

Conference Session 1.3: Academic - Training
The Desegregation of Theological Teacher Education: the Case Study of Claremont Lincoln University

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Imagine a group of students and teachers who represent the multiple religious and cultural realities of our globalized world working together with mutual respect and harmony. Their goal is nothing less than to apply the wisdom and practices of many different religious, ethical, and cultural traditions to the challenge of solving the world's most enduring problems...You have just imagined Claremont Lincoln University.¹

Secular institutions of higher education require of their faculty to present material related to religion in a completely objective “academic” manner. In these contexts, there are several methodologies employed to teach religion; historical, phenomenological, psychological, and sociological, etc... There is much virtue in these descriptive approaches in that they provide the student with a broad understanding of expressions of religious traditions. This, however, is only the first step to true religious literacy, which in turn, is only the first step in true interreligious education. Claremont Lincoln University provides a new model for interreligious education. In addition to understanding one another’s religious traditions academically, Claremont Lincoln University provides an additional layer of insight into the various religious traditions through having both instructors from the respective traditions as well as fellow students from those traditions. Both of these groups bring their religious commitments to into the classroom discussions and enhance the learning experience.

Additionally, Claremont Lincoln University equips the student body with the skill-set needed to engage in interreligious learning. These include both active listening skills and the skills needed for sincerely sharing their own beliefs. The classroom environment might also include opportunities to experience both the sacred ritual and even the sacred space of the “other.” Students are often invited to observe (and even participate in, should they feel comfortable,) a prayer service of another religious tradition. The idea is that learning is not just an intellectual activity, but includes the heart and spirit as well. Lastly, a complete interreligious education should help the students build upon the common ground of understanding, shared values, and dialogue projects for the common good and a more peaceful world. In today’s world, religion is often blamed, rightly or wrongly, for violence and conflict. It is the philosophy of Claremont Lincoln University that religions have tremendous contributions to make to humanity and that we can make them more effectively through collaboration amongst the adherents of the various faiths. Religions should claim the imaginative space of peacemaking and cooperation and lead the way to civilizational dialogue, cooperation and a better tomorrow.

¹ Claremont Lincoln University. Claremont, CA: Claremont Lincoln University, 2010. This section is a reworking of an unpublished document that I co-authored with CLU President Jerry Campbell.

The Case of Claremont Lincoln University²

In September 2006, Dr. Jerry Campbell, in his first year as President of Claremont School of Theology, an historic Christian seminary established in 1885, recognized that the existing model of theological education was limited with regards to its ability to provide an education that would meet the needs of the market in today's world. Religions did not escape the impact of globalization. The world has become smaller, and populations are now organized in new patterns. Mainline Christian denominations and other major religions no longer enjoy their previously held "corner on the market". It no longer works, for example, to educate Muslim and Christian leaders separately, and then to send them out into the world with the expectation that they will work together to form constructive partnerships. Claremont Lincoln University is a new model of preparation for religious scholars and leaders and teachers. In this model, future clergy, teachers, and religious scholars are educated side by side.

In 2007, President Campbell launched the idea of the world's first interreligious university. He emphasized the premise that only an interreligious group of leaders could build a genuinely interreligious university together. Three institutions of the Abrahamic family of faiths came together to launch Claremont Lincoln University.

In September of 2011, Claremont School of Theology, the Islamic Center of Southern California, the largest and oldest Mosque in Southern California (and the founding organization for Bayan Claremont Islamic Graduate School), and the Academy for Jewish Religion, California, a trans-denominational, pluralistic institution dedicated to the training of rabbis, cantors, and chaplains, together formally launched Claremont Lincoln University.

The mission of the university is:

"to enable the religions of the world to work, study, problem-solve, strategize, and develop programs that help the people of the world work together in harmony to solve the major global concerns of our day: peace, health, sustainability, poverty, education, economic systems where 'good ethics is good business,' and more. Globalization has shrunk the world and requires a new and visionary way of thinking. The complex global problems of the 21st century require cooperation and collaboration. Indeed, they will not be solved any other way."

All three Abrahamic religions share common values, among which is a teaching known as the "golden rule:"

- Christianity - *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*
- Islam - *"No one of you is a believer until you desire for another that which you desire for yourself."*
- Judaism - *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

This shared concept is relevant to individual people of faith, business people, organizations, diplomats and governments. It is a tenet common to all religions and is essential to achieving the concepts, philosophies, and the practical application of one's faith in any tradition. Religion is an extremely powerful and long-lasting force in society. Using the worldwide infrastructure of the major religions of the world allows the religions to become the distribution system of cooperation and collaboration.

² Bayan Claremont 2010, Business Plan, Bayan Claremont, Claremont, CA.

The Structure of Claremont Lincoln University

The new Claremont Lincoln University constitutes the hub of a consortium of the three graduate schools that represent the Abrahamic traditions, also known as ethical monotheism. CLU is currently in process of adding to the consortium additional partners from Eastern religious traditions as well.

- **First:** Much of the world, including America and its cities, is becoming more multicultural and multi-religious each year. In this new context there is a growing need for institutions and strategies that diminish conflict, promote harmony, and strengthen the social fabric. While secular and governmental agencies can do much to bring about harmony in such increasingly diverse social settings, they are greatly helped when organized religions and other peoples of conscience join together to reinforce and support their efforts. Creating this means of integrating graduate religious education, while also providing for the continuing transmission of each tradition, promises to lay the foundation for religions to become essential partners with secular and governmental agencies in strengthening the American social fabric.
- **Second:** Efforts at finding solutions notwithstanding, major problems continue to plague the human family, even in the cases where the scientific and technological means for solutions exist. The interreligious approach of the Claremont Lincoln consortium promises to bring the power of religion to bear on these problems. Islam and the other religions can produce and support the sacred shared values of harmony, peacemaking, bridge-building across cultures, and respect for the earth. When the world's religions work together as allies, it creates a climate in which governmental and secular agencies can better solve global problems. Claremont Lincoln University also aims to produce major new research on how such partnerships can be accomplished.
- **Third:** There is a widespread view, often fueled by the news media, that religion is at the core of much of the world's conflict. Clearly, the need is for religions to diminish hostile rhetoric and to collaborate where there are common interests. This is unlikely to happen with the previous, religiously segregated model of religious education. Thus the University provides a new opportunity to point religions in the direction of mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration and to publicize successful partnerships with the global community.
- **Fourth:** Adherents of some religions that have more recently become a part of the American religious landscape are in need of developing seminaries. Specifically, the American Muslim population, in large part, relies upon imams educated in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world.³ However, such education is not always suitable for to the Muslim communities in the West. It is important for Muslims in western secular democracies and around the globe to facilitate the education and development of Muslim leaders for the increasingly pluralistic societies of the future.
- **Fifth** and finally, theological and ministerial education is in the midst of a significant shift. Since 2005, there has been a discernable downturn in the core degree programs of seminaries, divinity schools and other theological institutions, especially in

³ Baghby, Ihsan (2011). *The American mosque 2011: Basic Characteristics of the American Mosque Attitudes of Mosque Leaders.* (Report 1 form CAIR US Mosque Study). Retrived from <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files>

the mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish traditions. This shift signals a turn away from the once predominant need for professionalized Christian ministers and Jewish rabbis toward more varied modes of ministry and social service. While there is still a need for professional religious leadership, the new University offers a fresh focus that more closely aligns with the current generation of world citizens who have studied abroad, spent many hours in social service projects, and generally seek ways to make the world a better place, regardless of the religious and institutional boundaries. The Claremont Lincoln University seeks to preserve institutions of professional religious education while also meeting the needs and demands of the emerging generation that has grown up in culturally and religiously diverse schools and communities. We detect in this cultural climate a remarkable opportunity to capture the imagination of young people who are seeking to make a difference while still offering established professionals the opportunity to retool for a quickly changing world. Muslim educators in particular are needed in this new collaboration and have important contributions to make to it as Islam is often misunderstood in Western countries.

To achieve these objectives, therefore, this consortium-based University functions on three levels:

Level 1: The foundational level consists of the professional academies, institutes, and schools that educate religious, spiritual, and other leaders for service to their particular traditions. The founding institutions are listed above. These institutions are designed to attract students who seek to serve in settings appropriate to their religious traditions, but who want to do so in a multi-religious, multi-belief educational ecology to be better prepared for effective service in a world filled with many different religious and ethical perspectives. Each will maintain its individual curriculum for the specific purpose of educating religious leaders for the tradition it represents.

Level 2: The second level is the University proper, which houses the collaborative degree programs, courses, and students. The purpose of this level is to provide an educational context in which students learn to develop understanding and respect for those who hold beliefs different from their own. Initial programs focus on particular academic areas of concentration in which the faculty have expertise such as ethics, theologies, histories and scriptures. An innovative new program is also being launched in the field of Interreligious Studies, placing the new University at the vanguard of this field of study and practice. Most programs are at the master's and doctoral levels, though certificate programs are also being offered. Most recently, CLU launched a fully online Master's degree in Ethical Leadership. In the future, customized educational programs for businesses, governments, healthcare organizations, and non-profit organizations are also planned. All programs, however, regardless of their focus, do and will include the development of knowledge, competencies and/or practices in a multi-religious context for a diverse world.

At the core of the interreligious education of CLU is its pedagogy articulated as follows: Interreligious education engages people in learning about and from the rich diversity of religious communities, practices, and beliefs. As a field, it involves the use of interdisciplinary and experiential approaches.

Interreligious education at Claremont Lincoln University is not value-free but reflects the University's commitments to inclusive well-being and the flourishing of persons, communities, and the planet. Participants may be committed to one religious tradition, may be religiously seeking or uncommitted, or may belong to more than one tradition. Each person's stance or location is to be engaged respectfully and without proselytizing. Experience and reflection on experience should take place in interreligious contexts, structured to explore and research provocative questions in trustworthy settings. The process of interreligious education is intended to help participants become better equipped to move forward in their own religious identities and practices.

Interreligious education is not monolithic. It utilizes different religious pedagogies and approaches to spiritual formation, integrating them in the process of learning. Because it deals with specific features of humans-in-community, it brings abstract concepts into dialogue with concrete examples, universal judgments with case studies, and detached study with involvement.

Interreligious education is a process. It involves continuing and evolving dialogue aimed at mutual understanding, respect, and openness to growth. As a whole-person form of education, interreligious education includes at least three dimensions:

- The informational dimension: *religious literacy; critical and constructive engagement with religious traditions.*
- The intrapersonal, formational dimension: *reflection on personal responses to cognitive knowledge and to new experiences. A dimension of spiritual formation, it involves developing interiority and life-orientation—the ability to think and act with integrity and effectiveness.*
- The engaged dimension: *Involving students in the lived worlds of diverse religions through interaction with people of various faiths; working with people from different religious groups on projects for justice, development, and peace.*⁴

Level 3: The third level of the University focuses on the most difficult question: How can the power inherent in the world's religions be brought to bear to help communities, societies, and governments solve long-standing problems? Because answering this question will involve different traditions and disciplines, the answer is approached in the University by means of Interdisciplinary Centers that examine why religions have failed to collaborate on solving major problems and ask how they may be more successful in the future. What strategies can be developed to achieve collaboration, and how can such collaboration assist societies and governments in addressing problems? Level 3 Centers pursue philanthropic and other research funding sources to make progress in areas such as domestic social policy, international development, conflict resolution, and other areas of social studies to which multi-religious perspectives can contribute to betterment of human conditions and life of all kinds.

⁴ Claremont Lincoln University. (2013). *A Vision for Interreligious Education at Claremont Lincoln University, Claremont, CA.*

The Theology of Interreligious Education

Even though many religious traditions emphasize evangelism and proselytizing, Claremont Lincoln University, an interfaith university, creates an environment both on campus and within the classrooms in which the competing truth claims of the partner religious traditions coexist along side one another. Students are taught how to engage in active listening, i.e., how to listen with openness and to try to understand and appreciate the views of others. Students also develop the skills needed to share their own beliefs in a manner that is respectful, substantial, and earnest, yet not imposing. It is important to note that this approach is not intended to dilute any religious tradition or to advocate a synchronous praxis, but rather to expand the understanding and appreciation of the “other’s” religion. In fact, the experience at CLU indicates that this process serves to strengthen the original religious commitments that the students have when they enter into the program. Although some students might hope that students of other faiths might convert to their religious tradition, theological competition is not the approach or atmosphere created in the classroom.

This pedagogy allows for a rich discourse and a deeper experience in the classroom that builds bridges of understanding, highlights shared values, and encourages collaboration for the common good and the betterment of the society and world at large.

Collaboration: “Standing Together”⁵ and the Power of Pilgrimage

The courses taught at Claremont Lincoln University must meet at least the first two [but preferably all four] of the following criteria in order to meet the CLU standards for an interreligious course:⁶

1. The course must cover content from more than one tradition, such that it leads to increased knowledge of the beliefs and practices of those traditions (often called religious literacy).
2. The course invites engagement through its pedagogy. Methods can include skill-building, case studies, simulations, dialogical, and/or praxis components. Faculty are encouraged to describe what this would mean in their particular discipline, and include this description in the course syllabus.
3. The course invites engagement by encouraging embodied action in communities outside the classroom.
4. The course includes people from multiple traditions teaching and/or otherwise involved.

While there are approximately a dozen courses that meet these criteria, I would like to highlight one that will be taught in the spring of 2014; *Muslims and Christians in Dialogue*.

This course involves the practical opportunity to develop and apply dialogue skills in a real world setting. The students will be assigned a mosque or church depending on their religious affiliation. They will be tasked with recruiting volunteers from that community

⁵ The Christian Muslim Consultative Group. (2009). *Standing Together: Study Guide*. Los Angeles, CA.

⁶ Claremont Lincoln University. (2013). *Criteria for courses that meet the interreligious studies requirements in our degree program*. Claremont, CA.

to participate in “Standing Together,” a seven-session interfaith dialogue study guide.⁷ They will be paired up with a neighboring church/mosque. The student, as part of their course work, will facilitate the group dialogue outlined in the study guide. The instructor of the course will supervise and guide the student facilitators ensuring that they not only model best practices for dialogue, i.e. active listening and sincere sharing, but also create the most conducive atmosphere for dialogue. This course follows the hybrid model in which the students meet for reduced classroom instruction with the rest of the contact hours taking place through the supervision of the facilitation of the “Standing Together” study-guide and online asynchronous discussion sessions with the instructor and other students.

Another unique means of instruction at CLU is through interfaith pilgrimages. During the spring semester of 2013, CLU offered a directed study course that involved an interfaith pilgrimage to the Holy Land. A group of 28 Muslims, Christians and Jews, [not all CLU students] lead by clergy from each of the Abrahamic faiths traveled to sites sacred to each. Although required reading before the trip prepared the students for an intellectual understanding of the history and theology of the various faiths, nothing prepared them for the first-hand on-site experience. During the pilgrimage, at each sacred location, the group experienced sacred ritual that was authentic yet accessible, a mass, a Shabbat service, Muslim prayer in a mosque, the walking of the via Delarosa, etc... The religious services were translated and explained. The followers of other faiths were invited to participate in the “other’s” various rites and services, but no one was pressured or even expected to do so.

The outcome was transformative for all who were on the trip. Additionally, the traveling together, praying together, and participating in facilitated dialogue sessions during the trip helped to forge strong relationships across the religious groups. These strong bonds enabled the students to have difficult conversations regarding politics and the prospects for peace in the region. Furthermore, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by the students is that all of the religions share essentially the same values and that religious communities must play an active role in conflict resolution. Upon return, students were required to participate in interfaith panels and town hall forums to share their experiences with the society at large.

Conclusion

Religion is a powerful force in the world and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Too often, politicians and fanatics manipulate religions to garner support in creating or escalating conflicts. People of faith need to reclaim the power of religion to solve the world’s conflicts and engage in peacemaking. Claremont Lincoln University, through its consortium of seminaries and its desegregation of religious education serves as a model for how this collaboration across religious communities can take place. CLU aims to graduate teachers and religious leaders that have at the core of their education, both religious literacy and the skillsets needed to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue and cooperation across traditions, religions and cultures for the common good.

⁷ See appendix

Appendix

The pedagogy of Dialogue for the Christian-Muslim Consultative Group (CMCG)

Beginning in 2008, the members of the CMCG developed the concept for Standing Together in response to a collective realization that there did not appear to be any study guides on Islam and Christianity that were developed by teams of Christians and Muslims working in partnership on the same materials. In this sense, Standing Together represents a unique collaboration that reveals the richness and vibrancy of these faith traditions and teachings. The goals of Standing Together are:⁸

- To bring Muslim and Christian neighbors together to come to know one another as people and break down the dehumanizing stereotypes that keep us apart and fearful of one another. We live in the same neighborhoods; our kids go to school together; we see each other in the supermarket. However, we often don't know each other very well, if at all, because it is rare for Christians and Muslims in the United States to socialize formally or informally. With Standing Together, the members of The CMCG hope to bridge relationships and communities together.

- To create opportunities for faithful Muslims and Christians to engage with one another about beliefs and practices. Of course, it is always possible to pick up a book or watch a television program and get some of the same information; however with Standing Together, face-to-face interactions develop a deeper, first-hand knowledge of the ways in which our faith traditions are both similar and distinctive. Furthermore, in the process of this dialogue, you will clarify your knowledge about your own beliefs and traditions.

- To lay the foundation for possible future projects that your group might choose to do together to enhance the well-being of all your members and communities. The members of The CMCG have found ways to partner on many projects of common interest beyond the original intent of the organization, and share fellowship with one another as our bonds of friendship deepen. It is our prayer that your dialogue group will also experience the abundance of more profound relationships together.

It is also important to clarify what Standing Together is not. It is not an opportunity to try to convert one another. As you talk about your own faith tradition, speak from your experience and knowledge, and in a way that honors the experience and knowledge of all the members of your group. Come to the dialogue assuming that you will disagree on some matters, but remain open to hearing the perspectives of the other side. Listen for the unexpected ways in which you may be more alike than different. Be renewed in your understanding of what makes you who you are and in the faithfulness of our Creator. Stand Together.

⁸ *Standing Together: Study Guide.*