

World Public Forum

“Dialogue of Civilizations”

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Fr. Walid Moussa, *President*

Coming from Lebanon, I would like in my note to briefly tackle the issue of cultural traditions and the educational challenges in the Lebanese context.

During the last 17 years, we at Notre Dame University – Louaize, tried to study the depth of these cultures and their influence and impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the people, particularly the general behaviors connected to the different Lebanese wars that took place, which can be summarized as wars of civilizations.

The analysis of these wars has been a platform for us to revise our curricula and renew them and reconsider our extracurricular activities to provide a better humanistic and civic education to our youth for the years to come.

The most important issues we discovered in our study lead us to the conclusion that in Lebanon we are facing a serious situation, and we are in front of a series of challenges that can be synthesized in the following four:

1. Challenge of beliefs and openness. This challenge is the result of the various belongings, in the sense of dependence (where they belong). The person is called to cross from a state of locking himself/herself inside the limitations of a set of beliefs to a state of building a flexible human identity. It is an identity rooted in personal beliefs but open to the other where the human being in his/her historical background knows himself/herself through his/her relations and his/her openness to the different cultures and various beliefs and belongings around him/her.
2. Challenge of tradition and modernity. We, as educational institution are called to encourage and build an objective global attitude of critique within

our youth. Certainly, this includes the scientific approach of critique. All truths are questionable. Traditions are questionable. Build this attitude of critique in its logic, techniques and objectives to protect the human renaissance in all fields of knowledge, meaning thus reason, heart, conscience and spirit. The human being is the final value.

3. Challenge of commitment and engagement. While commitment may have meant the attachment to a network of human relations protecting the principles of an authority as they are, the meaning of engagement is more in the sense of involvement for change. Educate the youth to be engaged in changing the hegemonic authority and be involved in launching the project of forming an authority based on respect and human love, and that the love of others.
4. Challenge of education. It is the main challenge. The youth in Lebanon needs to rediscover the importance of its role and learn how to express it. They need to be themselves. To listen to what is inside them and learn to be themselves in relation to the experience of others. A major role is expected from education to shape such a learning process in expressions, meanings, symbols etc.

In summary, this crisis of cultural traditions is a crisis of lacerated identity that we, as educational institution, are called to bring about its restoration through all our activities.