

Diagnosing the Diagnosis Responding to the “gaps” in the “great commission”



Tēnā koutou katoa — that is a formal greeting in te reo Māori, which literally means I see you; I acknowledge you all. I am Jay Mātenga, Executive Director of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission. I'm a contextual theologian of indigenous Māori heritage.

In Te Moananui a Kiwa, the great wet continent that Europeans have called the Pacific Ocean, we embrace our moananui, our big waters, as the means by which our islands and island nations connect to one another. Rather than seeing the ocean as a barrier that keeps us apart, it is the water that brings us together. I bring this innate sense of connectivity to our discussion today about the Lausanne 4 strategy.

This assumption of connection, deep in my indigenous cosmivision, informs my response if asked what I think about misión integral, integral mission. Recently I have become accustomed to saying that, for the Indigenous, “integral” is redundant. The adjective is only necessary because Industrials have DISintegrated God's purposes in the world.

It is well past time for us to cease assuming that we need to paint an Indigenous perspective of God's people participating with God's purposes in the world upon the canvas of Industrial assumptions.

I use Industrial and Indigenous with upper-case-I's in a particular way that I don't have time to develop here. If it helps, just imagine upper-case Industrial is Western and upper-case Indigenous is Majority World — but my categorising is more about values than geography or economics. A talk for another time.

Participants here may recognise my desire to refrain from painting an Indigenous perspective on the Industrial canvas as a decolonial response, which I believe the Majority World church and missions practitioners need to lean into. For too long our conversations around what, quote, God's mission, unquote, means are constrained by the assumptions of Eurocentric theologies, where the Eurocentric theological consensus dictates the terms that frame our conversations. Even the word “missio” limits our imaginations about what the Bible reveals concerning God's purposes for the cosmos and how Jesus calls us to participate in it.

These Eurocentric theological assumptions are no more evident for Evangelicals than those motivating the institutional aspects of the Lausanne Movement.

Every issue collated for this Lausanne congress is laudable. They are tremendously helpful to focus conversation at a conceptual level. But, from my cosmivision that sees connections, when I consider what gaps are missing from the Lausanne 4 strategy, I strongly believe that the gap in the gaps is the gap.

For Lausanne 4, each identified gap is devoid of context. They are presented as depersonalised universal components. A pathology paradigm is evident here. The issues are problematised and by and large treated like a disease, for which we are being tasked with developing universal vaccines.

Sure, we will be discussing them regionally as well and attempting some form of hypothetical contextualisation, but even so, the way these issues are identified is constraining what discussion we can have. They are all good, valid, well defined, each and every one, but by separating them out we are only half way to understanding challenges that a given human context may face. There is a great deal of intersectionality overlapping the issues selected, let alone overlaps with myriad other issues that are not addressed.

A pathological perspective is just one side of a coin. We need to consider systems as a whole, within contexts. The flip side, the more Indigenous approach, is a wellbeing perspective. Our faith is a living faith. An Indigenous angle would ask how can we promote life and nurture flourishing? Like both sides of a coin, it's not an either/or but a both/and. The Industrial pathological and the Indigenous wellbeing perspectives held together in harmonic tensions of difference, tuned by the Holy Spirit.

I think our shared concern in this group of like-minded believers is to hold together the integrated whole and work from below, from the grass-roots, to bring about transformative change within embodied contexts, not to prescribe solutions and impose them from above. Here I am conscious of redescribing [INFEMIT's call for missional humility and integral mission](#). Missions from below, you might say.

Unfortunately, missional terminology restricts the dialogue to the nomenclature of the Industrial missions complex. To paint on that long-established canvas. I concede that this is probably necessary for L4, the context in question. After all, it's their assembly. We're playing on their home turf so to speak. But for those of us on the prophetic margins of Evangelicalism, if I may be so bold, we need to develop new terminology that emancipates a biblically faithful, re-enchanted, social imaginary about God's purposes in the world.

Articulating it in English is still somewhat restrictive, but for my part, I now prefer to speak of co-creating New Creation. But, again, another conversation for another day.

Back to L4. The stated outcome of providing "transferrable tools" through a collaborative initiative may be of some help, but it reveals too much confidence in abstracted and universalised solutions, based on hypothetical transcultural assumptions that are, illusory — like globalising Industrial-driven caricatures. Those of us who have had our cultures suppressed by colonial forces have felt the effects of such imposed standardised approaches.

In closing, one of my other concerns, especially for this conversation, is that the framing of GC-gaps and the spreading of participants over 25 issues may have the unintended

consequence of diluting prophetic responses to underlying cultural assumptions. Or, maybe, that's a deliberate intention, I can't say. It may be a feature not a flaw.

[My hope for Lausanne 4](#) is that robust discussion will be permitted to allow the Holy Spirit to draw out the gifts of God from BOTH the Industrial and the Indigenous, on site and online. That together we will co-create a beautiful, counterpointed harmony that does not marginalise the particular in favour of the universal.

That L4 will produce a result that does not commodify and instrumentalise the gospel for the goal of a prescriptive dogma of universal moral good, but instead honours the gospel, retaining its highly relational and contextual dynamic. As implied in the L4 theme, "to declare and display", where the *demonstration* works together with the *proclamation*. And, if there is to be any prioritisation at all, it will be focused on the incarnational indigenous *propagation* of the narrative of God in Christ among all peoples. Demonstration, proclamation, for the propagation of the gospel.

I pray that we will hold respect for one another in our discussions, and leave the conversation space with a renewed respect for local contexts, all the people who dwell there, and the ecologies they are mandated to care for. After all, even those increasingly inhabiting digital realities live enfleshed in real-world places that need to be nurtured.

And I pray that we will maintain a high confidence in the sovereignty of the Creator to fulfil the purposes of God through the people of God so that, together with God and one another, we might be effective co-creators of New Creation everywhere, for the glory of God. A New Creation that Jesus came to establish and one he is returning to complete. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Amen.