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An Outline of the Development of Evangelical Social Teaching: The Study of the Lausanne Movement's Core Documents

Abstract: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (the Lausanne Movement), representing global Evangelicalism, is becoming an increasingly important place for the conceptualisation of Christian social teaching. An analysis of the movement's four international conferences, held in 1971, 1989, 2010, and 2024, shows a clear development in the scope and significance of systematic social thought within Evangelical theology. It is important because, until recently, Evangelicalism did not develop systematic social teaching, concentrating rather on evangelisation. In answering the question about the reasons for this development, it can be assumed that it is the result of the Christian mission encountering the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the places to which it is directed. Evangelical theologians are increasingly mindful that evangelisation also requires solid instruments to shape the social environment. One such instrument is systematic social teaching, which links the Christian mission with the quest for a more just and peaceful society that opposes poverty and exclusion.

The article aims to present the social teaching of the Evangelical Churches as formulated by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, with special emphasis on the four core documents of the movement: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement. Literary analysis is the primary method employed in this article.

Keywords: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, Lausanne Movement, Evangelicalism, ecumenism, social thought, Christian mission

Introduction

Until recently, Evangelical Christians did not develop systematic social teaching, concentrating on evangelisation. Rather, Evangelicalism was sceptical of such reflection on society, drawing on the tradition of distinguished competencies of the state and the Church. Something, however, has begun to change. The global expansion of the Evangelical Churches and a confrontation with local poverty and exclusion in many corners of the world have led many Evangelical theologians to foster a social doctrine grounded in Evangelical Christianity. This is the case of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, an organisation that, over more than 50 years, has brought together Evangelical communities worldwide. As a place of encounters and shared experiences among Christians, the Lausanne Movement has fostered an original teaching that reflects not only the zealotry and dynamism of Evangelicals but also the advancement of their social thought. Of course, Evangelicalism encompasses different strands, differing from each other, including stances towards systematic social doctrine intended to impact on the institutions of state in order to shape the desired social order (it is, indeed, one of the heaviest factors of division). Yet, the Lausanne Movement, with its global reach and insightful recognition of the processes at the junction of culture, society, economy, and mission, offers an essential contribution to global Christian social teaching.

When introducing the problem, it is worth noting that Evangelical social teaching, as developed by the Lausanne Movement, is primarily about the theological interpretation of contemporary processes and phenomena. Thus, Evangelical theologians consider what happens in society, the economy, science, and culture, shedding theological light on the most burning issues of our time (most recently, the AI revolution). Yet they do not refuse to develop an original theological theory of society that would demonstrate a desired social order based on Christian values.

The article aims to present the social teaching of the Evangelical Churches as formulated by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, with special emphasis on the four core documents of the movement: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement. Their literary analysis will be the primary method employed in this article.

1. The theological marks of Evangelicalism

Of course, it is superfluous to start with an extended presentation of Evangelical Christianity. There is already a large repository of sources that showcase what Evangelicalism is and its key marks. Given this article's purpose, it is worth noting two schemes of attributes that define Evangelicals. First, by David Bebbington, is a more overall and drawing attention to the inherent features when distinguishing four "special marks" of Evangelicalism: biblicism (the Bible as the ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the New Birth), activism (a dynamic and individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the core of Christianity).¹ Many other schemes point out at the same or at least similar features like this by Bebbington, albeit sometimes differently named.

The above list should be completed by a more descriptive definition, such as one by David Bosch, a prominent South-African Evangelical missiologist who formulated the concept of six strands of Evangelicalism. Even though the list is roughly thirty years old, it still reliably showcases a diversity of Evangelical families that goes far beyond stereotypes about Evangelicals. Bosch, therefore, distinguished: "[F]irstly, 'confessional evangelicals,' who emphasise their position in the Reformation tradition with its doctrines of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. Secondly, 'pietist evangelicals,' who have inherited the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivals and protests against Protestant scholasticism's 'dead orthodoxy.' The Holiness movement is a more recent manifestation of this. Thirdly, 'fundamentalists,' who develop their identity out of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy in North America in the first decades of this century. Fourthly, the Pentecostals, who are the fastest-growing Christian group in the world. Fifthly, 'conservative Evangelicals' or 'neo-Evangelicals,' a loose grouping which has developed, particularly in the USA, since World War II. It has subsequently grown through large-scale missionary efforts in many other countries, particularly in the Two-Thirds World. Neo-Evangelicals comprise groups as wide-ranging as Fuller Theological Seminary, the Billy Graham Organisation, the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (LCWE), and the American Southern

¹ D. BEBBINGTON: *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London 1989, pp. 2–17.

Baptist Convention. Sixthly, ‘ecumenical evangelicals,’ who either have evangelical principles and remain within churches affiliated to the conciliar movement or, if they are not in those churches, are open to work with the World Council of Churches. An extension of this would be ‘radical evangelicals,’ who are particularly concerned with issues of social justice.”² This extended excerpt provides an encyclopaedic description of Evangelicalism worldwide, demonstrating a profound knowledge of the then trends within the global Evangelical family.

2. An outline of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation

Among many strands, Bosch mentioned the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation. Nowadays, one of the most significant organisations gathering Evangelical Christians traces its history back to two events within global Evangelicalism, both in 1966: the missiological congress held in Wheaton College and the conference on worldwide Evangelicalism organised in Berlin, Germany, by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The first gathering emphasised the necessity of an Evangelical consensus grounded in faith in God’s words in the Bible and in Jesus Christ’s second coming. The conference in Berlin, while being critical of a merely humanistic interpretation of the Holy Scripture, stressed the ways of using social science outcomes and technological progress.³ However, both meetings revealed an increasing institutional rapprochement and a theological maturity of Evangelical Christians, enabling them to constitute a global community and develop a complex vision of the Christian mission worldwide. Both preceded the International Congress on World Evangelisation, organised in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 by the aforementioned Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Billy Graham himself was a leading figure of this event, and his theological thought strongly influenced the congress’s main topics. The Protestant Pope, as Graham was sometimes called,

² D. J. BOSCH: “Ecumenicals and Evangelicals: A Growing Relationship.” *The Ecumenical Review* 40/3–4 (1988), p. 458.

³ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement, 1974–2011,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35/2 (2011), pp. 81–84.

had been concerned for decades about the moral condition of Western societies and culture, insisting that they were spiritually “empty”; he also believed in the approaching Armageddon and had repeatedly insisted that only the Bible could answer the people’s ultimate questions. He also argued that the missionary commandment for the Churches has entailed a quest for Evangelical unity, which, however, should be more spiritually and doctrinally than institutionally regarded.⁴

Although Graham’s theological thought shaped both the congress itself and the follow-up movement, it did not address certain divisions within global Evangelicalism. They can have been denoted (obviously, in general) as running among Evangelicals from the USA and other world regions, mainly Europe and South America. It is worth noting, from the perspective of this article, that one of the most crucial factors of division was social involvement. Whereas Evangelicals from North America were reluctant to intervene in the area traditionally perceived as an autonomous field of the state, those from the UK or Latin America accentuated systematic social teaching leading to solving social problems as an integral part of the Christian mission.⁵

Moreover, since the very beginning, the Lausanne Movement has recognised the growing significance of the ecumenical movement and the need for a common response from the Evangelical Churches to the challenges of a changing world. The organisation helped Evangelical Christians to become mindful of their cultural, political, and spiritual diversity within a profound cultural transformation. Among factors of this transformation the founder of the movement listed such phenomena as a growing impact of social sciences on a theological thought, a global political situation marked by the Cold War, a global Christianity’s shift to the global South, Christian fundamentalism, especially in the USA, countercultural Revolution in the Western countries as well as citizen’s rights movement and its influence on American Evangelicalism.⁶

Even though the Lausanne Movement was somewhat sceptical as to the ecumenical vision of the World Council of Churches, it has sometimes expressed eagerness to cooperate with the WCC as well as with other ecumenical bodies. All in all, the Evangelical Christians sought forms of a unity

⁴ W. H. FULLER: “From the Evangelical Alliance to the World Evangelical Fellowship: 150 Years of Unity with a Mission.” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 20/4 (1996), p. 160.

⁵ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement...,” p. 81.

⁶ M. CLAVSON: “Misión Integral and Progressive Evangelicalism: The Latin American Influence on the North American Emerging Church.” *Religion* 3 (2012), p. 97.

of Evangelical family, especially in the face of difficulties raised by contemporary world and because of barely acceptable mainstream of ecumenism.⁷ John Stott, one of the most prominent leaders of the Lausanne Movement and an outstanding theologian defined this peculiarity of the Lausanne Movement “functionally,” as a place of raising new missiological and ecumenical ideas at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was more important as this place was emerging against the backdrop of prevailing religious pluralism. In other words, the Lausanne Movement is faithful to the Christocentric core of Christianity.

The gathering in Lausanne, which brought together more than 2,700 delegates from 150 countries, is deemed a symbolic starting point for the Lausanne Movement. The congress produced the Lausanne Covenant, a final document, groundbreaking in the history of global Evangelicalism. Moreover, it entailed a call for establishing a continuation committee that one year later, during the meeting in Mexico City, brought to life the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation.⁸ Leighton Ford, the first leader of this organisation, became a charismatic missionary who has not hesitated to resist political authorities in world’s countries defending Christian rights to confess their faith.

In the years that followed, the institution strengthened the Committee, even though numerous consultations (on topics such as the homogeneous unit principle, the Gospel and culture, Evangelism, and social responsibility) revealed internal disagreements. Besides these consultations, the movement set up several working groups (on intercession, theology, strategy communication, leadership development, resource mobilisation and technology, a joint business, government, education, media, and medical working group) that ensured a continuity of functioning. In addition, regional teams and working groups have been established in order to coordinate the movement’s efforts at the local level.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Lausanne Movement was undergoing changes caused by different factors, both internal and external, such as Pentecostalism, growing divergences among leaders from the USA on the one hand and Latin America on the other, implementation of Evangelisation strategies (e.g. window 10/40)⁹ and some institutional and financial problems.

⁷ S. CUEVA: *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*. Langham 2015, p. 39.

⁸ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement...,” p. 83.

⁹ E. GRISWOLD: *Dziesiąty równoleżnik. Doniesienia z pogranicza chrześcijaństwa i islamu*. Warszawa 2013, p. 137.

Nowadays, the Lausanne Movement showcases its truly global reach. Its structure consists of the board of directors who constitute a central executive body, regional directors, catalysts (leaders responsible for specific targets, such as media engagement, creation care, cities, diasporas, tent-making, Jewish Evangelism, least reached people, to mention but a few), advisory leaders (among them is Leighton Ford, a Honorary Lifetime Executive Chair) and members of the three working groups (for theology, intercessory, and communication).¹⁰ The structure of the governing body is, therefore, corporation-like.

But the movement's central moments are marked by the global congresses. The Lausanne gathering in 1974 was the first. The next were in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010 and Incheon, South Korea, in 2024. In addition, four global thematic conferences took place: the Forum for Global Evangelisation in Pattaya, Thailand, in 2004; the Global Leadership Forum in Bangalore, India, in 2013; the Younger Leaders Gathering in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2019; and the Global Workplace Forum in Manila, Philippines, in 2019. All these events impressed by their reach, number of participants, and theological maturity, and all fostered the movement, producing the documents that give insight into Evangelicalism and its theological interpretation of reality.

3. The Lausanne Covenant: a declaration of systematic social teaching

As already mentioned, Evangelical Christians have differed on systematic social teaching, and the dividing line has run roughly between Evangelicals from the USA on the one hand and from Europe and Latin America on the other. Yet from the very beginning, the Lausanne conference accentuated that Christian mission is not only about proclaiming the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ (so-called unreached people) but also about Christian social involvement and responsible teaching in society. The four documents, being the fruits of the global conferences: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement, clearly showcase it.

¹⁰ *The Lausanne Movement*, <https://lausanne.org/leader> [accessed 5.10.2025].

The Lausanne Covenant manifested such an integral approach and, at the same time, a self-criticism when stating: "Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless, we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty."¹¹

The above excerpt from the Lausanne Covenant introduces an Evangelical concept of social thought. It is based on the interpretation of the four theological fields: teaching about God, human being, salvation, and God's Kingdom that, when brought together, determine its inherent causes. So, first, Christian social involvement is based on a belief that the Bible shows God as wanting people who are happy and seeking justice, liberty, and reconciliation.¹²

Therefore, Christians must participate in God's plan for the world. Second, it draws on a truth about unconditional human dignity stemming from the teaching about man and woman created in God's image and likeness, which does not allow for any reduction of the human being, whether economic, social, or cultural. Third, by locating salvation at the very centre of Christian theology, the Lausanne theologians emphasise that it must be confined to neither its secular nor its eschatological dimensions. They perceive salvation as a consequence of God's intention for man and woman, a liberation from evil, both individually and socially, eschatologically, and worldly. Salvation is, therefore, transformative.

The teaching on salvation entails the fourth motive, that is, God's Kingdom. Opposing any reduction of this Kingdom to merely a social and political idea (which is sometimes imputed to some liberal theological circles, including the World Council of Churches), the Lausanne theologians understand it as a spiritual space in which salvation is carried out and which is concomitantly a fruit of salvation. Christians become, in a sense, citizens of this Kingdom, subjected to its principles and striving for its broadening. Hence, the God's Kingdom (somewhat like in nineteenth-century liberal

¹¹ J. R. W. SCOTT (ed.): *The Lausanne Covenant. Complete Text with Study Guide*. Peabody 2012, p. 27.

¹² Ibidem, p. 30.

theology) contains a normative potential to external actions, including mission and social involvement.¹³

It is easy to guess that the Lausanne Covenant goes the middle way between Evangelical fundamentals who were reluctant to develop a theology of transformative social and political involvement and theological liberals who reduced Christian liberation and salvation to worldly dimensions. Consequently, the Covenant plays a significant role in a conceptualisation of Evangelical social thought.

4. The Manila Manifesto: development of social teaching

The next global gathering of the movement, held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, reflected its growth in numbers: more than 4,000 delegates from 170 countries participated. The conference happened on the threshold of a collapse of the communist bloc (e.g. Christians from many republics of the Soviet Union came to Manila) and a prevailing feeling of an oncoming global change. In addition, some internal divisions and original approaches to Church mission transformed the movement from inside. In this regard, Samuel Escobar distinguished the three principal missiological trends within the movement: the first, “a *postimperial missiology* coming from both continental Europe and Britain that interrogates both past and present mission practice in light of the demands of God’s reign for liberation and ecumenism. The second, *managerial missiology*, associated with a false urgency, an uncritical reliance on technology, and the instrumental use both of the social sciences and of spiritual practices. The third, that is a *critical missiology*, emerging in a variety of forms from Two-Thirds World theologians and church leaders who are particularly concerned with the poor and marginalised as agents of God’s mission rather than as merely recipients of evangelistic outreach” (emphasis in the original). It is worth noting that the term “Two-Third World” used in Evangelistic missiology was said to replace a stigmatising “Third World.”¹⁴

¹³ P. KOPIEC: *Spółeczeństwo w teologicznej refleksji organizacji ekumenicznych. Panorama ujęć*. Lublin 2019, p. 214.

¹⁴ L. E. KEYSES, L. D. PATE: “Two-Thirds World Mission: The Next 100 Years.” *Missiology: An International Review* 21/2 (1993), pp. 187–206.

Nonetheless, Manila was in line with the gathering in Lausanne. The theologians in the Philippines explicitly affirmed “continuing commitment to the Lausanne Covenant as the basis of our cooperation in the Lausanne Movement (the first affirmation).”¹⁵ This declaration of continuity referred to the whole of theological teaching, including social commitment. Of the twenty-one affirmations and their elucidations (of which the manifesto comprised), the two prove it emphatically. Primarily, it is the ninth affirmation in which the Lausanne theologians “affirm that the proclamation of God’s kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness.”¹⁶ Secondly, it is the fourth point of the elucidation, under the telling title “The Gospel and social responsibility,” which, in a relatively short way, confirmed a theological mandate for Christian social involvement. Since, in light of the article’s purpose, this text is crucial, it is worthwhile to cite it *in extenso*: “The proclamation of God’s Kingdom necessarily demands the prophetic denunciation of all that is incompatible with it. Among the evils we deplore are destructive violence, including institutionalised violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, the drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights. In our concern for the poor, we are distressed by the burden of debt in the two-thirds world. We are also outraged by the inhuman conditions in which millions live, who bear God’s image as we do. Our continuing commitment to social action is not a confusion of the Kingdom of God with a Christianized society. It is, rather, a recognition that the biblical Gospel has inescapable social implications. True mission should always be incarnational. It necessitates entering humbly into other people’s worlds, identifying with their social reality, their sorrow and suffering, and their struggles for justice against oppressive powers. This cannot be done without personal sacrifices.”¹⁷

The authors of the manifesto successfully present the crucial tenets of an Evangelical approach to social commitment in this short excerpt. In addition, between the lines, they referred to two theological issues, touching on the primordial fundamentals of Protestant theology. It is, first,

¹⁵ *The Manila Manifesto*. In: *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization, 1: Basic Statements 1974–1991*. Eds. STEPHEN B. BEVANS and JAMES A. SCHERER. Maryknoll 1992, p. 293.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

about the value of good deeds and their connection to God's grace. Not compromising the traditional Protestant teaching on the primacy of grace over every human deed, the Lausanne theologians highlighted their interdependence and state that Evangelisation and diakonia must go hand in hand. Second, it is about the Kingdom of God and how it is understood in the Church's teaching. The manifesto, when emphatically rejecting any reduction of God's Kingdom to a merely socio-political idea,¹⁸ accentuated that its proclamation entails social involvement, not only through a daily charity, but also through a promotion of social and political models inspired by a Christian message. It also declared openness to cooperating with secular institutions in striving for human rights and a more just social order, even though more conservative Evangelical Christians have been sceptical of such cooperation. Finally, it included a clear, although diffident mention about ecological consciousness in Evangelical theology, missing in the previous document.¹⁹

5. The Cape Town Commitment: deepening of Evangelical social thought

The Cape Town Commitment, as the fruit of the global conference in the South African city, demonstrated further advancement, greater maturity, and greater complexity in Evangelical social thought. It also reflected an awareness of global heterogeneity and directly emphasised that social involvement must not consist merely in daily charity but should include a steady quest for values such as social justice and solidarity.

The Preamble introduces the document by pointing out that human life happens in a weave of what is changeable and unchangeable. The former refers to social and cultural dimensions; the latter concerns the truths of faith. So, Christians live in a world where there is a permanent clash of rapid global changes on the one hand and the human condition on the other.

¹⁸ D. A. LUIDENS, ROGER NEMETH: "Public and Private Protestantism Reconsidered. Introducing the Loyalists." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26/4 (1987), pp. 450 (450–464).

¹⁹ J. STOTT, C. J. H. WRIGHT: *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. London 2015, p. 36.

The Commitment examined many issues that had hitherto been either not considered or merely touched on in the teaching of the Lausanne Movement. This is, first, a care for an integrity of creation that the Lausanne theologians deemed as integral part of a Christian mission,²⁰ and distinguished the three ways of action: Christian self-confession of guilt for destroying natural environment and for consumerism, a commitment for ecological responsibility and a support of those who work for preservation of nature, including taking political decisions. Second, this is an affirmation of ethic, cultural and racial diversity, which is deemed God's gift²¹ but also a task for Christians who must oppose any racism, ethnocentrism, and relationship of dominance or exploitation of one over another. However, the Lausanne theologians rejected cultural relativism that was at times discerned in some ecumenical organisations, arguing that cultures are not morally neutral: they can be more or less close to the Gospel and more or less sinful. Third, it is an involvement in countering social exclusion, regarding both individuals and whole groups and nations that must encompass not only a sphere of daily diakonia but also a systematic reflection on Christian social order entailing systemic political changes.²² Thus in this point the Lausanne theologians declared political involvement that nevertheless must have been accompanied by the two theological "conditions": that a just and peaceful social order needs standing individual conversion, moral and spiritual; and that social involvement must reject any compromise with a sin and sinful world.²³

A memorable illustration of how the Lausanne theologians have perceived contemporary societies and the need for social involvement is their rejection of four idolatries that hinder the Christian socio-economic order: idolatry of sexuality, power, success, and greed. In the first case, they referred to a biblical teaching on human sexuality and stated that it is in accordance with human vocation and dignity only in marriage. They also drew attention to a profound contemporary crisis of family and identity reflected in many evils, such as involuntary loneliness, pornography, prostitution, adultery, and promiscuity, to mention but a few. The idolatry of power may take place in all relationships of dominance and submission

²⁰ "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action. The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town, 16–25 October 2010," *KAIROS – Evangelical Journal of Theology* 5/1 (2011), pp. 166 (165–224).

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

or differences among genders, races, and social status. Interestingly, the commitment paid particular attention to marital relationships: “Any form of abuse of one’s wife – verbal, emotional or physical – is incompatible with the love of Christ, in every culture.”²⁴ The idolatry of success is regarded as an inherent trait of contemporary dominant culture, subduing values such as confidence and honesty. Finally, the idolatry of greed refers to a peculiar trend within global Evangelicalism, that is, the so-called Prosperity Gospel, “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through financial or material gifts.”²⁵ The issue of Prosperity Gospel would need a more thorough examination; nevertheless, the Lausanne theologians joined other Evangelical theological circles that categorically oppose this teaching as being at odds with a commitment to the Bible as God’s authoritative word.

6. Today’s Lausanne perspective on Christian social commitment

Merely fourteen years after the Cape Town gathering, the Lausanne theologians met in Incheon, South Korea. Yet, when reading the final document from this conference, one gets the impression that the world has changed a lot. The Seoul Statement is somewhat different from previous declarations, unveiling both self-criticism by Evangelical theologians and their still-growing theological maturity, combined with intercultural experience. In terms of social commitment, the document appears less declaratory and conceptual than the texts from Lausanne, Manila, and Cape Town, and focuses more on specific issues.

Nonetheless, it is not a rupture. The statement declares a standing continuity of the Lausanne tradition. In other words, Seoul stands in line with Lausanne, Manila, and Cape Town, and does not reject or invalidate any paragraph of the previous core documents. The theologians state it clearly in the document’s Preamble: “For fifty years, the Lausanne Movement has been guided by the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Manila

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 216

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 217.

Manifesto (1989), and the Cape Town Commitment (2010). The Seoul Statement of the Fourth Lausanne Congress fully affirms those earlier Congress documents and builds on their firm foundation by renewing our commitment to the centrality of the Gospel and to the faithful reading of Scripture.”²⁶

However, as already mentioned, when aligned with the previous Lausanne documents, the statement somehow settles on successes and failures in the realisation of Christian mission. The words of self-criticism appear surprisingly often, setting the tone for the entire document. Actually, at the beginning of the Preamble, the Lausanne theologians admit that: “The Church has often failed to nurture new believers to obey Christ’s call to radical discipleship at home, at school, in the Church, in our neighbourhoods, and in the marketplace. It has also struggled to equip its leaders to respond to trending social values and to distortions of the Gospel, which have threatened to erode the sincere faith of Christians and to destroy the unity and fellowship of the Church of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, we are alarmed by the rise of false teachings and pseudo-Christian lifestyles, leading numerous believers away from the essential values of the Gospel.”²⁷

The statement draws special attention to issues such as the cultural and geographical contextualisation of Christian mission and the need to develop ecclesiology. The document overtly states a negligence in this field: “We recognise that the doctrine of the church has received little attention during these decades of extraordinary Christian expansion in the world, and there is little consensus about what the church is, its importance in the life of the Christian, and its relevance to our world.”²⁸

An observation that the statement contains fewer theoretical concepts than previous documents, refers also to the theory of social teaching. It considers social commitment indirectly, in the backdrop of a theological lecture, self-criticism, or the discussion of new phenomena and trends shaping the life of the Church. For example, point 15, when describing the significance of faith for Christian life, states that “by faith, we steward and care for God’s creation and one another; work for his justice in our societies; and seek to live peaceable lives of faithful service.”²⁹

²⁶ *The Seoul Statement*, <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-seoul-statement#vii-technology-the-accelerating-innovation-we-discern-and-steward> [accessed 14.10.2025].

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem, para. 15.

Instead of social involvement theory, the document focuses on specific trends that, according to widespread belief, determine the contemporary world. It is about sexual identity, technological progress, including AI and wars. In the first case, the statement affirms the biblical teaching on human sexuality and points out the detrimental consequences of sexual freedom and gender fluidity. It also extensively (compared to the previous core documents) dealt with same-sex relationships, holding that sexual intercourses between persons of the same sex seriously distort God's design, and, nevertheless, that homosexual persons should find their place and support in the Church. Interestingly, the Evangelicals from the Lausanne Movement are remarkably close to the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in this field.

Compared to the previous core documents, the statement focuses more on the criticism of ideologies and values that lead to unjust violence and oppression, and it describes the current political situation, indicating where wars, political conflicts, persecutions, and violations of human rights occur. In this regard, the statement directly refers to nationalism, ethnonationalism, racism, and casteism, to mention but a few.

Finally, the Lausanne theologians address the unprecedented technological progress the world faces, discerning the growing danger of technological domination over humans (particularly stemming from areas such as genetic engineering, cloning, biotechnology, mind-uploading, digital media, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence). The theologians remind us that technological progress is good in itself, reflecting God-given human creativity. Yet, because the sin is in the middle of reality, technology can be sinful as well, distorting human relationships and self-understanding, becoming idolatrous by worshipping produced things (consumerism), and disembedding people, especially the young, from their social environments. When examining peculiar threats posed by technological advancement, the statement carefully considers the questions Christians must ask. This part of the document demonstrates the Lausanne theologians' profound knowledge of the aftermaths (both successes and failures) of the clash between the Church's vocation and technological potential.³⁰

Overall, the Lausanne Movement often and with expertise addresses technological progress, exploring topics such as online Christian communities (online parishes), discipleship in the context of an AI revolution, and the ethics of AI, to mention a few.

³⁰ Ibidem, para. 95.

Conclusions

The Lausanne Movement, representing global Evangelicalism, is becoming an increasingly important place for the conceptualisation of Christian social teaching. An analysis of the movement's four global conferences, held in 1971, 1989, 2010, and 2024, a clear development can be seen in the scope and significance of systematic social thought in the context of Evangelical theology. In answering the question about the reasons for this development, it can be assumed that it is the result of the Christian mission encountering the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the places to which it is directed. Evangelical theologians are increasingly mindful that evangelisation also requires solid instruments to shape the social environment to which it is directed. One such instrument is systematic social teaching, which links the Christian mission with the quest for a more just and peaceful society that opposes poverty and exclusion. In this way, the Lausanne Movement also brings Evangelicalism it represents closer to the ecumenical movement.

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