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

Harold Segura mentioned that mission has sometimes been reduced to a mere proselytizing campaign, losing its prophetic and transformative essence. Carolina Bueno, Executive Secretary of FEREDE, Spain, pointed out from Seoul that “All believers and churches need each other to fulfill the Great Commission” (Bernabé 2024).

#### **Conclusion**

The Ibero-American missionary movement must strengthen collaboration, actively depend on the Holy Spirit, promote an integral mission, and manage our differences with love and truth. Only then can we be one in purpose and action, responding to God's call with humility and determination. Can we, as the body of Christ, be faithful to this call and proclaim and display Christ together in a fragmented world? What is my participation and responsibility within this intergenerational and intercultural mosaic in an age of hyperconnectivity? It is not just about the IV Lausanne Congress, nor a one-time event, but about a journey in which we reflect, dialogue, and act. This Church, committed to the global mission of God—an integral, intergenerational, and transcultural mission—is called to be a light in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a slightly expanded and revised version of an identically entitled English version of a report to COMIBAM about the Incheon Lausanne Congress. [https://comibam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/INFORME-INGLES\\_c.pdf](https://comibam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/INFORME-INGLES_c.pdf)