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BELONGING BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND EXTREMISM

Dear Friends,

It is the anniversary of NDU. Today, we are commemorating Founder's Day. Today, we are all called to contemplate in God, and in ourselves. This contemplation presupposes several questions: is this anniversary a mere tradition? Is this anniversary a joyous feast that ends by nightfall when we all return to the confines of our rooms? Is this anniversary just a meeting to exchange felicitations and a day-off for our students, teachers and staff?

Let us venture beyond that. Let us turn these questions into a quest that is related to me, you and the human and national reality at the onset of the 21st century. In this century, conflict is taking up different forms stemming from the clash between globalization and extremism. This clash is embodied sometimes in the clash of civilizations or terrorist bombings or wars, which we know how they begin but have no idea how they will end.

Modern technology and contemporary scientific breakthroughs have offered us a "gift", which some dubbed "globalization", where situations and events interact to transcend national and geographical boundaries. As such, the entire world seems as one global village: distances have been reduced, differences have been removed, peoples have become intermingled, communication has become widespread, and the horizons of knowledge and information have widened. Hence, what takes place in a faraway country or in another planet is broadcasted and transmitted by the media in seconds or minutes; to the extent that we are living the concerns, troubles and sufferings of others. This globalization was used by some for political and economic goals. These talked about "Americanization", or neo-colonialism, or the hegemony of capital or large companies. That is why some have adopted a stance against globalization, and have voiced their opposition to it. Others have committed to it and have considered it the best formula for the building of a prosperous future void of conflicts, disputes and wars.

In the face of this "globalization" movement, which some have characterized as savage and oppressive, extremism emerged. This new emergence represents a return to the roots and an abstention from adopting some civilized and modern views for fear of being lost or erased. Some of those who believe in extremism consider that holding on to heritage, preserving traditions and customs and abiding by the accounts of history is better than the expansion offered by globalization, which erases the traits of basic identity.

Just like "globalization" sometimes appeared in a guise that bears all the meanings of hegemony and swallowing, extremism also sometimes appeared in the guise of that who surrenders to his past refusing any form of progress or development, abiding by principles

that do not perhaps go in par with the present and are not in harmony with the needs of the age.

This conflict between globalization and extremism is today taking up tragic forms: terrorism, occupation, hegemony, hunger, retardation, etc.

Further, this conflict is being reflected on identity, to the extent that some have come to believe that identity is a problem since it holds on to the past at the expense of the future. When Ameen Maalouf published his book *Lethal Identities*, he spoke in depth of the problem of identity, which rather than being a trait characterizing the individual, has become a cause of division and murder.

Today, we are witnessing and living this conflict in the entire world; and some of its manifestations appear in the region and in Lebanon. What is our role as universities? What is our role as educators? What is our role at NDU, in particular?

Dear Friends,

When NDU was conceived on the hands of his Eminence, our Father Archbishop Bechara Al Rahi, in the womb of the Maronite Mariamite Order, more than a quarter of a century ago, its personality was not indistinct for it was formed out of diverse educational, spiritual and national accretions. This was translated in the preamble of the objectives set by the University, which reads:

Stemming from the history of the Maronite Mariamite Order, its heritage and spiritual mission, and stemming from its belief in a unified Lebanon whose land embraces groups of people from different religious belongings, which makes it a paradigm for a rich and diverse civilization characterized by universal human aspirations.

In the above lines, I see the following ideas:

- I see a clear extremism when talking about the history and heritage of the Order.
- I see a clear identity when talking about believing in one Lebanon whose land embraces diverse and multiple religious groups away from fanaticism and isolation.
- I see globalization when talking about universal human aspirations.

Conciliating between these three ideas is what makes me bestow a title to the present mission of NDU: Belonging between Globalization and Extremism. This means that we should build a bridge where the identity devouring globalization can meet with the extremism that abolishes everything other than identity. We can do that by focusing on belonging: facing the challenges of globalization is not done by preserving historical remains that impede growth and paralyze the will for construction and development; it is rather achieved via belonging, which obliges us to subject ourselves to a process of self-criticism and accountability to the extent of reaching a point of confession and honesty that does not tolerate manipulation or dishonesty.

The main headlines for research are set through the following questions:

- 1- The first question is a question which I address to my brother monks and myself: do we truly belong to the Maronite Mariamite Order, to its history, heritage, and mission, which were embodied in actions and sacrifices for more than 300 years? To what extent do we believe in this belonging and its implementation? What is our relation with this University? Are we owners or are shepherds? Are we in its heart or is it in ours?
- 2- Do we as teachers, staff and employees in general, truly belong in deed, in speech, in writing and in research to NDU? How do we manifest this belonging? What are its materializations? What are the actual links between the employees and this University? Once again: are we as teachers and employees in its heart or is it in ours?
- 3- Do we as students and tomorrow as graduates bear the emblem of this University and its mark of distinction with pride and dignity? Or is this University featureless, void of any traits distinguishing it from its counterparts? Is our main aim to get a degree and then move on to the work market? For the third time I ask: are we, students and graduates, in the heart of this university or is it in ours?

All of the above questions revolve around belonging. If this belonging fails, then we are faced either with globalization or extremism. Honesty compels me to say: some of us are globalized and some are extremists; yet, few of us are individuals with a belonging.

- **The Monks:**

Some monks are globalized. The monk who has no ties to the land or to the monastery or to the history of his group, and who does not feel that he is a part of this educational institution, has no roots in it and has no belonging. He is a monk that prays, that loves, that believes, that looks up to the heavens, and that have transcended the earth to Heaven. This is his inalienable right. He is globalized in one sense or the other and kudos to him. On the other hand, some monks are extremists. They are attached to traditions and ancient systems, they practice their role as if they were children of another age, they do not belong to the University of the Third Millennium, and they are not open to the new flow of information. Between globalized monks and extremist monks, we are in need of monks who make their university a foundation and a point of departure for globalization. For no roots grow in the sky but on land, with its load of historical and spiritual facts.

I pray that my brothers and I will enjoy this belonging that has surpassed the temporal stage, the different events, positions and tasks to become part of our monastic persona in which the individual fades into the background to leave way for the institution and the Order. Today, we are here and tomorrow we might be elsewhere, but our belonging will not change. This requires a lot of sacrifice, and a renunciation of malicious selfishness.

- **Teachers and Employees:**

Some of our teachers, employees and staff are either globalized or extremists: they are globalized in the sense that they set future goals and work on achieving them, and this is part of human nature. Their main concern in this time and age is money, position and glory; this too is quite understandable and part of their rights. How do they achieve their goals? In any means possible, the most important thing is the end.

Some of them are extremists in the sense that they are traditionalists, attached to heritage and the remains of history; and this is reflected in the way they look upon their colleagues and their students to the extent of confessional or political fanaticism. This is natural for some and does not go in par with the belonging we are aspiring for:

That is why I call upon those globalized and extremists to belong to a university – a university that does not distinguish, does not separate, has Christian roots, a Lebanese identity and a civilized moral mission. A university that is able to preserve its roots in the land and leave its branches to soar up to the heavens; a university that embraces a diversity of individuals sitting under its shade and on its seats.

Our belonging to this university, as teachers and employees, lies in our belief that we are its fathers and its children and not just passersby. Many come and go, but some pass by and stay. We all pass by, but who of us leaves behind him a trace, a name or a given invention? The spirit of invention and creation, the tendency to develop and renew, and the joy of giving without waiting for something in return or for fake glory is at the basis of belonging to this University. I pray for the proliferation of those who belong to the University, who make the University their second home, and whom the University takes up as its stars. I pray that their hearts be open to all students, opinions and ideas, without blind monism and deaf extremism, just like the University's doors are open to all people.

- **Students and Graduates:**

Students and graduates are the children of their generation and representatives of their age and its aspirations and boundless horizons.

Those students are mostly globalized in their clothes, behavior, and learning and communication methods. They also carry within them a tendency to rebel, to refuse and to break all traditions and customs. In their dreams, the horizon of family and nation does not contain them and they yearn for a farther horizon. As if their skins, like their countries, cannot contain them anymore and they try to liberate themselves.

In the face of the above, few are the students who are still attached to the old ways for religious, social or economic reasons. We see them in their clothes and their behavior still upholding traditions, expressing their rejection of everything new and denouncing all means of liberalization which they consider as chaotic, lewd and corrupt.

These two kinds of students are not the product of the University and do not bear, in a sense, the name and identity of the University.

Our greatest challenge is to foster a sense of belonging to the university in those students and raise their awareness vis-à-vis their attachment to their land, their parents, their society, and their university.

But this quest is laden with obstacles and difficulties: they break free from any restriction; that is why it becomes necessary for the University to change its *modus operandi* to gain the love of these students and to sow the joy of life in their spirits.

Let us belong to them so that they may belong to us. Let the University embrace them without looking at their confessional, social, regional or political identities. Let them feel comfortable and loved. This organic relation between the students and the University is the basis of every academic, national or educational work.

This should not be limited to the three or four years which the student spends at the university. On the contrary, it should extend to after the graduation. This requires the drafting of a new bylaw for the Alumni so that students could be proud of their degrees and their Alma Mater.

Dear Friends,

Between a monism that seeks to eliminate the other, and a globalization that seeks to eliminate distinction, we should choose belonging: a belonging that does not eliminate identity and does make it a god to be sanctified and revered. The more generous this belonging is, the more responsible, deeper and more organic it is.

Here, I believe that I should clarify certain terms: identity is other than belonging. You can hold a Lebanese identity, while your belonging could be Syrian, American or French. You can hold the identity of your family, but you live outside all family and tribal constraints. Belonging is a belonging outside of the framework of civil society and to the civil society with all its aspirations and open horizons. It is a free choice, while identity is an imposed, destined or natural decision.

Our role, in this university, is to achieve this goal and to sow belonging and to free ourselves and our students from the tunnel of globalization and extremism. This will not take place by preaching or exhorting, nor by laying the burden on the shoulders of others, or placing the ball in their courts. On the contrary, this begins, as I have mentioned above, through constructive self-criticism: let each one of us look into himself/herself, starting from the president of NDU: do I truly belong to this university? Am I working, within my capacities and leadership, to make others belong to it? Do I, as a teacher, employee or student, know the meaning of this belonging?

While tackling this issue, I know that I will be treading on dangerous grounds and that I will be faced with obstacles; but I believe in the necessity of unveiling all masks, opening all curtains, and revealing all truths. There is not future for a university or an educational institution or an identity without the reiteration of this human or social belonging. We have abolished heritage under the banner of modernity; and under the banner of heritage,

we have abolished modernity. Under the banner of globalization, we have lost our identity; and under the banner of identity, we cursed globalization. All of this has been done for naught. All of this has led us to where we are today in the world. All of this has brought about wars, destruction, bombing and devastation.

I am not raising this issue to change the world or to reform this age. My main concern today is my university and my students. It is from here that reform begins; it is from here that we can advance and develop.

Should we place our trust in God? Yes. But, God will not change anything in unless we change ourselves.

I hope that by next year's Founder's Day, our university, with your help, presence and activities, dear teachers, employees and students, will have made a qualitative leap in the subject of belonging. I do believe we will achieve our goal.

I also hope, dear colleagues and officials, that you will be witnesses, in the hope that through our constant cooperation, honest and genuine dialogue, we will be able to institute some change in our national behavior and in the mentality of those working for the national interest. Through love and awareness we can move mountains.