

Addressing Key Gaps: The Missiological Contributions of Lausanne 4

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Abstract:

The extensive process of preparing for the Fourth Lausanne Congress (L4) in South Korea in 2024 exposed a range of strategic and theological discrepancies between ideals and realities in the missional task of the evangelical church. These gaps formed the point of departure for the work conducted during and following the congress. This article seeks to identify where such discrepancies emerge, as evidenced in the available material, and to demonstrate how the efforts before, during, and after the congress have been shaped by the intention to address these identified gaps. The article begins by situating the Lausanne Movement within its historical context, before examining how the movement approached the tasks of identifying, engaging with, and exploring strategic gaps. In analyzing theological gaps, particular attention is devoted to *The Seoul Statement*. Finally, the article considers two core concepts central to the entire L4 process – *discipleship* and *collaboration* – exploring how these are understood, how these gaps have been recognized, and how these key thematic areas might be further developed.

Sammendrag:

Den omfattende prosessen med å legge til rette for den fjerde lausannekongressen (L4) i Sør-Korea i 2024 avdekket en rekke strategiske og teologiske sprik mellom ideal og virkelighet i den evangeliske kirkes misjonsoppdrag. Disse gapene danner utgangspunkt både for arbeidet under og oppfølgingen etter kongressen. Denne artikkelen forsøker å vise hvor disse sprikene finnes ifølge det framlagte materialet, og hvordan alt arbeidet før, under og etter kongressen har vært preget av intensjonen om å fylle de påviste gapene. Artikkelen starter med å plassere Lausannebevegelsen i en historisk kontekst før den viser hvordan bevegelsen arbeidet med spørsmål om å identifisere, adressere og utforske de strategiske sprikene. I analysen av teologiske gap, vies særlig oppmerksomhet til *The Seoul Statement*. Avslutningsvis utforsker artikkelen to kjernebegreper knyttet til hele Lausanne 4-prosessen, «disippelskap» og «samhandling», hvordan disse gapene forstås, hvordan disse sprikene kan identifiseres, og hvordan disse sentrale temaområdene kan utvikles videre.

Keywords: The Lausanne Movement, Lausanne 4, the Seoul Statement, strategic mission gaps, theological mission gaps, discipleship, collaboration

Introduction

The Lausanne Movement held its fourth global mission congress (Lausanne 4) in Seoul-Incheon, South Korea, in September 2024, with 5.394 delegates from 202 nations. It coincided with the 50th anniversary of the influential evangelical movement which has made a significant impact on contemporary missiology and missions.

The Seoul-Incheon Congress was an integral part of a wider process called the Lausanne 4 Journey, launched in 2019. According to the Lausanne Global Executive Director Michael Oh (USA/Japan), this process had a broad purpose: “Lausanne 4 is a multi-year, global, polycentric process facilitated by the platform of Lausanne, towards catalytic collaboration of the global church, for the discipling of all nations and the shaping of the world in 2050.”¹

The aim of this article is to identify and analyse the essential missiological contributions of the Lausanne 4 process throughout the pre-Congress, the Congress, and the post-Congress phases. We have chosen to focus on how the Lausanne 4 process addresses key strategic and theological gaps, with central online publications as our primary source material.

The word “gap” generally denotes “an incomplete or deficient area”² or “a space where something is missing”³. Gap is used by the Lausanne movement as a significant

1 The Lausanne Movement. “What is Lausanne 4” <https://lausanne.org/14>.

2 “Gap”, *Merriam Webster Dictionary* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gap>.

3 “Gap”, *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries* <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/gap>.

concept for the whole Lausanne 4 process, as expressed by Lausanne Global Associate Director and Lausanne 4 Congress Director David Bennett (USA):

We believe it is intrinsic to God's mission that the global church declare and display Christ together to a watching world... However, there are significant gaps in the progress toward that mission, globally as well as regionally... We have been on a journey to identify where the current gaps exist, and where new gaps are likely to open up – globally, as well as in each region of the world.⁴

These gaps are defined and explored in major publications throughout the Lausanne 4 process. *The L4 Listening Reports* (2021-2024) and the *State of the Great Commission Report* (2024) identify several strategic gaps. The accompanying *Seoul Statement* (2024) supplements previous Lausanne foundational documents with its focus on vital theological gaps. During the Congress the delegates explored 25 mission gaps in collaborate sessions, resulting in the subsequent publication of *Fourth Congress 'Collaborate' Gap Summaries* (2025).

As missiologists involved in the Lausanne Movement we understand our role in this article as critical insiders.⁵ Our approach here is analytical in two stages, with an emic perspective and with reference to early research on Lausanne 4. First, we identify major strategic and theological gaps in the central Lausanne 4 documents introduced above. Secondly, we highlight the central gaps of discipleship and collaboration. The wider context for this analysis is the evangelical theological and missiological profile of the Lausanne Movement.

Background: A Brief Profile of the Lausanne Movement

The first Lausanne congress in 1974 would never have taken place without American evangelist Billy Graham's initiative, vision, support and networks. With an awareness of the emerging global nature of evangelicalism and world mission, with deep concerns for recent developments in the World Council of Churches and out of a deep vision for cooperation among evangelicals, Graham invited evangelical leaders from all over the world to Lausanne in 1974.

In his opening speech at the congress, as congress host, Billy Graham expressed four hopes for this event:

1. I would like to see the Congress frame a biblical declaration on evangelism.

4 David W. Bennett. "Why Seoul 2024?" Blog. (The Lausanne Movement, 2023) <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/why-seoul-2024>.

5 Whereas Lars Dahle has been Lausanne Catalyst for Media Engagement since Lausanne 3, Rolf Kjode has been involved in Lausanne since 2001 as a national mission leader and more recently as a missiologist.

2. I would like to see the church challenged to complete the task of world evangelization.
3. I trust we can state what the relationship is between evangelism and social responsibility.
4. I hope that a new 'koinonia' or fellowship among evangelicals of all persuasions will be developed throughout the world.⁶

These four hopes have largely been fulfilled throughout the history of the Lausanne Movement.

We may express this as four key characteristics of the movement: *First*, Lausanne has reintroduced a classical evangelical theology of evangelism and mission as a significant and vibrant tradition into contemporary missiology and missions. *Secondly*, Lausanne has communicated the urgent task of world evangelization to the global evangelical church and beyond. *Thirdly*, Lausanne has gradually formulated a significant and influential theology of holistic or integral mission. *Fourthly*, throughout its history, Lausanne has provided a global community context for evangelical leaders, whether mission or church leaders, marketplace leaders or reflective practitioners.⁷

Since its third global congress in 2010, the Lausanne Movement has been revitalized with a clearer self-understanding, a growing three-dimensional activity, and a fresh formulation of its vision. According to its self-understanding the Lausanne Movement exists to connect influencers and ideas to accelerate global mission together. This takes place across the three dimensions of regions, issue networks, and generations. The vision is fourfold: (i) the gospel for every person, (ii) disciple-making churches for every people and place, (iii) Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and (iv) kingdom impact in every sphere of society. These central features shaped the movement in the transition period from the third to the fourth global congress.⁸

Identifying Gaps: *Global Listening Reports*

“We want to see an acceleration of collaborative initiatives that can function to address missional gaps and opportunities with the goal of fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations.” This was the central motivation behind the launch

6 Billy Graham. “Why Lausanne?” 1974. Graham’s keynote address is available as audio file and transcript at <https://lausanne.org/best-of-lausanne/billy-graham-answers-lausanne>.

7 See Lars Dahle et al., “Moving on from Cape Town – Beyond the 40th Lausanne Anniversary” i: *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*, edited by Margunn Serigstad Dahle et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 461-463.

8 See David W. Bennett, «A Movement in Motion: A View from the Inside » i: *Evangelical Review of Theology* 48, nr. 3 (2024), 215-221.

of the Lausanne 4 process in 2019.⁹

It was decided to begin the Lausanne 4 process with a global listening phase. Despite the Covid epidemic, the listening phase was undertaken in three stages from 2020 to 2024, where each stage resulted in the publication of a Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP). The global listening team was co-led by Eiko Takamizawa (Japan) and Steve Sang-Cheol Moon (South Korea).

The first stage involved evangelical leaders representing the whole movement, including its 12 regions, its 23 (active) issue networks, and its YLGen (Younger Leaders Generation) network. These 36 groups had listening calls in 2020 and 2021, with the emphasis on how these leaders understood key current challenges for global mission. The first question that all groups had to answer was, “What are the most significant missional gaps and remaining opportunities?”, followed by four questions about breakthroughs and innovations, needs for collaboration and research, and identification of other potential listening groups.

The findings from the first stage were published in *LOP 71: The Evangelical Church Interacting between the Global and the Local*.¹⁰ Its most relevant part to our topic is the last section which provides deeper analysis of word frequencies and topical patterns. As mentioned above, the first question in the analysis of themes and patterns is about “gaps and opportunities”. The largest of the 11 gaps that were recognized in the process was the “need for discipleship”, followed by the “need for love, unity and partnership”.

The second stage involved 30 interviews in 2022 and 2023 with participants in 12 countries from eight regions. These focus group interviews tried to dig deeper into the five issues from the listening calls in 2020-21. The findings were published in *LOP 72: Engaging in the Realities of Global Missions*.¹¹ This analysis distinguished between dominant global themes and dominant regional themes in mission, with several suggestions for future Lausanne initiatives both at the global and the regional levels.

The final stage of the listening phase from January to May 2024 involved listening to a core group of leaders from all regions. Individual interviews were undertaken with 22 evangelical leaders in 14 countries representing 7 regions. The overall aim was to establish some key recommendations for the future outreach of the global evangelical church. First, and most important among the recommendations, is still the need for discipleship. The findings were published in *LOP 73: Seven Challenges for the Global Evangelical Outreach*. The word “gaps” does not occur in this paper, but the idea of gaps is well represented by the identified “challenges” or “themes”.

9 “What is Lausanne 4”.

10 The Lausanne Movement, 2023. *LOP 71*. <https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/the-evangelical-church-interacting-between-the-global-and-the-local>.

11 The Lausanne Movement, 2023. *LOP 72*. <https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/engaging-in-the-realities-of-global-missions>.

These seven key themes are ‘building discipleship communities’, ‘mentoring for younger people for their leadership development’, ‘seeing the bigger picture of the remaining task of world evangelization’, ‘considering cultural trends for contextualized ministries’, ‘listening to various voices for a recalibration of ministry efforts’, ‘caregiving for the suffering with a special attention to their mental health issues’, and ‘storytelling God’s unconditional love’.¹²

Thus, according to LOP 73, these key themes constitute seven strategic challenges for the global church for its missional outreach in the years ahead.

Addressing Strategic Gaps: The *State of the Great Commission Report*

Parallel to the global listening process, Lausanne commissioned around 150 missiologists and mission practitioners around the world to prepare the *State of the Great Commission Report* (SOGC) which was launched in April 2024.¹³ This comprehensive report includes data, analysis and reflections on global mission related to (i) current status, (ii) context shifts, and (iii) regional considerations. These three parts of the SOGC were released successively, finally amounting to more than 500 pages.¹⁴

Matthew Niermann (USA) was Director and Executive Editor of *SOGC*, but he has not co-authored any article in the report. The introduction chapter is written by Ivor Gerard Poobalan (Sri Lanka) and Victor Nakah (South Africa) as Co-Chairs of the Lausanne Theology Working Group. This underscores the close connection between the *SOGC* and the accompanying *Seoul Statement*. However, Niermann’s official description of the *SOGC* is that it “brings together the best global data and key strategic thinkers to understand where the greatest gaps and opportunities are for the Great Commission’s fulfillment”.¹⁵

12 The Lausanne Movement, 2024. *LOP 73*. “Introduction”. <https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/seven-challenges-for-the-global-evangelical-outreach>.

13 Matthew Niermann (ed.). *The State of the Great Commission Report* (The Lausanne Movement: 2024). <https://lausanne.org/report>. It should be noted that the authors of this article have

14 A series of essays called *Theological Foundation Papers* (2025) have been published as Lausanne Occasional Papers, undergirding the insights presented in the *State of the Great Commission Report*. See Julius Kim & Philip Chung. “Rooting the *State of the Great Commission Report* in Timeless Truth: Introducing the Theological Foundation Papers”. Blog. (The Lausanne Movement, 2025) <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/rooting-the-great-commission-in-timeless-truth>.

15 <https://lausanne.org/report>. Niermann has been profiled in several Lausanne podcasts leading up to L4; see <https://lausanne.org/nb/authors/matthew-niermann>. It should be noted that we have contributed as co-authors to two articles in the *SoGC Report*, i.e., “Propaganda and Decentralization of Media” (Lars Dahle) and “Re-evangelizing Europe” (Rolf Kjode).

Part 1 of the SOGC investigates the current status for world missions and global Christianity. The issues covered include ecclesial megatrends globally, the status of missionary sending and the unreached people groups. This part of the report is not primarily about mission strategies but invites the evangelical church to explore the front line of Christian mission at large. One key issue is where we see significant growth and decline. Graphs and illustrations make the material easily available for the common reader. The research has used a wide variety of sources, with an emphasis on resources such as World Christian Database and Joshua Project.

Part 2 of the report goes much deeper as it explores challenges in world missions from now until 2050 in view of expected socio-political and cultural changes. These context shifts are categorized in ten key questions which represent challenges and opportunities for Christian missions. This section of the report combines further graphs and illustrations with texts written by groups of missiologists and mission practitioners. While part 1 of the report is focused mostly on the front line of mission, i.e., the unreached, the unengaged, and the global blocks of Christian tradition, part 2 investigates the wider context for Christian mission.

We recognize the rich variety of issues for missional involvement from part two of the *Cape Town Commitment* (2011). The biblical Gospel has relevance for the entire human life, for human fellowship, and in the end for all creation. What are the implications of an increasingly polycentric Christianity? How do we encounter the rise of Islam and secularism? How do we build trust when objective values are under attack and fake news aim for dominance? How do we establish viable communities, help people to live sustainable lives, or stand up against injustice and poverty in a divided world? What about the recent challenges to our understanding of humanity represented by gender confusion or transhumanist ideas? What are the implications of the digital age and the rapid development of AI for mission strategies? The church is called to live and serve in this world of key context shifts as it takes part in God's mission.

Thus, part 2 of the SOGC, which consists of 350 out of a total of 500 pages, addresses obvious strategic gaps for global Christian mission. This part does not need to be read consecutively. The ten issue chapters are 30-40 pages each with subtopics at approximately six or seven pages. In other words, those who are interested in a specific topic can easily read it separately. Altogether, 39 strategic gap issues were identified.

Part 3 of the SOGC consists of regional reflections upon the gaps in part two. All twelve geographical regions of the Lausanne Movement were asked to select five of the ten challenges that seemed most important for their own regions and present reflections on how to fill these gaps, both strategically and practically. The regions have solved this task rather differently. While some regions have a setup for their response that clearly corresponds with the ten gaps identified in part 2, most of the regions have taken the opportunity to answer more independently and added their own topics with a looser connection to the identified gaps. We find this more helpful than confusing, because it shows the variety of global and regional challenges and gives us a fuller

picture of the situation.

However, some gaps are identified as common challenges in most regions. Demographical changes are mentioned by at least ten out of twelve regions, followed in frequency by issues about ministry in our digital age, including discipling and Gospel proclamation. Issues about what is fair and just and about sustainability, through both creation care and mental health issues, are also well represented. The lowest score is on issues about what it means to be human, including both AI and LGBTQ+. However, traditional gender issues concerning women's role in church and missions are represented in the question about what is fair and just. A central issue among missiologists, like the growth of a polycentric Christianity, is also poorly represented in the answers. This is a global megatrend, which may be a reason why it is not prioritized when regions try to bring their own challenges down to a practical level. The question about community also has a low score, but the sub-topic of people on the move seems to be represented under the question about demographic changes. Finally, the question about the source of hope holds a relatively low score, but we should note the concern from English-speaking Africa. Despite having the highest numerical church growth globally, they also experience increased social impact from both Islam and secularism.

Exploring Strategic Gaps: The Collaborative Sessions at the Congress

It was decided to facilitate a series of four collaborative sessions at the Seoul-Incheon Congress where selected strategic gap issues could be explored.¹⁶

Out of the 39 issues highlighted in the SoGC Report, 25 issues were identified for special focus during the Congress. The selected issues should be globally significant, dynamically shaping our world, needing global mission focus, be conducive to collaboration and design thinking, and be cross-disciplinary concerns.

These 25 strategic gap issues were organized under 7 overall headings:

- “How can emerging population blocks be reached?” with 6 issues: The global aging population; the new middle-class; the next generation; Islam; secularism; and least reached people.
- “What is ministry in a digital age?” with 4 issues: Scripture; church forms; discipleship; and evangelism.
- “What does it mean to be human?” with 3 issues: AI and transhumanism; sexuality and gender; and wholistic health.
- “What is polycentric mission?” with 2 issues: Polycentric missions and polycentric resource mobilization.
- “How can spirituality and holiness define missions?” with 3 issues: Integrity and

16 See Joseph W. Handley Jr. and David W. Bennett, “Looking to the Future: Lausanne 4/ Seoul 2024” in: *Leading Well in Times of Disruption: Leadership Development for Global Mission*, edited by Joseph W. Handley Jr. et al. (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2024), 318-321.

anti-corruption; integrated spirituality and mission; and developing leaders of character.

- “What is community?” with 4 issues: People on the move; urban communities; digital communities; and ethnicism and racism.
- “What is the influence on society?” with 3 issues: Christianity, radical politics, and religion; caring for creation and the vulnerable; and societal trust and influence of Christianity.

Each participant was assigned to a sub-group within one of these gap issue groups to explore the issue through individual reflections, table group conversations, and plenary interaction. The published collaborate gap summaries provide a window into these sessions. Within each gap group the participants “listened to perspectives on the current reality, imagined a preferred reality, discussed how to create ways to close the gap, and communicated a prayerful proposal in response”.¹⁷

The vision behind these gap issue sessions was to encourage and catalyze towards collaborative action. Around 280 action teams “were formed to address some of the most urgent gaps in global mission”.¹⁸ In order to facilitate that, Lausanne Action Hub was launched as a digital platform at the congress. Due to initial technological challenges, a new platform for the Action Hub had to be launched early in 2025.

Addressing Theological Gaps: The *Seoul Statement*

On the second day of the Lausanne 4 Congress in South Korea the Lausanne leadership released the document called the *Seoul Statement* (SST).

A fourfold intention behind the SST can be perceived. First, the SST was not intended as a stand-alone document but should be read alongside the previous three congress statements, i.e. the *Lausanne Covenant*, the *Manila Manifesto*, and the *Cape Town Commitment*. Secondly, it was written by the Theology Working Group (TWG) as their response to key theological issues raised in the listening process and the SOGC report. Thirdly, the SST has a specific focus on theological gaps, understood as key theological areas that the previous Lausanne foundational documents had not given sufficient attention. Fourthly, it was intended as a fully integrated part of the overall collaboration within the Lausanne 4 process.¹⁹

Which theological areas are identified by the TWG as ‘gaps’ in previous founda-

17 The Lausanne Movement. *Fourth Congress ‘Collaborate’ Gap Summaries. A collective response to the topics raised in the State of the Great Commission Report*. 2025. <https://lausanne.org/l4-gap-summaries>.

18 The Lausanne Movement. *Impact Report 2024*, 2025, 5. <https://lausanne.org/impact-report-2024>.

19 The Lausanne Movement. “Introducing the Seoul Statement.” Blog. 2024. <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/introducing-the-seoul-statement>.

tional Lausanne documents? Whereas the term 'gap' is absent from the SST itself, it is used in the introductory article to the document:

The entryway to thinking about the necessity of the *Seoul Statement* came from the TWG's discussion around the meaning of 'the gospel', its declaration and its defense. This opened up questions about crucial theological gaps evident in the global church, which work to undermine the church's mission to proclaim and demonstrate the 'gospel' in the world.²⁰

The SST gives attention to several gap issues from the listening process and the SOGC. Many regions called for better theological training and a raised theological awareness. Europe calls "for a fully biblical understanding of truth"; Francophone Africa calls for theological discernment as they encounter the *Kemite* movement; North America reports of an alarming "rise of biblical illiteracy"; South Asia seeks to maintain "doctrinal integrity".²¹ The SST is concerned about the foundational theology underpinning true mission by taking these theological challenges seriously.

The key issues addressed in the SST are about defining the Gospel, securing the Bible as basis for the Christian faith, understanding the church, establishing a theology for the human person, and calling to discipleship. In addition, the last two chapters are about missional responsibilities in a world of conflicts and in a digital age. Alongside the SST, a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers were published on four of these issues as background documents.²² We would especially like to highlight the three chapters on evangelical hermeneutics (ch. II), the human person (ch. IV), and discipleship (ch. V) as significant within the Lausanne tradition and beyond.

SST is rather different from part II of the Cape Town Commitment (CTC) with its very concrete strategic call to action. However, SST calls the church to come to a deeper understanding of her missional being. Dejan Afdjic and Philip Bartholomä commented in one of the early research articles after Lausanne 4 that the strength of SST is "precisely in the fact that it does not continue the 'continuous shift' from the theological to the ethical, which has rightly been criticized many times regarding

20 "Introducing the Seoul Statement."

21 SOGC. 424-425 436-437, 460, 485

22 See: (i) LOP 74 - 'Do You Understand What You Are Reading?' Toward a Faithful Evangelical Hermeneutic of Scripture; (ii) LOP 75 - The Formation of Disciples for Mission and the Formation of Disciples as Mission; (iii) LOP 76 - Christian Faith and Technology; and (iv) LOP 77 - A Theology of the Human Person. <https://lausanne.org/occasional-papers>

Cape Town”²³.

Our understanding is that the SST is much more concerned about “securing a firm foundation for mission than focusing on the strategic mission challenges of the day”.²⁴ Thus, we will focus this overall analysis on how the SST understands the fundamental theology in relation to previous Lausanne documents.

In the Preamble SST “regrets” that, 50 years after Lausanne 1, globally, it still is necessary in too many churches “to help new believers develop a truly biblical worldview”. Consequently, discipleship has not been nurtured and they “are alarmed by the rise of false teaching and pseudo-Christian lifestyles, leading numerous believers away from the essential values of the gospel”²⁵. This forms the background for the introduction of the nature and necessity of the gospel as the foremost theological element in all understanding of mission. This biblical gospel is primarily understood as “the story we live and tell”²⁶. The following paragraphs (par. 1-16) display this salvation story which is both Trinitarian and Christocentric.

What is this gospel according to SST? In line with CTC, it confirms the biblical story as fundamental to what the gospel is. There is a strong emphasis on Jesus and his salvation. The cross of Christ is presented with a spectrum of images, among them the understanding of penal substitution. Thus, the theology is Christocentric and confirms what David Bebbington called evangelical “crucicentrism”. However, the work of the Spirit is referred to in all five subtitles and in several paragraphs in a way that reminds us of the central role of the Spirit in much recent ecumenical theology.²⁷ According to SST, the primary role of the Spirit is to bring salvation to the world as he points to Jesus Christ, but the chapter on the gospel is also aware of the comprehensive nature of salvation, concluding with the prayer, “O God, our Father, by your Son and through your Spirit, bring the fulness of new creation!” Thus, SST represents a theological understanding of the gospel that is both Trinitarian and Christocentric.

The centrality of the gospel is a bridge to the next foundational chapter of SST, on the authority of the Bible for theology and mission. The core understanding of the Bible corresponds well with previous Lausanne documents and affirms what Bebbington characterizes as evangelical ‘biblicism’ and Tim Larsen calls “preeminent

23 Dejan Afdajic and Philip Bartholomä, “Seoul Statements: Erste Reflexionen und Impulse im Anschluss an Lausanne IV”, in *Evangelische Missiologie* 40 nr. 3 (2024), 161 (our translation). It should be noted that behind this positive evaluation of SST lies a critical approach towards what the authors consider insufficient in CTC.

24 Rolf Kjode. “Participant Perspective: Building on a Firm Foundation.” *Vista Journal* 46 (Dec. 2024). <https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/ij1bn5hp85097yohjeesh6k3rchkm>.

25 The Lausanne Movement. *The Seoul Statement*, “Preamble”. 2024. <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-seoul-statement>.

26 *The Seoul Statement*, chapter 1, introduction.

27 See e.g., *Together Towards Life*, the leading mission document from WCC since 2013.

place of the Bible” in their definitions of evangelical essentials.²⁸ However, SST differs from previous text in its focus on hermeneutics. While par. 18 primarily confirms the centrality of the gospel – and thus of Christ – in biblical interpretation, par. 20 underscores the necessity of reading the Bible as a historic text that must be understood in its original context. Furthermore, par. 21 reminds us that it must be read under the guidance of the Spirit. This also indicates a kind of humility that leads us in par. 22 to reading the Bible together with the believers in the long Christian tradition, and then in par. 23 to reading it with all contemporary believers in shifting contexts.

The inclusion of these different hermeneutical contexts, while reading the Bible as the authoritative source of faith and life, gives SST a broader angle than many other evangelical documents. While SST is focused on theology as the foundation of mission, it cannot be read as a defence for a narrow ‘fundamentalist’ approach. On the contrary, it places the evangelical movement with a classical evangelical theology within a wider frame of Christian tradition. While the commitment to the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* is unwavering in the introduction and in par. 17, the introduction also underscores the importance of being “guided by the interpretative tradition of the church”. This emphasis of standing in the long and wide tradition of the Christian church is different from the previous congress documents. The call to unity has been important in the 50 years since Lausanne 1, but in SST the explicit dependency on the historical and universal church stands out as something new.

One of the common critiques against previous statements, not the least against the *Lausanne Covenant*, has been the total absence of references to the sacraments. In SST baptism is mentioned 14 times. It is part of the Gospel, as it is “[by] faith [that] we are baptised into Christ’s death for the forgiveness of sins” (par. 15). This is further developed in the chapter about the church as being “baptised as members of the Body of Christ” (par 25) and as “a sign and seal of God’s grace” (par. 26). Baptism is not the only sacrament mentioned in SST. Par. 36 says that The Lord’s Supper is a place to taste God’s grace, and further in par. 75 that baptism and the Lord’s Table is a place of “regular rehearsing of the Gospel”.

The cumulative value of these new explicit elements, i.e., the dependence on the long and wide ecclesial tradition in hermeneutics and the emphasis on the importance of the sacraments for the Gospel and for the church, gives SST a significant theological profile compared to previous Lausanne foundational documents. It is interesting to note that it took 50 years for the Lausanne movement to fill in these gaps in the theology of the movement.

It should be mentioned that SST immediately spurred significant discussion and

28 David W. Bebbington. “The Gospel in the Nineteenth Century”. In *Vox Evangelica* nr. 13 (1983), 19. Timothy Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism”. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* edited by Timothy Larsen et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-14.

contention.²⁹ A double critique was raised against the text. A group of 235 delegates signed a petition that the statement should address social issues, not least the climate crisis, more boldly. Others, with Lausanne Regional Director Ed Stetzer as one prominent voice, begged for a stronger emphasis on the evangelistic calling, not least the call to go to the less reached. However, no major changes were made in SST.

Exploring Discipleship as a Key Gap

It is not within the frames of this article to elaborate the strategic and theological gaps addressed throughout the Lausanne 4 process in any detail. We will restrict our analysis in this second stage of our article to two key gaps that we have found significant and representative in the material. This first one is the whole issue of discipleship.

Discipleship was highlighted as a key gap throughout the listening process. In the first phase, “the need for discipleship” came out on top – with a clear margin – before the need for partnership and involving youth. In phase two, “the importance of discipleship” clearly came out on top, alongside the presentation of stories about “cases of breakthroughs in ministry”. Furthermore, the need for building discipleship comes out as number one out of seven priorities in the third and last phase of the listening process.

It needs to be asked what discipleship actually implies when emphasized in an evangelical mission context. It is not within the limits of this article to explore that in any detail, leaving it as an important area for further research. However, in our material we have found some indication of how discipleship is defined within the Lausanne Movement.

The report from part three of the listening phase highlights some marks as representative for the understanding of discipleship in the context of mission. First, discipleship is not primarily about individuals but about formation within a community of believers. This is fellowship in spiritual disciplines like Bible reading but also walking the road of reconciliation and doing evangelism primarily within relational frames. Secondly, the emphasis is on discipleship as whole life formation. Following Jesus implies life-long learning and a sanctification process. Finally, the report observes a growing longing among many youths to walk alongside mature followers of Christ and thereby learning to lead a Christian life. This demonstrates the significance of locating discipleship formation in the context of intergenerational community.³⁰

In SST we find that the words ‘disciple’ and ‘discipleship’ occur 44 times. 23 of these mentions are in the fifth chapter which is directly about discipleship. This chap-

29 See Morgan Lee. “Lausanne Theologians Explain Seoul Statement that Surprised Congress Delegates. *Christianity Today*. Sep. 26th, 2024. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/lausanne-seoul-statement-theology-south-korea-evangelism-scripture-discipleship/>

30 *LOP 73: Seven Challenges*. See Challenge 1.

ter starts with the following affirmation:

We affirm that to be a disciple is to be formed in the pattern of life that conforms to the good news of Christ's incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension by which God in his love has saved his people from their sins and, through the outpouring of the Spirit by the ascended Christ, graciously granted them the power to live under his holy and righteous rule. As a result, mission is properly aimed toward the formation of disciples. (Par. 71)

From all of this follows what SST defines as the core of discipleship, i.e., "Our Calling to Holiness and Mission". Thus, discipleship contains both personal and vocational aspects. The call to holiness and the call to bear witness to Christ in a broken world stand out as the two focal points in discipleship when described as an ellipse. In line with the needs reported in the listening process, this discipleship holds a strong community element. The local churches play a vital role. "We affirm that a local church grows and matures as it seeks to ensure that its corporate life reflects the pattern of life that conforms to the message of Christ crucified."³¹ This strong communal perspective of discipleship corresponds to the challenges identified in the listening process.

This emphasis on discipleship is not new within the Lausanne Movement, but it is clearly an increasing emphasis. *The Lausanne Covenant* mentions 'discipleship' three times, related to obedience to Christ's commission, to the evangelistic task, and to training of church leaders.³² *The Manila Manifesto* uses the word 'disciple' or 'discipleship' five times with full emphasis on training for the ministry of witnessing and evangelism.³³ In *The Cape Town Commitment* the word stem 'discipl' is far more frequent, appearing more than 50 times, including mentioning 'discipline' three times. In CTC, discipleship seems to be an all-encompassing description of the Christian life and calling. It is central to all parts of the document and is nearly equally frequent in the Confession of Faith (part 1) and in the Call to Action (part 2).³⁴ Thus, SST seems to position itself close to CTC on this very central mission motif in both documents. What characterizes SST, however, is an even stronger emphasis on the communal elements of discipleship.

How does this increasing emphasis on discipleship align with established definitions of being 'evangelical'? In Bebbington's definition, 'conversionism' and 'activism'

31 *The Seoul Statement*. See the introduction to chapter V for 'holiness', par. 73 for the Great Commission, and par. 75 about the local church.

32 The Lausanne Movement. *The Lausanne Covenant*. 1974. See "Introduction", par. 4, and par. 11. <https://lausanne.org/statement/lausanne-covenant>.

33 The Lausanne Movement. *The Manila Manifesto*. 1989. See par. B6. <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-manila-manifesto>.

34 The Lausanne Movement. *The Cape Town Commitment*. 2011.

may contain elements of it, but his definition does not seem to explicitly include the centrality of discipleship. Larsen's definition probably comes closer in his fifth and last point: "who stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others, including the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people."³⁵ John Stott, in his presentation of evangelical essentials, sees carrying the cross of Christ as a core element of discipleship together with the overall perspective, that the Triune God facilitates "every aspect of our Christian discipleship".³⁶ In his presentation, Stott frequently refers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic *The Cost of Discipleship*.³⁷

Dutch theologian Evert Van de Poll also observes that discipleship is central in the SST. He raises an interesting discussion related to what the change of core vocabulary implies.³⁸ Van de Poll observes that mission in SST is not defined with previously established terms like "proclamation and demonstration" or "proclamation and social responsibility" but with word-pairs like "evangelism and discipleship" and "declare and display" (the congress motto). He asks whether these are indications of changed emphases away from "well-known models like holistic mission, integral mission, *missio dei*, or the Five Marks of Mission". We agree with his conclusion that the new triad "presence, proclamation and practice" corresponds with the previous terms and that "declare and display" should be understood similarly. However, the emphasis on discipleship is in line with the word 'practice' in the triad. This marks a development in the Lausanne profile, reflecting the demand for a priority of discipleship formation in the entire process of Lausanne 4.

In what way does the Lausanne 4 process understand discipleship as a 'gap'? What are the alleged deficiencies in this area? Whereas SST affirms the "dual emphases" on "evangelism to unreached people" and "social concern in face of injustice", it is concerned that this concept of integral mission "has not always fully integrated the command of our Lord to be disciples and his commission to make disciples".³⁹ In line with these concerns, SST presents a challenging situation analysis of the global

35 Larsen, "Defining and locating evangelicalism", 1.

36 John Stott. *Evangelical Truth* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1999), 96-97. 135.

37 It should be noted that the increased focus on discipleship is not constrained to the evangelical tradition.

38 Evert Van de Poll, "Mission, Discipleship and Ethical issues. Evaluating the Seoul Statement of the Lausanne Congress 2024". In *European Journal of Theology*, 34 no.2 (2025), especially his discussion on pp 300-305. Van de Poll's article in EJT autumn 2025 is a slightly extended version of his article "Evaluating the Seoul Statement of Lausanne 4". In *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 49 no.1 (2025). <https://theology.worldidea.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/ERT-49-1-print.pdf>.

39 *The Seoul Statement*, chapter V, introduction.

evangelical church with financial mismanagement, sexual misconduct, power abuse, ignorance of pain, and spiritual anaemia and immaturity. All these deficiencies should lead the evangelical body to profound grievance and lament, to repentance and confession. Thus, “we therefore commit ourselves to the following affirmations,” followed closely by the goals of forming discipleship. Forming life-long discipleship stands as the gateway to fulfilling the Great Commission.⁴⁰

Exploring Collaboration as a Key Gap

The second gap that we have found especially significant and representative in the Lausanne 4 material is collaboration. The urgent need for increased collaboration in global Christian mission has been high on the Lausanne leadership agenda throughout the Lausanne 4 process, with the Lausanne 4 Congress as the pivotal point. While the overall motto of the Congress was *Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together*, the strategic goal was collaboration through “moving together to close Great Commission gaps”⁴¹.

A fourfold intention can be perceived in terms of collaboration as a gap. *First*, to raise the awareness of the importance of collaboration in mission, through teaching, stories and testimonies.⁴² *Secondly*, to provide the Lausanne 4 congress as a laboratory for collaboration, both in terms of ideas and actions, with the afternoon collaboration gap sessions (as described above) as arenas. *Thirdly*, to change the fundamental attitudes towards collaboration, through the invitation to sign the *Lausanne Collaborative Action Commitment*. *Fourthly*, to catalyse and accelerate collaborative action through the invitation to form Lausanne Action Teams and the introduction of digital platforms and tools.

One year before the Lausanne 4 Congress, the Congress Team formulated a “Congress Experience Promise” with “a journey of collaborative action” as a key outcome:

We promise a congress experience where every touchpoint, from innovative plenary sessions to immersive prayer and engagement spaces, is designed to deepen your connection to God’s mission and the global church, fostering a sense of together-

40 See also Ivor Poobalan, *LOP 87 – Discipleship and the Great Commission* [Theological Foundation Paper] (The Lausanne Movement, 2025). <https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/discipleship-and-the-great-commission>.

41 The Lausanne Movement. *Congress Executive Summary of Afternoon Programme*. <https://congress.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Fourth-Lausanne-Congress-Executive-Summary-of-Afternoon-Programme.pdf>.

42 A central example is Michael Oh’s address during the 50 year anniversary celebration: “Declare and Display: Collaborative Action for Christ’s Mission”, <https://lausanne.org/video/declare-and-display-collaborative-action-for-christs-mission>.

ness, belonging, and empowerment for leaders from across the globe to embark on a journey of collaborative action.⁴³

But how did these intentions work out in real life? CEO of the global A3 network Joseph Handley (US) shows how the new situation of a polycentric leadership of mission and church necessarily leads to the centrality of collaboration that was displayed at the Lausanne 4 congress, calling collaboration “the heart of polycentric mission”. He sees collaboration as a blessing and an opportunity, as “an embrace of interdependence”.⁴⁴

This was clearly the idea behind the spirit of collaboration that permeated the whole Lausanne 4 Congress. It was never intended just to be an event, but to be one key station in a long process. As noted by Congress Event Coordinator Evi Rodemann (Germany): “While the immediate effects are evident in the energy, strategies, and relationships ignited, the long-term outcomes will only emerge as participants incorporate these insights into their ministries and serve as multipliers in their communities.”⁴⁵

While being in favour of increasing collaboration, BMS General Director Kang San Tan (Malaysia) asks timely “Whose collaboration and whose priorities?”. He expresses a concern among some Global South mission leaders who “are suspicious when calls for collaboration become another means of control if platforms of influence and decision-making powers remain with those who provide financial support”. Despite the new global map of polycentrism in church and mission, Tan reminds the church body that there are still both obvious and invisible restrictions or limitations for equal collaboration as long as power and money are unequally distributed. He affirms SST when it addresses the identity issues connected with gender and sexuality and takes it as an area where evangelicals need to meet and resolve conflicts. “[C]ollaboration does not mean partners cannot challenge one another.” Tan further addresses the question about the limits of collaboration. Does it also include people of different faiths? We are in favour of his agenda that the church must learn “to live in peace with people from different religious traditions”. However, we wonder how far he is willing to go in understanding “others” as” collaborators for gospel transformation”⁴⁶.

43 Evi Rodemann. “Collaboration in Global Mission: Measuring the Impact of the Fourth Lausanne Congress”. *Lausanne Global Analysis* 14 nr. 2 (March 2025). <https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/the-fourth-lausanne-congress-measuring-collaborative-action-impact>.

44 Joseph W. Handley Jr. «Reflections on the Fourth Lausanne Congress”. In *Evangelical Review of Theology* 48 nr. 4 (Nov. 2024), 294-295. https://theology.worldidea.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ERT-48-4_web.pdf.

45 Rodemann. “Collaboration in Global Mission”.

46 Kang-San Tan. “Whose Collaboration? Whose Priorities? A Missiological Response to the Seoul Statement”. *Lausanne Global Analysis* 14 nr. 2 (March 2025). <https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/the-seoul-statement-a-missiological-response>.

Concluding Reflections on the Missiological Contributions from Lausanne 4

The Lausanne 4 process has generated a wealth of missiological resources for the global evangelical community and beyond. Our analysis has shown that ‘gaps’ is a fruitful perspective for the analysis of the Lausanne 4 process and congress. To our knowledge, this has not been developed conceptually in other research articles on Lausanne 4.

We may now summarize our analysis of the most significant missiological contributions from the Lausanne 4 Journey, when compared with Lausanne’s historical perspectives and contributions:

- The Lausanne 4 process is characterized by a strong *continuity* in terms of vision (“fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission”), evangelical essentials (“renewing our commitment to the centrality of the gospel and to the faithful reading of Scripture”), and missional focus (“meet the specific challenges that now face the global church”). However, there is also an element of *discontinuity* since the consistent and dynamic tension between Gospel proclamation and Christian social responsibility in the previous three congress documents is absent in the *Seoul Statement*.
- In terms of *emphases*, the thorough preparatory process through the listening phase and the *State of the Great Commission Report* set the agenda for the congress in a fresh way both in terms of strategic and theological gaps. There is also a stronger emphasis on emerging global demographics, which are experienced as common, huge challenges across the regions, as well as on the workplace as a missional everyday arena for a majority of Christians.
- Lausanne 4 is also characterized by key *developments*, both strategically and theologically. The broad identification of strategic gaps breaks new ground, whereas the major focus on collaboration represents a fresh approach. Theologically, the exposition of discipleship is much more substantial, emphasizing the deep connection between the call to holiness and the call to witness. Other key theological developments include hermeneutical principles for a faithful reading of Scripture, a more robust ecclesiology, and an exposition of a biblical understanding of the human person.

The Lausanne 4 Journey has strengthened the role of the Lausanne Movement as a global evangelical platform for fellowship, friendship, and partnership. It remains to be seen whether the global evangelical mission community will work towards taking the identified strategic and theological gaps seriously in collaborate reflection and action.