

A Mountaintop Experience
Report on the Academics in the Alps 2023 Conference
August 28-31, 2023
Sponsored by The Leadership Anvil and Komensky Institute of Prague

“The LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes!” (Ps. 118:23). God answered all of our prayers and more for **The Leadership Anvil’s Academics in the Alps 2023 Conference**. It was a truly blessed time as **80 academics from 20 countries** gathered for four days in the majestic Swiss Alps. Because of your prayers and God’s faithfulness, we enjoyed one of the most delightful, spiritually refreshing, Christ-focused weeks of our lives.



GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP - From the very first session, our hearts were drawn into praise for our great God. The worship music was powerfully led by Dr. Maria Dutu and Drs. Emanuel and Alina Balaceanu (**right**)—all from Emanuel University in Romania. Tears of joy and adoration were shed, hands were lifted up, hearts were refreshed as God came and moved in our midst. Frankly, these young Romanians led the worship better than any conference I’ve ever been to. They did an amazing job!

BUILDING NEW FRIENDSHIPS - It’s always refreshing to meet brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing the same challenges and fighting the same battles in academia. One of our most significant hopes for the conference was for



attendees to build solid relationships and to begin supporting one another. Many who attended, came by faith, not knowing anyone else in attendance, but by the time our conference ended, close and loving friendships had been forged.

In our four days together, many new relationships were established. Future collaboration and further networking efforts were initiated. Daniel, the director of Credo House, hosts a variety of groups and he told me that he immediately noticed an unusual joy, laughter, and camaraderie among our group. He was impressed by the warm interaction among our conferees. The group was truly diverse, representing many different denominations, almost 20 nations, a wide-spectrum of academic disciplines, and a whole host of personality types (including of course, many bookish introverts and shy scholars). But we connected! First, we connected as members of the Body of Christ and secondly, as Christian scholars who want to bring glory to God in higher education.

FEASTING ON THE WORD - Each morning, Dr. Dirk Jongkind (right), from Tyndale House at Cambridge, one of the premier Bible scholars in the world, led us through an in-depth study of Proverbs 1-2. He opened for us new insights into how God's wisdom can and should shape our work as scholars. It was a rich feast on the Word. Every speaker anchored their insights in the inerrant Word of God, whether they were discussing classroom influence, secularism, freedom of religion, the spiritual darkness of secular universities, or the dangers of the leftist woke social justice theology. It was a powerful and enlightening time in the Word.

REFRESHMENT AND ENCOURAGEMENT –

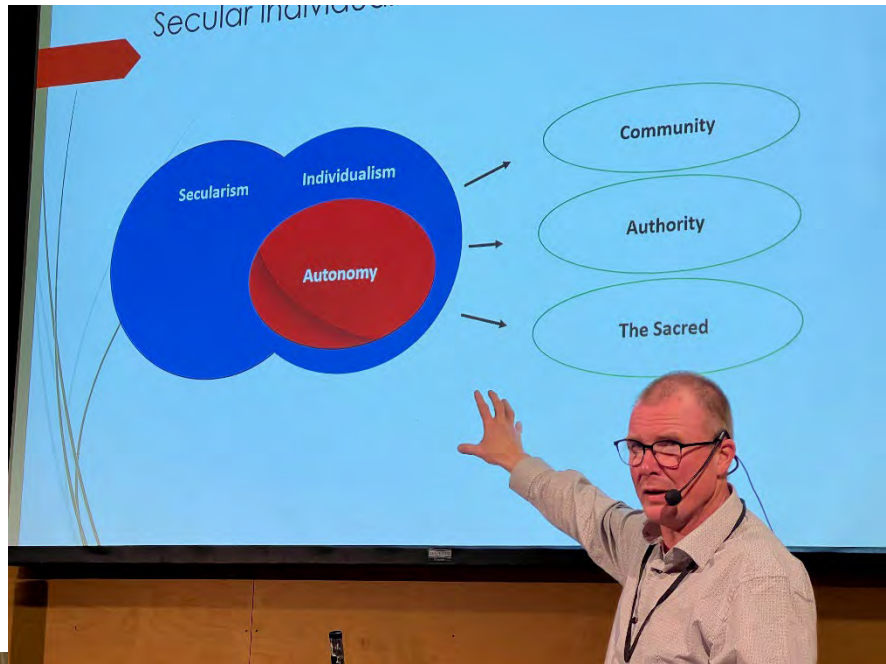
Teri's vision for the conference from the beginning was that the conference would "refresh the hearts of the saints," as Paul says in Philemon 7. God truly met us there. It was a wonderful thing to see. Many participants arrived weary with the battle, discouraged by isolation, and frustrated by their seeming lack of fruit. Added to that, many were travel weary. Our Ukrainian participants traveled four long difficult days to get to Wilderswil, Switzerland, where we were meeting. One man had to get special permission to leave Ukraine because of the war. Dennis hadn't seen normal life outside of his war-torn country since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, 2022. Dnipro, his city, was bombed the night before his family left. Another brother, traveled all the way by bus from Belarus—it took more than two days. Their determination and commitment to be at the conference was both humbling and encouraging. This is what hunger to gather with other Christian colleagues looks like! Our Belarussian brother said, **"The week of the conference was the best week**



of my entire life.” He meant those words, as did others who expressed gratitude and appreciation for the time together and all the nurturing and ministry they received. Only God could do this!

NEW INSIGHTS - Academics by nature are (or should be) learners. They are always looking for new insights. The conference offered an abundance of invaluable principles, insights, and wisdom both through the plenary sessions and the workshops. Here are some of the topics that were addressed:

- How to respond to secular individualism, and effective practices for defending and debating Christian principles in the public arena, Dr. Per Ewert (Sweden) **(right)**
- Responding to leftist politics and the threats to freedom, especially religious freedom and academic freedom, Dr. Ralf Bergmann (Germany)
- Teri spoke on lessons we learn from Daniel who served essentially as a university chancellor
- Accessing the power of the Holy Spirit in making disciples, and engaging with the worldviews of students, Dr. Chuck White (USA)
- Kingdom-shaped holistic apologetics, Dr. Seidel Boanerges (England)
- Not just teaching facts, but creatively teaching students to think critically, Dr. Dana Hanesova (Slovakia) **(right)**
- How to respond to the spiritual war and the cultural war all around us, Dr. Emanuel Tundrea (Romania)
- Ministering to graduate students, Anja Lijcklama a Nijeholt (Netherlands/England)
- Nurturing an authentic Trinitarian spirituality, Dr. Stephen Dray, England
- Discipling our children and grandchildren, Mrs. Carol White (USA)
- Lessons for Christian academics from the life of William Carey, Dr. Phil Roberts (USA)
- Effective ways to bring Christian principles into politics, Mrs. Birgitt Bergmann (Germany)
- I spoke on why academic work is significant and why it is a holy calling; why freedom is in danger and how we can respond



When the participants met in groups with others in their specific discipline, they shared best practices and current challenges and prayed with and for one another.

NETWORKING AS WE HIKED IN THE ALPS - It's true that many of us academics tend to be more introverted and are less likely to spontaneously connect with others. So it was a beautiful thing to behold the natural and easy way connections were made as we hiked together in the Alps. We were in awe of God's majestic



creation and many said the splendor of the mountains brought them into an attitude of worship. Rod Nolte, one of our participants who is an experienced hiker, ably planned our outings. We took a whole afternoon in the middle of the week to pile onto a bus and go to nearby Lauterbrunnen, where we climbed onto a massive gondola (like a giant ski lift) which held nearly 100 people, and ascended into the heights. We hiked to scenic Murren. As a Type-A content-oriented person, I was amazed to see how that afternoon shifted the atmosphere of the conference and connected people. Much more was accomplished in relationship building in the mountains than ever would have been



accomplished in a seminar room. It was good to simply relax and have fun together. There were lots of hiking groups before and after the conference as well, thus maximizing our location. **(left, the view from Credo House)**

MINISTERING TO SPOUSES AND MOMS - It was a special blessing to have Teri's sister, Cindy Rice, at the conference as a volunteer to minister to the wives and moms whose primary work is



not in the academy. Cindy's obvious love for Jesus and the Word was infectious and her praying, listening, and encouraging these women was a real highlight of the conference. Each morning she led a devotional time with these women and they loved the opportunity to share, be heard, and pray together.

(left to right, Therese Ewert (Sweden), Cindy Rice, Teri, and Letta Jean Taylor)

From the start we encouraged all the speakers to bring their spouses and we encouraged the married participants to come as a couple and to bring their children as well. This made it different from any other academic conference because we were there as whole persons in our real-life roles.

WILLING

VOLUNTEERS - The logistics of the conference were smooth, primarily because of the competence and willing efforts of our great volunteers. Jim and Sharon Brown and their volunteer team made all the difference in the details, allowing the Holy Spirit to move among us without hindrance. Every member of the Emanuel Tundrea family, from Oradea, Romania, spent many hours serving. Emanuel made late night



runs to the train station. Nadia and Nahum worked with the children so parents could enjoy the sessions. Nathan and Titus expertly ran the sound system and PPT presentations. Coming all the way from Montreat, North Carolina, our long-time friends, Dr. Skip and Letta Jean Taylor, served in a thousand different ways, from one-on-one prayer and counsel to offering practical assistance like registration and information. Letta Jean serves as the chair of our Leadership Anvil Advisory Council. Dr. Chuck and Carol White, just days after their 50th Wedding Anniversary, came and gave of themselves in workshops, invaluable service, and hard work. The conference would not have been the same without the quiet service of these saints.

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS - One of the primary goals of the conference was to equip the participants to launch academic networks in their city or region. Our prayer is that during the next year at least ten academic networks will be launched. During the conference we provided specific instruction for how to set up these regular times in which Christian academics can gather for encouragement, equipping, sharing best practices, and praying together. Dr. Emanuel Tundrea, who played a key role in launching the Romanian National Academic Network a few years ago, provided encouragement and practical advice for this.

Listen to what the participants said about how they learned and benefited much from the conference: **(right, with Ukrainian friends)**

- “I’m not alone in this fight!”
- “My vision for spreading the gospel among university students and academics was strengthened.”
- “I am grateful for the opportunity to get in touch with amazing men and women of God and to have so much spiritual and intellectual nourishment.”
- “I was encouraged to be bolder as a believer where I work.”



- “This conference not only refreshed me intellectually, emotionally, and physically. Talking and praying with the other professors and researchers from the same field of study was a unique and encouraging experience like I never had before. Also, I was encouraged as a follower of Jesus in academia by hearing from the peers who are thinking deeply about current challenges to Christian faith in academia, and standing for their faith boldly.”
- “I will start a network of Christian scholars in my own country.”
- “These were impressive encounters with wonderfully inspirational, but also "fertile," people. It was very valuable. Thank you, thank you, thank you that it could also take place in this wonderful mountain world. I have been deeply touched during the days and also encouraged. And, I feel less alone on my way, but integrated into a spiritual community of people who - like me - are sometimes lone fighters on site. Thank you for your support. That is something very special that took place in Wilderswil.”
- “So for me this conference was like a great gift that I didn't deserve.”
- “You have made it possible for many people from lonely parts of Europe to be able to network together with other Christian academics that would have been far from possible by any stretch of the means by what resource Europe has as a continent to do this. It's humbling that so many on the other side of the Atlantic would care so much to want to help such helpless academics in Europe.”

OVERFLOWING GRATITUDE - The time we enjoyed at the conference will endure as one of the most special weeks of our lives. We prayed that God would be gracious to make His presence known at this gathering and He definitely did. He came and He came with power, with healing, with wisdom, and with sweet refreshment. We praise Him.



We are also overwhelmed with gratitude for all the prayers of God’s people for this conference and for the generous gifts that made it and the ongoing work of **The Leadership Anvil** possible. What God birthed in our hearts as a vision years ago was made possible by the support of His people. Thank you. We are indeed blessed to serve God along with you in this good work.

We are already making plans for the next conference in 2025. Many of the participants now have August 25-28, 2025, on their calendar. We will be grateful for your prayers in advance for this as well.

Again, thank you. As a partner of the **Leadership Anvil** ministry through your prayers and your support, you share in everything that was accomplished at this conference.

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