

# **The First Fruits of L4**

## **Evaluating the European Response to the Fourth Lausanne Congress**

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**Abstract:** The Lausanne Movement has held four global congresses over the last fifty years. This article, written by the current Co-Regional Directors for Lausanne Europe, combines a narrative account of the development of Lausanne Movement in Europe over recent years with an evaluation of the Fourth Lausanne Congress in September 2024. Their insider perspective is complemented with evaluations and critique by other European delegates and by Majority World leaders in Europe who were delegates in Seoul. The article concludes with an account of how national Lausanne movements in Europe have followed up on the congress.

**Keywords:** Lausanne Movement, Lausanne Europe, Fourth Congress, L4, State of the Great Commission, Seoul Statement, mission in Europe.

**Sammendrag:** Lausanne-bevegelsen har arrangert fire globale kongresser i løpet av de siste femti årene. Denne artikkelen, skrevet av de nåværende regionale direktørene for Lausanne Europa, kombinerer en narrativ fremstilling av utviklingen av Lausanne-bevegelsen i Europa de siste årene med en evaluering av den fjerde Lausanne-kongressen i september 2024. Forfatterens innsideperspektiv suppleres med vurderinger og kritiske

innspill fra andre europeiske delegater, samt ledere fra det globale sør som var delegater i Seoul. Artikkelen avsluttes med en redegjørelse for hvordan nasjonale Lausanne-bevegelser i Europa har fulgt opp kongressen.

Nøkkelord: Lausanne-bevegelsen, Lausanne Europa, fjerde kongress, L4, status for misjonsbefalingen, Seoul-erklæringen, misjon i Europa.

## Introduction

The Fourth Lausanne Congress (L4), held in Incheon-Seoul, South Korea from 22nd to 28th September 2024, brought together 5394 Christian leaders from over 200 nations and territories. Among the delegates were 750 Europeans, the third largest regional group after North America and East Asia.

As Co-Regional Directors for the Lausanne Movement in Europe, we have a privileged insider perspective on how Europeans have responded to the Fourth Congress. This article is both a narrative account of the development of Lausanne in Europe over the last ten years and an evaluation of the Fourth Lausanne Congress. It brings together the story of Lausanne Europe, and our reflections as critical insiders and missiologists within the Lausanne Movement, with the views of missiologists and L4 delegates from across Europe to provide a multidimensional evaluation of the Fourth Congress.

In our academic studies and mission practice we have found that reflective theology depends on narrative for simplicity and meaning.<sup>1</sup> Alongside our academic and reflective practices we have attempted to approach our leadership roles by listening to voices from the margins. These voices not only include life experiences but also allow for four theological voices: formal (from the academy); normative (what is considered normal and thus authoritative); espoused (what is articulated by the marginalised); and operant (what is embedded into the practices of the group).<sup>2</sup>

This narrative approach, together with a consciousness of the need to listen to both dominant and marginalised voices, constitutes our methodological approach in the writing of this article.

After an account of the recent history of the Lausanne Movement in Europe, we will present our personal evaluation of the Fourth Lausanne Congress. We will then open our ears to the voices of others, both European delegates from church and academy, as well as Majority World voices, as they reflect on the Fourth Congress and its principal theological contribution: The Seoul Statement. The article concludes with an account of how national Lausanne movements in Europe have worked out the

1 Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001)

2 Cameron, et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research & Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2010)

implications of L4 in the months since the congress.

## **Lausanne Europe: A New Vision for a New Europe**

Fifty years have passed since the International Congress on World Evangelisation which ultimately gave rise to the Lausanne Movement. The theme of that first Congress in Lausanne, Switzerland, was “let the earth hear his voice” and, back in 1974, European churches and mission agencies were key players in responding to the challenge of evangelising the world.

In the years that followed, Lausanne Committees were established in many European countries and these helped to shape national mission agendas for a generation. So much of our contemporary missiological lexicon was a fruit of that first Congress: integral mission, unreached people groups, the call on the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world, and so on. The subsequent congresses in Manila (1989) and Cape Town (2010) built on these foundations bringing together more leaders from more countries with a greater diversity of gender, generation, vocation, and denomination.<sup>3</sup>

Though these global congresses were significant, in Europe at least, Lausanne’s influence began to wane. The generation of leaders whose vision for world mission was shaped by Lausanne 1974 was aging and the new generation of leaders had little connection with its history.

In September 2016, the European Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne Movement convened a gathering of European leaders for two days of reflection. It was described as an “open process, listening to God and listening to each other for what we feel is on God’s heart for Europe and how we can best join him in being a further blessing to our continent.”<sup>4</sup>

The participants came to five conclusions: (i) that Europe has changed so much in the past few decades that we should consider it as a New Europe that needs not just re-evangelising but a new evangelisation; (ii) that there has been a loss of confidence in the gospel and the Bible, and the need is for us to regain our confidence and bear witness to Christ in all areas of society; (iii) that this will require a focus on whole-life discipleship; (iv) that Europeans are searching for a sense of identity and community; and (v) that there are serious disconnects in the Evangelical body between East, West, North, and South, and particularly between “Europeans” and both Roma and

3 For a full review of the historical development and the theological and missiological contribution of the Lausanne Movement, see Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (Eds.), *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014)

4 Evangelical Focus, “*Europe needs hope: Evangelical leaders reflected on challenges faced in the continent*”, 28/9/2016, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/print/1957/EEA-Lausanne-movement-Europe>

migrant churches.

A joint EEA-Lausanne pan-European conference was postulated but did not materialise. Nevertheless, some of the thinking from that 2016 gathering was carried forward into the planning of a Lausanne Europe conference under the title: *Dynamic Gospel: New Europe*.

In January 2019, eighty leaders serving in diverse ministries across Europe were invited to Amsterdam for a thinktank to consider the dimensions of this conference. Among their number were a group of migrant leaders representing the millions of Majority World Christians whose migration to Europe over the last fifty years has changed the face of the European church.

As discussions developed, the Roma leaders reached out to Lausanne Europe to invite them to a Roma Networks conference. This was indeed the first time that the Roma had engaged with Lausanne signalling a shift in perception of perhaps the most visible historical outsiders to the church in Europe. Previously, the life experiences of the marginalised were represented through tokenism or by the participation of sympathisers of those considered less fortunate or seemingly less able to speak for themselves. The choice to listen to leaders from the Majority World, Roma, younger generations, workplace professionals, and women leaders, became an important aspect of what became the *Lausanne Europe 20/21 Conversation and Gathering*. Voices that had previously been muted were now being heard.<sup>5</sup>

A Coordination Team was formed to begin planning the gathering. It included senior leaders with a long-standing relationship with the Lausanne Movement: Ole-Magnus Olafsrud from Norway, an exceptional mentor of younger leaders; Lars Dahle, Lausanne Catalyst for Media Engagement and a senior theologian from Sweden; Bodil Skjøtt, Lausanne Catalyst for Jewish Evangelism and a senior Christian woman leader from Denmark; Janet Sewell, a younger leader with a pan-European heritage and technical skills; and Usha Reifsnider, a British South Asian Christian theologian from a Hindu background. Shortly afterwards, European missiologist Jim Memory joined the team and challenged the team to broaden out the vision from a gathering to an extended conversation that might engage a much larger number of people.

The *Lausanne Europe 20/21 Conversation and Gathering* had two elements. The Conversation was a year-long engagement of delegates and others in monthly virtual or in-person *Impact Groups* for prayer, scripture reading, and missiological reflection. The Gathering itself engaged 800 carefully selected delegates from every country of

5 Usha Reifsnider (Ed.), *Unmuted: Speaking to be Heard*, (London: Apollos, 2025); Usha Reifsnider, 'Reclaiming British Gujarati Hindu Culture After Conversion to Evangelical Christianity' 2022, PhD thesis University of Middlesex; Michael R. Armstrong, "Training Theological Reflectors to Facilitate Ordinary Theology in Churches" *Ecclesial Practices* 2 (2015), 198-216

Europe. It was planned for October 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic led to an initial postponement to November 2021 and ultimately a switch to a virtual gathering with 1200 participants.

In January 2022, two members of the organising team, Jim Memory and Usha Reifsnider, were asked to become Co-Regional Directors for Lausanne Europe. As we reflected back on LE20/21, it became clear that going further would require us to wrestle with one of Europe's essential challenges: its linguistic diversity. Europe is a region of some forty countries with thirty national languages. Most churches in Europe are not gathering in English, yet pan-European events suggest the opposite. Most local pastors cannot engage easily with Lausanne's resources and networks. Perhaps even more critically, their voice is not being heard in the global Lausanne conversation.

This realisation birthed a new vision: the revitalisation of national Lausanne movements across Europe. Beginning with the first *Lausanne Europe National Movement Gathering* in Budapest in October 2023, we have sought to support the emergence and development of relational Lausanne movements in every country. Participation in that gathering was limited to four people per country (to ensure that no national voice predominated) with the teams having at least one woman, at least one person under 35, at least one person from the world of work, and at least one person representing a diaspora or marginalised minority. In short, we wanted this gathering to unmute people as much as possible.

As the *Fourth Lausanne Congress* was announced, we actively engaged the national movements in the nomination process. Though the final decision on who went to Seoul from each country was determined by the Lausanne Global Selection Team, our connections across Europe through the national movements meant we were able to identify many excellent European delegates for Seoul. We also led the team of European missiologists who contributed the Europe chapter to the primary publication in the lead-up to the Seoul Congress, the *State of the Great Commission Report*.<sup>6</sup>

After this review of the years leading up to the Seoul Congress, we now turn to our evaluation, as Co-Regional Directors of Lausanne in Europe, of the event itself.

## Lausanne 4 – Evaluating its Contribution

Each of the previous Lausanne congresses has provided significant theological and missiological contributions to the world church. In this section, we will provide our evaluation of the Fourth Lausanne Congress before turning in the subsequent section, to the evaluations of others.

6 Lausanne Movement, "State of the Great Commission", <https://lausanne.org/report>. The Europe chapter was written by Julia Garschagen, Luke Greenwood, Rolf Kjode, Jim Memory, Usha Reifsnider and Janet Sewell.

### *A Vision of the World Church Today*

Today there are more Christians in more countries than at any time in human history.<sup>7</sup> The Fourth Lausanne Congress provided proof, if ever it were needed, of the extension, vitality, and diversity of evangelical Christianity today.

Here is not the place to review the copious literature on the shifting centre of gravity of world Christianity. Yet it is worth noting that, at the time of the First Lausanne Congress in 1974, neither the writings of Andrew Walls which did so much to reframe perceptions of the expansion of the Christian gospel, nor the first edition of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* which provided data on this changing reality, had yet been published.<sup>8</sup>

Fifty years on from Lausanne 1974, it is evident to all that the most vital churches and mission movements are not to be found in the West but in the Majority World.

Christians in Europe have been praying for revival, yet could it be that a revival is already underway? An acceleration in church planting, revival movements among Europe's youth, and more than anything else, the arrival of millions of Majority World Christians into Europe in the last few decades, has changed the face of European Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Many Europeans now worship alongside Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans in their churches and many more Majority World Christians resident in Europe gather in their own diaspora churches.

At the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in 2010, there were almost no Majority World representatives in the European regional gathering. Fourteen years later, in Seoul, two thirds of the European national delegations had participants that originated from outside of Europe and North America.

Many delegates at the Fourth Lausanne Congress were inspired by the vision of the global Church that they saw in Seoul. "It was a taste of heaven", many said. Yet all around us, the global Church worships with us in towns and cities across Europe. European Christians need to look for heaven closer to home and recognise the challenges and opportunities for collaboration with diaspora churches in our neighbourhoods today.

7 Gina Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World's Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022)

8 Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996) ; David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopaedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000*, (Oxford: OUP, 1982)

9 Jim Memory, "Europe 2021: A Missiological Report", <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/europe2021>, p.26ff

### *A Challenge to Honest Debate*

The theme of the Seoul Congress was “let the Church declare and display Christ together” in an apparent acknowledgement of Lausanne’s position on integral mission.

At the First Lausanne Congress, the Ecuadorian evangelical theologian and missiologist René Padilla challenged the delegates to not dichotomise evangelism and social action but rather to take seriously the social justice implications of the Christian gospel. Ultimately the argument for “integral mission” seemed to prevail but at each of the subsequent Congresses, to a greater or lesser extent, the tug of war between those who see evangelism as primary and ultimate, and those who argue for a necessary and active engagement in social justice has continued. The centre-point of the rope has moved back and forth in different Lausanne statements, but the tension remains.

On the second day of the Seoul Congress, Ruth Padilla DeBorst, René Padilla’s daughter, was invited to speak on the issue of Justice. Despite having only fifteen minutes, her wide-ranging address touched on poverty, the discrimination of women and the disabled, racism, ecological destruction, and war - specifically Israel’s military offensive in Gaza.

Her speech triggered a reaction from those who objected to her critique of dispensational eschatology, her assertion of Israel holding hostages, and her lack of mention of Hamas’ attack on Israel on 7th October 2023. Lausanne issued a rushed apology and a fierce debate ensued among some delegates and in the media.

Following the Congress, articles were written in defence of Padilla DeBorst, on justice issues, and on integral mission, whilst others argued that the Seoul Statement was not strong enough on the primacy of evangelism.<sup>10</sup>

The “tug of war” between evangelism and social responsibility that has been an ongoing debate since the first Lausanne Congress continues into the present day. Yet perhaps that is how it is meant to be: a tension that must be maintained. Like so many paradoxes in Scripture, two apparently contradictory truths must be held in tension. To deny one truth is to lose something vital and ultimately leave us all on the floor as ultimately happens when one side “wins” in a tug of war.

Mission is contextual. In any given moment, different regions of the world, and even different countries in a given region, may need churches to pull more strongly in one direction or another on this matter. In many European countries today, there is a need for a bolder proclamation of the gospel. Many Christians are timid in their evangelism, and many churches focus their mission budgets on social justice projects

10 Mitchell Atencio, “*A Speech on Justice Criticised Israel: The Global Evangelical Conference Apologised*”, Sojourners, <https://sojo.net/articles/news/speech-justice-criticized-israel-global-evangelical-conference-apologized>; Ed Stetzer, “*Declaring, Displaying, and the Future of Lausanne*”, Church Leaders, <https://churchleaders.com/voices/497753-lausannes-integral-mission-the-role-of-evangelism-in-the-lausanne-movement-explained.html/2>

rather than evangelism and church planting. Yet in other countries churches may need to be bolder in denouncing injustices towards the poor, women, refugees, asylum seekers, and the disabled.

More broadly, we have a challenge to confront division and pursue unity. Division is not resolved by leaders alone but through theological discussion together with ordinary believers. Anne Zaki, professor of preaching and practical theology at The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, spoke powerfully at the Seoul Congress of the need to restore “the lost art of church discussions, the art of talking and listening to each other, even to those who oppose our views on how to interpret the Bible or how to worship or who should lead in the church or which country to bless and which nation to curse.”<sup>11</sup> We must face up to the real situations of racial, financial, and sexual misconduct in the Church and pursue honest and transparent accountability. As Zaki affirmed, “When we are silent in the moment of truth telling, the future of the Church is at stake.”

### *A Call to Repentance*

The European chapter of the *State of the Great Commission Report* begins by highlighting the fundamental epistemological shift that has taken place in Europe over the last 100 years. Quite simply, Europeans no longer trust the Church. “For many Europeans, the Good News has become bad news: it is morally corrupt, intellectually naïve, and emotionally irrelevant. The leading question ahead of the Church must therefore be: How can we live and speak of the power, beauty, and truth of the Gospel so that Europeans perceive it as good news?”<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, one of the main reasons for this loss of trust has been the abuses committed by church leaders. Recent corruption and abuse scandals have had an undoubted impact on Christian mission. As John Stott put it in the Manila Manifesto, “Nothing commends the Gospel more eloquently than a transformed life, and nothing brings it into disrepute so much as personal inconsistency.”<sup>13</sup>

As we call the Church to a bolder proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel, we must also call it to repentance and to a more faithful discipleship which is one of the key themes in the primary theological text to emerge from the Fourth Congress, *The*

11 Anne Zaki, “*Confronting Division: Pursuing Unity Through the Spirit*”, <https://lausanne.org/video/confronting-division-pursuing-unity-through-the-spirit>

12 Lausanne Movement, “*State of the Great Commission – Europe Regional Report*”, <https://lausanne.org/report/europe>

13 Lausanne Movement, “*Manila Manifesto*”, <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-manila-manifesto>



*Seoul Statement*.<sup>14</sup>

Brazilian Italian leader Sarah Breuel also referred to repentance in her plenary on revival: “While it is God who brings revival we can posture ourselves for revival by personal and corporate repentance.”<sup>15</sup> Breuel’s call to repentance highlighted the need for transparency in our leadership. Abuse and moral corruption have crippled the Church and, for many, it has lost its position of trust. Corporate repentance and a shift away from hierarchical leadership is required.

One of the most memorable events during the Fourth Lausanne Congress was an evening when the Korean hosts told their story. Entitled “A Night for the Korean Church”, this spectacular visual and musical presentation began with the story of how Christianity was introduced to Korea, moving on to review the impact of the first missionaries, the Pyongyang Revival of 1907, the 35 years of Japanese colonisation, the reconstruction after the Korean War, and the explosion of the Church despite all the trial and suffering.<sup>16</sup> It was a beautiful but also searingly honest evening, including confession for the failures of past and present. The Congress itself concluded with Korean and Japanese pastors jointly leading a communion service in a powerful symbol of reconciliation.

We could learn much in Europe from the humility of the Koreans in the telling of their story. The good news of the gospel will only be heard as “good news” in Europe if the story is seen to be true and that requires honest assessment and confession of wrongs.

### *An Expectation of Collaboration*

If there is one word that featured more than any other at the Fourth Lausanne Congress, it was collaboration. Drawing on Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12, Lausanne CEO Michael Oh opened the Congress by saying that the four words that were doing the most damage to the global Church were: “I don’t need you”. Lamenting the isolation and competition between ministries and church leaders, he called the gathered delegates to “incorporate the whole Body into God’s mission.”<sup>17</sup>

The programme was structured to foster collaboration in addressing the 25 issue gaps that were identified in the *State of the Great Commission Report*. On most afternoons,

14 Lausanne Movement, “*Seoul Statement*”, <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-seoul-statement>

15 Sarah Breuel, “Revival and Repentance: Lessons from Global Movements”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRyi6RETCZE>

16 Lausanne Movement, “The Twelve Stones of the Korean Church”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5yzpFbWgeI>

17 Lausanne Movement, “Declare and Display: Collaborative Action for God’s Mission”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ih3MHNkFXhg>

delegates used a common collaborative process to work in groups towards “closing the gaps”. And on the final day, participants were invited to sign a ‘Collaborative Action Commitment’ to inspire them to explore ways to work together going forward.

It has been argued that the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) was the first occasion that missionary societies discussed working together.<sup>18</sup> Certainly it was the precursor to ecumenical structures like the International Missionary Council and ultimately the World Council of Churches. In these circles, partnership became the language to describe the relationship between older and younger churches throughout the world.

Within the Lausanne Movement, the word partnership has been used more broadly. It was cited by Billy Graham as an element of the “spirit of Lausanne”: prayer, study, partnership, hope, and humility. In the Lausanne Covenant, both article 7 (Cooperation in Evangelism) and article 8 (Churches in Evangelistic Partnership) express an expectation of partnership. And throughout Lausanne’s history, partnership has variously been used to refer to partnership in mission between men and women, partnership between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals, and partnership between churches, agencies, networks, and platforms.<sup>19</sup>

At the Fourth Lausanne Congress, it was very noticeable that the word “partnership” had been replaced by the word “collaboration”. Given the imbalances of power and the transactional nature of many partnerships, this is a welcome change. However, this change of language must be accompanied by a change to a posture of genuine mutuality.

This focus on collaboration is a challenge to our European individualism. So much of our practice as Christians seems to be at the expense of genuine relational community. Those that feel unheard and isolated should find churches to be a places of collaboration and polycentricity that truly display and declare Christ together.

What does it mean for churches, mission organisations, and networks to collaborate? It will necessarily involve a change of emphasis, with less attention being given to production and more on relationship. Rather than a focus on results, shortcuts to success, and value for money, collaboration challenges us to strengthen and develop trusting relationships that will enable us to serve the Lord of the Harvest together.

The stories of persecution that were shared at the Congress gave another perspective on collaboration. Within Europe, persecution that causes danger to life is rare. However, Europe has become a home for persecuted Christian refugees from elsewhere. Lesser degrees of persecution persist amongst migrants who convert to Christianity from

18 Graham A Duncan, “The growth of partnership in mission in global mission history during the twentieth century”, *Theological Studies*, Vol 63, No 3, 2007, pp.1033-1065

19 Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (Eds.), *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), ix

other religions. This may be in terms of isolation from their families and communities or experiencing difficulties with securing a stable home or job. More broadly, many Christians in Europe experience a more subtle persecution or discrimination as a result of their decision to take biblically ethical positions in an increasingly secular society which rejects the Bible as a moral authority.

### *A Focus on Technology*

Another aspect of the Congress was its focus on the use of digital technologies for the fulfilment of the Great Commission. A large space was dedicated to showcasing digital technologies and how they could be used in mission. The *Digital Discovery Center*<sup>20</sup> allowed delegates to engage with innovators who are exploring how digital tools could accelerate the fulfilment of the Great Commission. This was accompanied by a strong emphasis in plenary sessions on the necessity of using digital tools, and particularly Artificial Intelligence, if we are to reach the younger generations.

Those familiar with the Lausanne Movement's history will know of the debate around the use of strategies, technologies, and quantitative approaches to measuring progress in mission.<sup>21</sup> Samuel Escobar's warnings about the dangers of "managerial missiology" after the Second Lausanne Congress sparked a lively debate and some reacted to the perceived "industrialised" rather than "indigenised" emphasis during L4.<sup>22</sup>

However, examples of a counternarrative were also evident in the stories of the persecuted Church. In the powerlessness of persecuted Christ followers, their weakness becomes the means through which the Holy Spirit demonstrates God's power. This is a prophetic challenge to our Western confidence in new technologies.

The fundamental question is: when it comes to the fulfilment of the Great Commission, do we trust in the power of technology or in the power of the Holy Spirit? And when it comes to the younger generation, is it really the case that we can only reach them if we connect with them digitally? Our experience of *Lausanne Younger Leader Gatherings* in Europe is that young leaders continue to thirst for "real community" not just virtual connections. Discipleship is all about intense, intentional, and intimate relationships. Technology cannot reproduce that, nor can Artificial Intelligence authentically accelerate it.

20 Lausanne Movement, Digital Discovery Center, <https://congress.lausanne.org/digital-discovery-center/>

21 Samuel Escobar, "A Movement Divided: Three approaches to world evangelization stand in tension with one another", *Transformation*, Vol.8, Issue 4, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/026537889100800409>

22 Jessie Cruickshank, "Technology and the Holy Spirit: The Role of AI in Global Church Strategy", *Church Leaders*, <https://churchleaders.com/voices/exchange/497814-technology-and-the-holy-spirit-the-role-of-ai-in-global-church-strategy.html>

Having provided our personal reflections on the Fourth Lausanne Congress, we now turn to the perspectives of other European delegates.

## Lausanne 4 - Diverse European Perspectives

The Fourth Lausanne Congress stimulated reactions and reflections from across the world. What follows is a far-from-complete review of these perspectives, but one which illustrates some of the dominant themes and trajectories of the ongoing conversation. Given that this article is an evaluation from a European perspective, we will mostly limit our review to European voices.

### *Reasons for Hope*

We begin this review of the Fourth Congress in Germany where Alexander Hirsch, a pastor in Marburg, drew encouragement from his encounters with Christians from around the world: “As the church in Germany and in the West in general struggles with secularisation and decline, Lausanne reminded me: the Church is alive and vibrant.”<sup>23</sup> He looked around the conference room and observed: “Many of “God’s generals” remain anonymous to most of us, like the nameless believers who planted the Antioch church in Acts 11. Yet God raises them up!”

Matthieu Gangloff, another pastor from France, also saw reasons for hope in Seoul, not least because “global Christianity is focusing more on the 99% of Christians who are not in the clergy (pastors, elders, deacons). More and more of them are realising that their work is a ministry in itself, and that the various places where they live (associations, homes, neighbourhoods) are also missionary fields in which Christians are called to be God’s temple, a place of His presence.”<sup>24</sup> Theologian and apologist Julia Garschagen, the one European contributing a Bible reading in Seoul, spoke to this in her review of workplace mission in the Book of Acts. From Paul and Silas in Philippi to Lydia and Aquila in Corinth, she showed how workplaces are holy ground through the presence of believers since in them God too is also present.<sup>25</sup>

Valentin Siniy, president of the Tavriski Christian Institute in Ukraine, highlighted the witness of the persecuted church: “One of the most moving moments was hearing testimonies from believers in regions of the world where persecution is a daily reality. Their courage and resilience reminded us that suffering for the faith is not just a historical phenomenon but a present reality. The church’s solidarity with the persecuted

23 Alexander Hirsch, “Bigger than you think – A German perspective on L4”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/bigger-than-you-think-lessons-from-the-global-church>

24 Matthieu Gangloff, “Reasons for Hope – A French perspective on L4”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/hhvlsj90qjt4qqftk25u3c7tq92pt3>

25 Julia Garschagen, “Holy Ground: Living Out Faith in the Workplace”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcVsrHwVYCs>

must remain a central focus of global mission.” He went on to say: “the theme of suffering and persecution resonates deeply with Ukraine’s recent history. The church’s ability to stand with the marginalised and speak prophetically into society is critical in a time of war and rebuilding.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Critiques*

There were also more critical perspectives from some Europeans. Jan Wessels Co-General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance was critical of the cost of participation and the lack of opportunity to shape the outcomes of the Congress, echoing the perspective of Māori missiologist Jay Mātenga.<sup>27</sup>

John Stevens, National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (UK) critiqued the lack of clarity around the meaning of the gospel, evangelism, and mission during the Congress and, like US missiologist Ed Stetzer, he lamented the lack of an explicit commitment to the priority of evangelism in the Seoul Declaration.<sup>28</sup>

Benno van den Toren, professor of intercultural theology at the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands, observed a dichotomy: “On the one hand, there were presentations that approached the mission from a modern Western business model. ... ‘Strategy’ and ‘effectiveness’ were recurring concepts in Michael Oh’s speeches. On the other hand, we were challenged by the Bible studies to wait for God’s Spirit, because it is God’s mission and not ours. On the one hand, we saw the church as a successful business reflected in the 80-meter-long LED screen behind the stage and in the smooth presentations of the young leaders who talked the programs together. On the other hand, a number of testimonies showed the significance of what is hardly noticeable: the testimonies of faith in Pakistan and in the Amazon and the

26 Valentin Siniy, “Unity of the Church in Evangelism: A Ukrainian Perspective on L4”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/unity-of-the-church-in-evangelism-a-ukrainian-perspective>

27 Chris Eyte, “EEA head on Lausanne 4”, *Christian Daily International*, 29 Nov 2024, <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/eea-general-secretary-shares-lausanne-4-initial-thoughts>; Jay Matenga, “Personal Reflections on Lausanne 4”, <https://jaymatenga.com/l4-reflections/>

28 John Stevens, “Personal Reflections and Lessons from Lausanne 2024”, John Stevens Blog, 9 Oct 2024, <http://www.john-stevens.blog/2024/10/personal-reflections-and-lessons-from.html?q=lausanne>; Ed Stetzer, “Responding to the Lausanne Seoul Statement”, Church Leaders, <https://churchleaders.com/voices/exchange/lausanne/497595-ed-stetzer-my-appeal-to-lausanne-dts.html>

struggle for justice in Costa Rica.”<sup>29</sup>

Other critiques of L4 from around the world fall outside the scope of this article.

### *Diaspora Voices*

Vista Journal, which commissioned many of these European perspectives on the Fourth Congress, also gathered the views of Majority World Christian leaders living in Europe who were also present in Seoul.

Fabiana Braun, a Brazilian missionary in Spain, noted that diaspora was a prominent theme in the Fourth Congress: “Diasporas offer us the chance to reach and mobilise individuals from diverse cultures, enabling them to become active agents in global missionary work. In doing so, we can foster a community of faith that transcends borders, where every Christian, regardless of their geographical location, can participate in the great call to spread the Gospel and serve as a living witness to Christ’s love in the world.”<sup>30</sup>

Peace Ashenafi, a young African diaspora leader in the UK, highlighted three priorities for global mission that flowed from the Congress: the need to cultivate intergenerational leadership, the need to prioritise discipleship, and the need to prophetically speak up against injustice. She concluded: “The global Church’s witness is strengthened by refusing to stay silent in truth-telling and speaking up against injustice, even when it is costly.”<sup>31</sup>

Calida Chu, a Cantonese theologian based in the UK concluded: “The Fourth Lausanne Congress demonstrates a paradigm shift that Christianity does not belong to North Americans or Europeans, but to everyone on earth, who is made in God’s image, humbly learning God’s words and following God’s way. The hybridity of our identity does not diminish our experience with God just because we are not ‘Western’; instead, it enriches our understanding of God for how God is at work in all contexts. The strength of hybridity, that we are both Asian and European, is that it equips us both in language and culture to serve the communities Jesus calls us to.”<sup>32</sup>

29 Benno van den Toren, “Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together: Dutch Report and Reflections from the Fourth Lausanne Congress”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/let-the-church-declare-and-display-christ-together-report-and-reflections-from-the-fourth-lausanne-congress>

30 Fabiana Braun, “Discovering the Potential of the Diaspora: A Call to the Brazilian Church”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/discovering-the-potential-of-the-diaspora-a-call-to-the-brazilian-church>

31 Peace Ashenafi, “Challenges and Opportunities for Global Mission: An African Missionary in Europe’s Perspective”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/aulev22t6bc5abwjfgh44sw2fd7fzi>

32 Calida Chu, “Observing a Paradigm Shift”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/jm7gjpdp0mar1xskvvs2b78p73zwwmp>

### *The Seoul Statement*

We now turn to a review of the Seoul Statement<sup>33</sup> which was the product of the Lausanne Theology Working Group led by Ivor Poobalan and Victor Nakah with 33 theologians from South Africa, India, Ethiopia, Norway, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Iran, Palestine, Sweden, Singapore, and Zambia. The statement was published on the first night of the Congress and there was significant disquiet among delegates that there was no discussion around the text during the Congress. The perspectives gathered here speak more to the content than the process. However, the fact that we as Lausanne regional directors received the text at the same time as other delegates speaks to one of the failings in the process.

Norwegian theologian Rolf Kjode reviews the seven chapters of the Seoul Statement and concludes that “it is far more interested in laying and securing a firm foundation for mission than focusing on the strategic mission challenges of the day. By delving into the issues of biblical hermeneutics and of human identity and sexuality, the statement gives a clear identity and profile to the evangelical body in the world.” He also comments on the critiques of the statement, both from those who called it to be revised because of its perceived ambivalence to issues of integral mission, and from those who wished it be more emphatic in defence of the priority of evangelism, concluding that both these voices are necessary and best held in tension.<sup>34</sup>

Dutch Missiologist Evert van de Poll’s comprehensive evaluation of the Seoul Statement noted three aspects: the emphasis on the Great Commission as the basis and content of mission, the double priority of evangelisation and discipleship, and the introduction of a new mission model or paradigm of ‘presence, proclamation and practice’. He welcomed the emphasis on the importance of the local church and the clear stance on sexuality, gender, marriage, and family, adding that “this voice needs to be heard in Europe, and especially in countries where evangelical pastors have become reluctant to give clear guidance to believers in their teaching and preaching, because of a ‘pastoral’ concern for Christians who have adopted a liberal position in these issues, and/or out of fear for the legal consequences—one might be accused of discrimination and condemned by a court of justice.”<sup>35</sup>

Italian theologian Leonardo di Chirico celebrated that the Statement reflects the voice of the global evangelical movement, not just the Anglo-American voice. In regard to its unambiguous position on issues related to marriage and sexuality he

33 Lausanne Movement, “Seoul Statement”, <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-seoul-statement>

34 Rolf Kjode, “Participant Perspective: Building on a Firm Foundation”, *Vista Journal* 47 (2024), <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/ij1bn5hp85097yjhjeesh6k3rchkm>

35 Evert van de Poll, “Evaluating the Lausanne Congress’s Seoul Statement”, *WEA Evangelical Review of Theology* 49:1 (2025), 5–18



added: “It was not a given that a movement like Lausanne, global, transversal and focused on mission, would elaborate such a position on the issue. It is not even a given that a topic considered “sensitive”, not to say “divisive”, would enter an official document from Lausanne. Often evangelical organizations, for the sake of peace, avoid addressing the crux of the issues and fly high, keeping away from controversies. Not so the Seoul Statement, which got to the heart of the matter.”<sup>36</sup>

As Co-Regional Directors for Lausanne, we had our own critique of the planning and execution of the Fourth Congress. Lausanne sought to rectify mistakes in the selection process for the Third Congress by establishing a Global Selection Team to ensure objectivity in selection and the meeting of quotas by country, age, gender, and ministry sector. Nominations were invited in early 2023 and we engaged our national movements and leaders to help us nominate the best people. However, though regional directors could indicate priority nominations from their region, we had no say in the final decision, and this led to a number of key leaders being rejected.

L4 provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to see and hear the global church in all its diversity and to participate in a genuinely global conversation. Taken together, these critiques suggest that most European leaders appreciated that.

## **Lausanne Europe – First Fruits of L4**

### *National Outworkings of L4*

As Co-Regional Directors for Lausanne Europe, we have had the privilege of seeing how national movements in different countries have responded on their return from Seoul. In this final section of the article, we will traverse Europe to note how some of the national Lausanne movements have carried the vision of L4 forward.

We begin this review in Spain. After the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, the Spanish delegation took it upon themselves to seek to influence Spanish churches with the vision of Lausanne. A national movement was initiated which has held an annual gathering for each of the last twelve years and has influenced hundreds of key leaders. At their post-Seoul national gathering in November, they re-presented the six daily plenaries and discussed their relevance for the Spanish context in small groups. This generated a report which was published shortly afterwards.<sup>37</sup> They also took the videos of the plenaries from Lausanne’s *Accelerate* platform, dubbed them into Spanish and developed a set of resources for churches to use.

At the Lausanne Europe National Movement Gathering in Budapest in November 2023, a number of countries in South-Eastern Europe expressed a desire to hold their own Regional Gathering. This came to fruition in January 2025 with teams

36 Leonardo di Chirico, “La teologia di Losanna 4”, <https://www.locicomunes.it/articoli/la-teologia-di-losanna-4-iii>

37 Lausana España, “Resumen del Encuentro Nacional de España 2024”, <https://lausan-aespana.org/>



from Serbia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Slovenia, coming together for three days in Belgrade, Serbia, to revisit the content of the Seoul Congress, consider how to make the most of it in each of their countries, and to pray. Given that it was only a generation ago that many of these countries were at war with each other, this was a powerful moment of reconciliation as well as collaborative potential for the gospel in SE Europe.

Post-Seoul Lausanne Gatherings were also held in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway (NORME) in late 2024 and early 2025. May 2025 saw two gatherings of particular significance in the Netherlands and Portugal.

Netherlands had a historic Lausanne Committee for many years but it had become dormant after the Third Congress. Nevertheless, through persistence and prayer, and drawing on the increased momentum from L4, an event was convened by the Netherlands Missionary Council (NZR), Reformed Missionary Alliance (GZB), Association of Mission in the Netherlands (IZB) and new leaders of Lausanne Netherlands to evaluate “The Fruits of L4”. Participants rewatched the morning plenary by Egyptian theologian Anne Zaki and heard brief testimonies from four Dutch participants on their insights from Seoul. Benno van den Toren, Jan Wessels, and Jim Memory also discussed and critiqued L4 and its relevance to church and society in the Netherlands.

The Portuguese Lausanne Movement and the Portuguese Evangelical Alliance worked together to prepare the *Forum Evangélico 2025* with the theme of “Welcome to the Mission Field”. With a clear focus on mobilising Christians in Portugal to see their work and social spheres as mission frontiers, this event also cast a vision for international mission. The vision of Lausanne was incorporated into the whole event along with the refrain of “calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world”.

Other national Lausanne 4 feedback gatherings have been held in Ireland (May), Slovakia (June), or are planned for later in 2025/6.

### *Second Lausanne Europe National Movement Gathering*

Lausanne Europe has just celebrated the second National Movement Gathering in Spain. As at the first National Movement Gathering in Budapest in November 2023, carefully selected teams from more than thirty European nations gathered in Cullera, Valencia, in October 2025, for three days of mutual inspiration.<sup>38</sup>

Our process of planning included bringing in younger leaders from multiple European countries onto the planning team. We were inspired by the focus on

38 Chiara Lamberti, “Called to collaborate: Lausanne Europe National Movement Gathering 2025”, *Evangelical Focus*, 28 October 2025, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/european-perspectives/32857/called-to-collaborate-notes-lausanne-movement-europe-gathering-of-2025>

collaboration during L4 but also acutely aware of the dangers of merely changing terminology. If we simply carry our existing ideas of partnership, networking, and strategic planning, and now call them collaboration, we won't advance things very much. Samuel Escobar's warnings of the dangers of managerial missiology were very much in our minds.<sup>39</sup>

Instead, we decided to consider what the Apostle Paul had to say about collaboration in his letters to the churches and individual leaders in the New Testament. Two months of reading and reflection by the planning team revealed the breadth and depth of Paul's collaborative vision. He talked about listening together, leading together, belonging together, reconciling together, working together, challenging together, together with God, and sent together. These phrases became the themes for our sessions.

Over the eight months we worked together, the planning team went through typical life challenges. These included the birth of new babies, job losses, church splits, the deaths of loved ones, unexpected tragedies, unexpected provision, and celebrations; all of which fed into our individual and collective engagement with Scripture and with each other. The result was a truly collaborative gathering; a time where relational honesty was at the heart of our working together.

## Conclusion

Is it possible to evaluate the Fourth Lausanne Congress after just one year?

In this article, we have tried to identify some of the principal contributions of L4: providing a vision of the world church, challenging Christians to honest discussions of difference, calling the church to repentance, fostering an expectation of collaboration, and highlighting the place of technology in world mission. We have also gathered the reactions of European participants to identify how a broad constituency of evangelical leaders assessed the congress.

Around that evaluation, we have also told a story of the renaissance of the influence of Lausanne in national movements across Europe and concluding with some of the first fruits of L4 in nations across Europe. The call to mission for Europe has been rejuvenated by conscientious efforts to welcome and include a variety of voices to make the most of the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ at our national movement gathering.

As we conclude, it is important to zoom out to fully appreciate the story of world mission that we inhabit today.

The Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference brought together 1215

39 Samuel Escobar, 'A Movement Divided: Three Approaches to World Evangelization Stand in Tension with One Another', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 8, no. 4 (October 1991):7–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537889100800409>.

delegates from around the world. Of these, 500 were from Britain, 500 from the USA, and 170 from continental Europe. There was one participant from Africa and none from Latin America. One hundred and fifteen years later, Europe may well receive more missionaries from the Majority World than it actually sends.

The future of the church in Europe will be determined by how old Europeans and new Europeans collaborate in mission. Collaboration begins in humble listening and an appreciation that we need each other. If the Fourth Lausanne Congress has revealed to Europeans that we need the global church and that the global church needs the European voice, then we can already declare it as a success.