

Notre Dame University

13/5/2010

Address of Fr. Walid Moussa
President of Notre Dame University
Celebrating
NDU Founders' Day

Dear Friends,

For the fifth consecutive year, I stand before you as President of Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU). In all humility, I consider this responsibility a great honor. The Maronite Order of the Holy Virgin Mary, to which I am proud to belong, entrusted me with this duty. The University's family--faculty, staff, and students--also wholeheartedly supported this decision. I salute and thank them for their support and assure them of my prayers because together we have met challenges, surmounted difficulties, and built a reputable University to serve our society - a University we call home and of which we are proud.

Dear Colleagues,

In our previous assemblies over the last four years, I have addressed the notion of belonging to the University in its different facets. Today, I endeavor to continue this mission by highlighting the importance of cultural belonging. Presently, universities are facing a cultural crisis, as a result of labor market pressures, the economic environment, and consumer-driven society. Are these factors the reasons why students seem to be focused only on obtaining a degree without giving much attention to cultural awareness?

Is it true that we are simply learning, but becoming less cultured?

Is it true that our universities have become institutions that only grant degrees?

These questions have prompted me to address this subject in an attempt for us to reach a common perspective.

Dear Friends,

If we were to go back to when the Order was established in 1695 AD and to when the Lebanese Synod (the Louaize Synod) was convened in 1736 AD, and if we were to review the basis upon which NDU was founded in 1987 and its objectives, we would realize that "culture" was the core constituent of the Order's establishment, the Lebanese Synod's decisions, and the University's foundation. The Founding Fathers and former Presidents of NDU strove to promote and safeguard education, which plays a fundamental role in protecting citizens against

corruption, fanaticism, and seclusion. Accordingly, the University endeavors to:

"Develop a cultured citizen who is multilingual and possesses critical consciousness, strives to continuously broaden his knowledge, and considers his major a part of his cultural awareness".

This objective was stressed by the Vatican Council II that stated:

"Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture. The word 'culture' indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community."

Moreover, the Apostolic Exhortation, "A New Hope for Lebanon," addressed this subject when it considered Lebanon an exemplary land for the dialogue of civilization and conviviality.

Most would agree that a cultured person stands apart from the merely educated or those specialized in certain fields, and that every cultured person is educated; however, not every educated person is cultured. For this reason, our University, as every university, should seek to form cultured men and women.

Why? Today, most people complain about the poor level of culture most university graduates display. I wish to add, albeit harshly, that cultural "illiteracy" is running rampant across universities. Very few students read books, write letters, or are able to lucidly articulate and converse in a refined manner.

Notwithstanding, some wonder how there exists a request to lower the voting age in Lebanon to eighteen when our students lack both political and democratic values.

Is this a cruel verdict? Maybe so, but it reflects some aspects of the painful situation that university communities are experiencing. If what has just been said hurts, it is because the truth hurts, and it is shameful to bury our heads in the sand to conceal our ailing reality.

Based on this, I will not dwell on the cultural objectives of NDU, although I must admit that we have not yet reached the level of awareness we wish to achieve.

In the twenty-first century, how does one define a cultured university student?

After much research and dialogue with colleagues and friends, I have managed to draw up the following profile of such a cultured university student upon whom we may confer the "Degree of Culture":

1 - A cultured student is one who is free and able to break the shackles of confining traditional practices and those that suppress his/her identity. He/she truly understands personal and public freedoms. Yet, he/she does not consider freedom as violating the dignity of people, creating chaos, and ignoring social, moral, and religious values. A cultured student is one capable of criticizing and choosing, and not one who is influenced by private, family, or confessional considerations.

2- A cultured student is one who is open and loving, who upholds the right to be different, and who is influenced by others insofar as he/she can influence others. As such, he/she can interact with society and the entire world, which has become a "global village". He/she will be neither reclusive nor narrow-minded. He/she will not hide behind the veil of blind and radical ideologies.

3. A cultured student is one who possesses a well-rounded personality on the spiritual, psychological, and social fronts... We do not seek intellectual minds and empty hearts nor brilliant minds and barren souls. We all cry out in loud protest against the situation of some students who end up forlorn, addicted to drugs, or psychologically ill. In most cases, these situations are the result of a psychological void that needs to be filled through care, attention, and culture. Faith in God plays a significant role. By this, I do not refer to faith based on violent radicalism, rather I refer to faith that is the fruit of a deep culture and enduring spiritual formation.

4- A cultured student is the altruist who can overcome selfishness, interact with society, and use his/her knowledge to serve others, or more precisely others who are dissimilar in ideologies to him/her. An educated person uses "I" when speaking whereas the cultured person uses "We." The educated person wants his/her personal interests to prevail over the interests of others, whereas the cultured person knows that his/her interests cannot be fulfilled without first fulfilling the greater interests of his/her society or nation.

5- A cultured person is the student who believes in his/her nation and people. He/she does not build a nation for himself/herself or a nation that is confined to his/her family, rite, town, and region. Lebanon's tragedy resides in the disappointing fact that it is unable to form a good and well-rounded citizen. A good citizen builds the state, and I believe that this is the reason why we are yet to build a state.

6- A cultured student is one who is capable of fusing traditional knowledge and modern science, the book and Internet, ink and pixels, and the art of listening and that of writing. It is quite usual to witness conflicts between radical and hegemonic regimes. However, if we succeed in eliminating radicalism and hegemony,

human civilizations could meet in and respond to today's "glocal" world.

7- A cultured student is the creative one who seeks to discover every possible novel, wonderful, and unique aspect of life. The future is reserved for the creative and not for those who copy others and live off their backs.

8- A cultured student is the brave heart who fears no one and speaks his/her words with poise, clarity, and honesty. He/she takes stances that are the fruit of profound deliberation and experience. He/she does not adopt the opinions of others to use as weapons or shields.

9 - A cultured student is the multilingual who conceives language as a tool to communicate with the world at large that continues to dispose of its limits and boundaries. If the Arabic language is the native tongue, other languages must be learned and used as tools to help the cultured student become better acquainted with new fields of knowledge and stay abreast of the latest developments.

10 - A cultured student is the leader who can assume responsibilities with self-confidence and lead his/her community toward a better and brighter tomorrow. This student can only become a model to be followed when he/she embraces moral and ethical values that make him/her influential among his/her fellow students at university, and later on, colleagues at work.

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The challenges to be met by the University emerge after having drawn up the profile of a cultured student.

What are the factors that enable the university to prepare and shape this cultured student?

This process does not undermine the vital roles played by parents, schools, the media, and various institutions in forming the personality of this cultured student. However, we, as a University, believe that we are committed to taking bold steps by putting our words into action. Therefore, we consider it our duty to evaluate our role as a University in the following areas mainly by:

a - Offering curricula and programs that are compatible with our goals. Therefore, classes are not boring and outdated; rather these become interactive and up-to-date, and help achieve educational objectives. We are continuously invited to review our courses in light of these realities.

b- Providing training courses for faculty and staff. In so doing, we are also presented with the opportunity to select those who are

skilled and talented, and reward them financially and morally in order to allow them the opportunity to perform their duties according to our objectives.

c- Providing state-of-the-art equipment, smart classrooms, and facilities that offer a supportive academic learning environment.

d- Applying advanced teaching methods that utilize research, dialogue, and personal efforts. Conferences, seminars, exhibitions, and plays should not be limited to certain age groups that fall above the age of students we are preparing for the future.

e- Developing training seminars in collaboration with the labor market to maintain the university-society relationship. This must be a complementary and interactive relationship to ensure that graduating students do not find themselves unfamiliar with the workplace.

f- Focusing on savoir-vivre and etiquette, which constitute a teaching unit and are aimed at training students on hygiene; protecting the environment; safe driving; proper grooming; sound relationships with the elderly, children, religious places, and the clergy; health and in particular physical and psychological health among others. Our students seldom receive the proper instructions to guide them.

Dear Friends,

Shaping cultured students requires an exceptional and unique university environment. However, this necessitates the following three factors:

- University leadership that starts from the President and Vice-Presidents to the Directors and Deans, who must adopt these educational considerations in order to build their strategies and work methodologies.

- Financial capacity, and there is no embarrassment in saying this, which could help achieve the University's objectives. This cannot be reached by relying solely on tuition fees. We should also resort to endowments, grants, donations, and participation of the private business sector.

- Decisions need to be taken at the level of all concerned ministries, which can help meet these challenges head-on instead of hindering their achievement.

Dear Friends,

In today's address, I haven't offered new ideas. As a clergyman who belongs to a Maronite order, and as a Lebanese citizen who believes in a free and modern nation, I see myself committed--after my five-year term in office as President of NDU--to tackle these issues with love and responsibility. Our University, which is currently considered among the most important universities in Lebanon, is encouraged to

grow not only in size but also in substance. Zorba used to say: "A man needs a little madness to change the world".

However, you and I are not mad, but we are able to make a change if our hands and minds are united, and if we turn our sights toward the bright future that God and country are calling upon us to fulfill.

On this note, I conclude my address and promise that as of today my advisors, General Assistants, Board of Trustees, University Council, Deans, and the entire NDU family will work together to discuss these themes. The views and ideas I presented here today are not sacred, especially given that we are all prone to error. My ideas are debatable and need to be discussed in order to adopt a strategy for NDU that would help achieve our objectives.

Yes, at the University level, we are seeking acknowledgment from abroad through the Accreditation Process, but real recognition should start from within, and this process has begun.

In closing, I would like to thank you all, faculty members, staff, students, and graduates.

You are the beating heart of this university; you are the core of this event.

Happy Founders' Day NDU

Long live NDU,
Long live Lebanon.