

The Lausanne Movement: How the church unified over global missions

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The first Lausanne World Congress in 1974, under the leadership of Billy Graham and John Stott, is considered by church historian Mark Knoll to be the most significant turning point for Christianity since the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh 1910.¹ The Congress became a Movement, and this mission unity movement continued to expand with the Lausanne World Congress II in Manila (1989), encompassing Pentecostals and Charismatics as well as representatives from Russia and Eastern Europe. To become known simply as 'Lausanne', this movement continued to broaden its influence. The Lausanne Movement brought together Christian leaders from 198 countries at The Third Lausanne Congress (2010) in Cape Town, S. Africa with at least two thirds of participants from the Majority World (Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Asia). *Christianity Today* has described the Congress as "*The Most Diverse Gathering Ever: Lausanne III is pulling a cross-section of 4,000 world leaders to keep the gospel front and center*".²

This paper intends to describe how the Lausanne Movement achieved unity with a common mission based on theological statements, bringing together Christ-like leaders from around the world into a global community.

I. A Common Mission: World Evangelization with the Primacy of Evangelism

The Lausanne Movement has wrestled over a common mission, vision, strategy, terminology and theology throughout the years. New words and concepts were introduced including 'World Evangelization', 'Homogenous principle', 'Unreached People Groups', and '1040 Window'. Respected godly leaders had their differences and yet through all the battles, unity was forged. With a common commitment to *The Lausanne Covenant* (1974) people with a range of perspectives on secondary issues all took seriously the authority of Scripture and the uniqueness of Christ, and all in humility worked together for a common direction. This is captured in *The Cape Town Commitment* (2010) which we trust will influence the future trajectory of evangelicals.

A. The Recovery of the Holistic Gospel and Social Responsibility

¹ The Second Vatican Council (1962) and the Third Lausanne World Congress (1974) are the most important events of our century in his final chapter. Mark A. Noll.

Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

² John W. Kennedy. *The Most Diverse Gathering Ever.* Christianity Today, September 29, 2010. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/september/34.66.html>

(Lausanne 1974)

The earliest and probably the most significant ideological battle was between two world leaders Billy Graham and John Stott over the two words ‘evangelism’ and ‘evangelization’. While similar in meaning coming from the Greek root word εὐαγγελίζω “euanggelizo” (‘gospelizing’ that announces the good news, the Lord’s glad tidings), the difference between ‘evangelism’ and ‘evangelization’ had great implications.

Founder Billy Graham from the United States with his vision and worldwide stature along with funding and organizational support through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) wanted a narrow focus on ‘Proclamation Evangelism’. Graham, himself an evangelist, viewed the Lausanne Congress as a continuation from the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin (1966). John Stott, the scholar and pastor from the United Kingdom, with chairman Bishop Jack Dain from Australia, and Latin American leaders Samuel Escobar and Rene Padilla, pushed for a broader agenda.³ Utilizing a new terminology ‘evangelization’, Stott championed a holistic gospel to include social responsibility intertwining the Great Commission and the Great Commandment; addressing injustices, and fighting the evil structures seen in other areas of the developing world.⁴ Stott’s subsequent involvement as the chief architect of *The Lausanne Covenant* provided the enduring long-term ‘whole gospel’ direction for the Lausanne Movement.⁵

The two positions clashed at the Lausanne Continuation Committee in Mexico in 1975. Leighton Ford describes the tension between Billy Graham and John Stott. “In his opening remarks, Billy Graham had urged the committee should limit itself to the specific task of evangelism. John Stott, on the other hand, argued that the mandate of the Lausanne Movement came from *The Lausanne Covenant*, and that the committee should seek to influence the whole wider vision of the church.”⁶ On the strength of 20 years of friendship, Stott voiced opposition to Graham’s appointment to the presidency of Lausanne, thereby setting for a broader direction forward.⁷

³ Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jorgensen. *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK.: Regnum, 2014), 5.

⁴ Rose Dowsett. “The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical” in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK.: Regnum, 2014), 403-405.

⁵ ‘Interestingly, John Stott was ambivalent about the Congress and only agreed to participate after Graham and Dain both met with him on two separate occasions.’ Dahle, p. 4-5.

⁶ Leighton Ford. *A Vision Pursued: The Lausanne Movement 1974-1986*. Fuller Lectures. Nov 1986.

⁷ Julia Cameron. “John Stott and the Lausanne Movement” in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK.: Regnum, 2014), 67

A year later, Leighton Ford, Billy Graham's brother-in-law, known to be a kingdom-minded bridge-builder, was chosen to succeed Chairman Jack Dain while John Stott became the chair of the Lausanne Theology and Education Working Group.⁸ Stott continued as the theological anchor for Lausanne as he also served as the chief architect behind the *Manila Manifesto* at the World Congress II in Manila in 1989 which expounded on the holistic gospel theme developed in 1974; "The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World".

The Third Lausanne Congress (Cape Town, 2010) continued along the lines of the 'holistic gospel' with the appointment of Chris Wright to head the Theology Working Group. Wright also served as chair of the Statement Group, responsible for producing the *Cape Town Commitment*. His handprint on *The Cape Town Commitment* in section 10 says "We Love the Mission of God" continues along those lines of the evangelical perspective on the broader *Missio Dei* (Mission of God).

"Our mission is wholly derived from God's mission, addresses the whole of God's creation, and is grounded at its centre in the redeeming victory of the cross... God commands us to reflect his own character through compassionate care of the needy, and to demonstrate the values and the power of the kingdom of God in striving for justice and peace and in caring for God's creation."⁹ (*Cape Town Commitment*)

Along with poverty, injustices and social responsibility is a new issue to be addressed by Lausanne: caring for God's creation including the environment. The newly established issue network 'Creation Care' led by Senior Associate Ed Brown has become one of the most active networks in the movement.

Why was this important?

Christians and pastors who have not heard of the Lausanne Movement have been no doubt shaped by it. President of Asbury Seminary, Theologian and Missiologist Dr. Tim Tennent writes,

"It was the Lausanne Movement which helped to shape and galvanize the church around a broader redemptive mission... Today millions of Christians who have been shaped by the Lausanne Movement are addressing issues from human trafficking, to poverty, to creation care."¹⁰

⁸ Ramez Atallah, "Continuing the Vision from Lausanne 1974: A Personal Perspective" in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK: Regnum, 2014), 75-76.

⁹ *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*. The Third Lausanne Congress. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2011), 28.

¹⁰ Timothy C. Tennant. "Lausanne and Global Evangelicalism: Theological Distinctives and Missiological Impact in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*". (Oxford, UK: Regnum, 2014), 58.

B. The Primacy of Evangelism

While the needs of the poor, tackling injustices and taking care of the environment are important and necessary endeavors, other Lausanne leaders have pushed for the position that the primary mission of the church must be the soul of a person. The danger for the holistic gospel could lead to a loss of focus on bringing people to a personal saving relationship with Christ.

John Piper, an American pastor and plenary speaker at Cape Town 2010, is a strong proponent for the primacy of evangelism in the mission of God. In a promotional Cape Town 2010 video, Piper emphatically states,

“as horrible are the sufferings of this world, they do not compare with the eternal sufferings to come from a life without Christ. I just hope that Lausanne gets this right.”

Another champion for evangelism in the Lausanne Movement is Blair Carlson, the Cape Town 2010 Congress Program Director, with 26 years of experience as the Crusade Director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Carlson shared at the Lausanne Asian Church Leaders Forum in Seoul 2013 about his meeting with Billy Graham after the Cape Town 2010 Congress. Graham’s question and concern were the same as ever. “What is Lausanne doing about evangelism?” Following the Congress, Carlson was appointed as the new Senior Associate for ‘Proclamation Evangelism’ and through Mission Africa, has helped with evangelistic events all across the continent.

Michael Oh, the new CEO and President of the Lausanne Movement since February 2013 has developed a fresh restatement of the Lausanne vision replacing the previous ‘the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world’¹¹.

“Lausanne is a global movement that connects influencers and ideas for global missions of the gospel for every person; an evangelical church for every people; Christ-like leaders for every church; and kingdom impact in every sphere of society.” (Lausanne’s Refreshed Statement)¹²

In this refreshed vision, the term ‘global missions’ has replaced the ‘whole gospel’ and ‘world evangelization’. While the phrase ‘primacy of evangelism’ is not used, the importance of evangelism is noted in the first statement ‘the gospel for every person’. Another interesting observation is the second statement with the re-

¹¹ Michael Oh is a Presbyterian Church of America missionary with connections to the Gospel Coalition.

¹² <http://www.lausanne.org/about-the-movement>

emphasis of the role of the local church¹³. Each perspective addresses an area of neglect from a previous era. During the earlier days of Lausanne, evangelicals needed a wake up call to address poverty and society injustice issues. However, when everything is promoted with the holistic gospel today, priorities can be lost and as a result people's souls and evangelism are unfortunately sidelined. Under Michael Oh's leadership, Lausanne appears to remind evangelicals again of the importance of evangelism and the role of the local church.

It's important to note that Lausanne leaders who bring different perspectives are all squarely within the same family of Evangelicals (based on *the Lausanne Covenant*). All believe in the uniqueness of Christ, the authority of Scripture and the importance of evangelism and social responsibility. The primacy of evangelism was even held by John Stott himself; mentioned in both the *Lausanne Covenant* (sec 6: The Church and Evangelism) and the *Manila Manifesto* (sec 4: The Gospel and Social Responsibility).¹⁴

The Lausanne Movement has been able to successfully bring together two arms of the church 'Personal Evangelism and Social Responsibility' together in a beautiful display of unity among different perspectives and emphasis under a common mission. Whether using "World Evangelization" or "Global Mission", the Lausanne Movement has been able to maintain a common mission to include both the recovery of the holistic gospel while holding on to the primacy of evangelism.

II. Enduring Theological Statements and Documents

Another reason for the lasting unity achieved among Evangelicals in the Lausanne Movement is due to an undergirding foundation; a set of common doctrinal statements and enduring theological documents coming from multiple consultations.

Historical lessons from the ecumenical movement after 1910 without a solid grounding on biblical truth pointed toward fracture, chaos and the eventual death of missions. In the preparation stage for Cape Town 2010, International Director Lindsay Brown, warned of the failures of the World Mission Congress in Edinburgh 1910 were due to a lack of theological grounding. Brown writes about his conversation with John Stott concerning the 1910 World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh.

¹³ 'The leadership of Lausanne recognized that the role of the local church in world evangelization had been insufficiently emphasized in some of its documents and so determined to put it center stage.' Lindsay Brown, email to David Ro on Aug 25, 2015

¹⁴ While Stott believed that evangelism was primary, he felt that 'the need to make a choice would be rare.' Julia Cameron. "John Stott and the Lausanne Movement: A Formative Influence" in Impact in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK: Regnum, 2014), 67 in footnote 23.

“He [John Stott] told me [Lindsay Brown] he was ashamed that it was the leaders in the Anglican community who refused to come to Edinburgh 1910 if there was to be any discussion on key doctrines (such as justification by grace through faith, and the lostness of man). John Stott believed you could not discuss Mission without discussing theology or doctrine. As a result, of course, Edinburgh led to the formation of the World Council of Churches, with all the theological and missiological confusion which came from that.”¹⁵

Lausanne leaders are characterized as thoughtful practitioners, believing in the importance of both theological reflection as well as practical application. One of Lausanne’s key contributions to the global church is its enduring theological and missiological documents and statements starting with *The Lausanne Covenant* in 1974, *The Manila Manifesto* in 1989, *The Cape Town Commitment* in 2010 and *The Seoul Commitment* in 2013. Other enduring resources are the 65 Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOP) emerging from the global consultations involving widely recognized evangelical leaders.¹⁶ In the years following the 1974 Congress, the new chair Leighton Ford carried the Lausanne Movement forward by bringing together some of the brightest and best minds to the table, in a series of mini-consultations.

- The Homogenous Unit Principle (LOP 1) in Pasadena, CA 1977
- The Gospel and Culture (LOP 2) at Willowbank in Bermuda 1978
- The North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization (LOP 4) in 1978
- The International Simple Lifestyle Consultation in London 1980
- The Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) in Pattaya, Thailand in 1980 where 900 leaders gathered (LOP 5-24) with heavy weights David Howard, Gordon MacDonald, John Stott, Peter Wagner, Gottfried Osei-Menasah, John Howell and Ray Bakke.
- The Consultation on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility in Grand Rapids 1982
- The Consultation on the Work of the Holy Spirit and World Evan. Oslo 1985
- Young Leaders Gathering in Singapore 1987
- Radio and Mission (LOP 26) in 1989
- Modern, Postmodern and Christian (LOP 27) papers at the Uppsala Consultation on Modernity 1993
- Spiritual Conflict in Today’s Mission (LOP 29)
- The Global Leadership Forum in Pattaya, Thailand (LOP 30-61) in 2004¹⁷

The Lausanne Covenant

¹⁵ Lindsay Brown’s email to David Ro on July 22, 2015.

¹⁶ The Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) are on www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops.html.

¹⁷ Lars Dahle and Margunn Serigstad Dahle. “Resourcing the Global Church: A Guide to Key Lausanne Resources 1974-2013” in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. (Oxford, UK: Regnum, 2014), 114-115.

The *Lausanne Covenant* needs special mentioning since it is widely regarded as one of the most important theological and missiological documents of all time.¹⁸ The Covenant, in the words of Chris Wright, was ‘prophetic in the sense of speaking in a way which applied the Word of God to the realities of the hour.¹⁹ With a theological framework for evangelicals, The *Lausanne Covenant* provided the belief framework for hundreds of collaborative ventures over the rest of the century.’²⁰

Rev. Tian Ming from Beijing Shouwang Church and co-chair for the China Lausanne Committee in his book “City on a Hill” writes

“The *Lausanne Covenant* clearly expressed the Christian faith and missions as well as helped build a Christian platform for new partnerships. The *Lausanne Covenant* has been ever since our call for unity in world missions. Countless Christian organizations have benefited from it.”²¹

China and the Lausanne Covenant

The *Lausanne Covenant* served as an important principle guide for China to clarify who would be the main constituency (Three-self or house church) to invite to the Congress at Cape Town 2010. While the process was complicated, the committee kept with the Congress selection policy as each China nominee was required to affirm the *Lausanne Covenant*.²² This decision unfortunately did not sit well with some officials as most of the China nominated participants were blocked from attending.²³ While this was a huge disappointment for those outside China, the China Lausanne committee viewed this differently. For them, not being able to attend Cape Town 2010 was a loss but not an essential one. More important was the launching of a unity missions movement based on a solid theological foundation.

The Lausanne Movement had united the church in China under a theological framework under the *Lausanne Covenant* into a global community. At the Asian Church Leaders Forum in Seoul serving as a mini-Lausanne Congress for China in 2013, a Beijing pastor shared of a Mission China 2030 vision: to send 20,000 missionaries from China by the year 2030. At the closing ceremony, The *Seoul Commitment* was drafted and signed, “We commit ourselves to maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are determined to receive one another, to strive for unity exemplified in the Lausanne Movement and to live out a loving covenant community...”.ⁱ

III. The Spirit of Lausanne: Led by Christ-like Leaders

¹⁸ Tennent. p. 45.

¹⁹ Cameron. p. 66.

²⁰ Cameron. p. 65.

²¹ Tian Ming Jin. *City on a Hill: A Series of Messages from Pastor Tian Ming*, 423.

²² Tian Ming Jin. p. 430.

²³ In the end, only five participants (along with three volunteers) made it to Cape Town out of 230 China nominees.

Doug Birdsall, honorary chairman and former chair during Cape Town 2010, once asked Billy Graham what was the Spirit of Lausanne, he responded “fellowship, prayer, study, partnership, hope, a spirit of humility in serving the global church”. Interestingly, while Lausanne brings together some of the top Christian leaders to provide direction and insight for the global church, the mega-church pastors or charismatic celebrity preacher are usually not at the table. The Lausanne spirit attracts a certain kind of a more humble temperament. Bringing together majority world leaders into a global network seems to draw a more John Stott personality. Chris Wright uses another three words to describe what Lausanne leaders aspire, “Three words; humility, integrity and simplicity. H.I.S. Are we HIS people?”²⁴

This is especially important when dealing with conflict. Working in a global network with different perspectives and opinions requires this Christ-like humility and graciousness. Ramez Atallah, the General Director of the Bible Society of Egypt, writes about that Lausanne Continuation Committee in Mexico 1975 when there was a disagreement between Billy Graham and John Stott,

“I was especially impressed by the humility, graciousness and statesmanship of Billy Graham and John Stott who agreed to disagree with one another on the parameters of the mission of Lausanne, while maintaining their deep friendship. This was a wonderful example to me of how Christian leaders do not have to agree on every point to co-operate effectively together!”²⁵

Another Lausanne leader who exemplifies the Spirit of Lausanne is Lindsay Brown, former General Secretary of IFES. When asked to describe the characteristics of an Evangelical Statesman, Brown answers with a similar description of himself.

1. Someone who rejoices in advancing the Gospel, no matter who God is using.
2. The ethnic, denominational or organizational background is of little or secondary importance to them.
3. They focus on defending and articulating the Gospel more than their own mission agency's mission statement!
4. They are interested in advancing the Gospel, not titles, least of all their own.
5. Such a person is happy to be in the background, and leave the platform to others.
6. They rejoice in promoting the ministry of others, in fact, it is often hard to get them to speak about themselves, or their own ministry.

Brown continues, “We need more such people. The men I have known who best demonstrate these characteristics over many years have been Billy Graham, John

²⁴ Chris Wright. “Confronting Idols” plenary message at the Lausanne Congress III CapeTown 2010.

²⁵ Atallah, p. 75.

Stott, George Verwer, Samuel Escobar, and Ramez Atallah.”²⁶

Another Lausanne statesmanlike leader is Patrick Fung, the General Director of OMF International who is the first Chinese and non-Westerner in 150 years to lead an International missions agency of 1,400 missionaries. A highlight plenary message from Cape Town 2010 was Fung’s humble warning of Sino-centric nationalism coming from Asia.

“I rejoice in the growth of the Asian church and Asian missionary movement. However there is a restlessness and anxiety in me. There is this thinking among Christians, that the 21st century mission belongs to Asia and belongs to the Chinese. Sometimes our Western brothers and sisters boost our confidence by promoting this idea, which is unfortunate to our own harm. Many Asians maybe are repeating the same mistakes that our Western brothers and sisters committed in the past; that is to equate economic and political power with the spreading of the gospel. We continue to reinforce the notion that the spreading of the gospel is always from the powerful to the powerless, the haves to the have-nots. And there is a sense of Asian triumphalism, which makes me very nervous. I stand before you here today and confess. I pray daily for myself. I pray for my people. I pray for the Chinese church to keep us humble. May the Lord grant us mercy, and grant us grace. No one, no ethnic group, no people can finish the great commission and think we are the ones to quicken the Lord’s return. We have to work together. Andrew Wall says ‘there is no single center of Christianity. Mission is from everywhere to everywhere.’ And I believe arrogance and self pity will be the two major barriers to pursing world evangelization.”²⁷

IV: A Global Community: The Entrance of the Majority World

The Lausanne Movement’s greatest contribution will no doubt have been the entrance of the Majority World church into the global missions movement during an era of globalization and interconnectedness. Western leadership with Billy Graham, John Stott and Jack Dain (Lausanne 1974)²⁸, Leighton Ford (Manilla 1989), Doug Birdsall and Lindsay Brown (Cape Town 2010) must be commended for bringing the global church together in world evangelization. The Lausanne Movement

²⁶ Lindsay Brown email to David Ro on the character of an evangelical statesman on August 5th, 2015.

²⁷ Patrick Fung. ‘Equilibrium vs Diversity in Unity’ plenary message at The Third Lausanne Congress, Cape Town 2010.

²⁸ Mark Noll writes “In the partnership of Graham and Stott, the Lausanne meeting can be viewed as the climax of Anglo-American world evangelical leadership. Significantly, however, because both leaders poured great energy into encouraging, training, heeding and learning from evangelicals in the Majority World, they made the Lausanne Congress a symbolically important transition where evangelical leadership began to shift toward Africa, Asia, and Latin America”, p. 300.

provided indigenous churches from Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Russia, the Middle East and Asia an evangelical platform for connections, networks, partnerships, resources, strategies and best practices; preparing leader for roles beyond their own country and region.

Now Majority World leaders are rising in global international roles.²⁹ Greater things are on the horizon with a generation of a majority world-led church leaders coming from regions where the gospel message is accompanied with the scars of Christ. Andrew Walls in his book *Missions in the 21st Century* writes. "In the multi-centric Christian church there can be no automatic assumption of Western leadership; indeed, if suffering and endurance are the badges of authenticity, we can expect the most powerful Christian leadership to come from elsewhere."³⁰

Conclusion:

The Lausanne Movement unified the evangelical church over a common mission vision of world evangelization without losing the primacy of evangelism. This movement has produced theological documents such as the *Lausanne Covenant* that has stood the test of time, ushering in a new wave of hundreds of mission partnerships among like-minded evangelicals. Lausanne leaders have demonstrated a statesman quality often described as the 'Spirit of Lausanne' with a Christ-like character of humility, integrity and simplicity. The Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town brought fresh energy of global engagement. Now a global mission movement led by Majority World leaders from Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Asia and China are poised to shape the future of Christianity and the world.

The Spirit of God is at work in the Lausanne Movement. Phil Butler, former Senior Associate for Lausanne on Partnership, once stated that any major mission movement that he has observed has had some form of mission partnership at the core. When the church works together, not only does it makes better organizational sense by eliminating duplication, but more importantly is a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When God's people are unified, a release of power from the Holy Spirit brings about spiritual breakthrough. May God pour down His Spirit to bless the work of His hands in this coming generation as the global church unites through the Lausanne Movement to bring the good news to all creation.

²⁹ Examples include Daniel Bourdanne, an African as the General Secretary of IFES, Patrick Fung, an Asian as the General Director of OMF International, Valdir Steuernagel, a Latin American as the former Vice President for World Vision International and Bishop Ephraim Tendero, the Lausanne Senior Associate for Integrity and Anti-Corruption, a Philippino who just stepped into the role of the General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance.

³⁰ Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross. *Mission in the 21st Century*. (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008), 203.

ⁱ **The Seoul Commitment 2013**

We commit ourselves to loving the gospel of Christ. We are determined to humbly learn the vision of evangelization of the Lausanne Movement, to walk in the light of the gospel, to proclaim the gospel in Chinese society, and to advance the evangelical movement.

We commit ourselves to maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are determined to receive one another, to strive for unity exemplified in the Lausanne Movement and to live out a loving covenant community, so that we can bring praise to His glory as a spectacle to angels and people.

We commit ourselves to joining hands with the global church in world missions. We are determined to take the vision of world mission of the Lausanne Movement, to pray faithfully for world missions, and to take action in mission mobilization, mission education and mission sending.

We commit ourselves to raising up younger leaders in the next generation. We are determined to respond to the challenges and opportunities of our era in the spirit of the Lausanne Movement, pass the vision of evangelization onto the younger generation and proclaim the salvation message of the old rugged cross with creative methods.