



## **“What shall we do?”**

Address of Father Hady Mahfouz

President of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik

USEK Patronal Feast Day

May 18, 2013

---

**1. “What shall we do?”** An existential question that is persistently raised through the course of time that never dies away. In fact, whatever the situation attained, the person is in a continuous quest for a better one.

We raise this very question, at the Holy Spirit University, knowing that our serenity, joy and quietude, and those of our surroundings, reside in a dynamic continuation of the mission entrusted to our University by the Lebanese Maronite Order, in the name of the Church. We raise this question, at the University of the Spirit, on the feast of the Spirit, **the day of the Pentecost** when Peter addressed the crowds. “When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). How beautiful it is to be aware that this evident existential question concerns the Pentecost par excellence and the University of the Pentecost, the University of the Spirit! This question equally evokes principles and draws a roadmap. The reason underlying such a question is not to set a detailed list of ideal and absolute activities that should be undertaken, for each person is one of a kind, and every circumstance is unique. It is a question that echoes faith that human activity, on both the personal and societal levels, is the fruit of different **cultures**. When adopted, these cultures grow and create an environment from which people can draw, at all times, the good of their present for the sake of their future. We tackle this

question because the faith and the beliefs of every person and every community yield a **management conviction**, which reverberates in the daily relational life matters.

2. The fact that the listeners to Peter raised this question implies that they had faith in the principles he had pronounced after the descent of the Spirit. **The culture of returning to the principles** raises the value of the person per se and reflects the greatness of his/her human dignity. This culture has a double impact: First, it adds a meaning to the everyday life of the person, so that he/she is not reduced to his/her everyday matters that might overgrow him/her; thus, tearing him/her apart. Second, it tints human activity that would remain fade had it not been for principles. As a result, this activity would flourish and succeed all along the way. “What shall we do?” First, we shall be inspired by great principles, which is an act rejoiced by all faith views. The culture of principles in the university realm is reflected in the necessity to refer to the university mission statement and to comply with it. At USEK, we recall that our University is the daughter of the Lebanese Maronite Order, and that it is our concern to fulfill the mission of the universal Catholic Church in Lebanon for every human being, without any discrimination, and the whole human being, in all his/her dimensions, including the spiritual dimension. This is a core principle in the social teaching of the Church, and it is what USEK ceaselessly echoes and what it strives to sow in its community members and in every person who is directly or indirectly linked to it. Our University is deeply rooted in its Christian and Catholic identity while it remains open to all other religions for the service of the human being. In this regard, inspiring is the principle pronounced by the Blessed Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities (*Ex corde Ecclesiae*): “Catholic members of the university community are also called to a personal fidelity to the Church with all that this implies. Non-Catholic members are required to respect the Catholic character of the University, while the University in turn respects their religious liberty” (27).

3. In his Pentecost speech, Peter declared first that **God is the Lord of History** and what takes place in the course of history transcends persons, events and circumstances. He also preached that **every person should be involved in making history**, according to God’s plan. Our work at the University, and everywhere else, is incorporated in this belief. On the one hand, we are totally aware that unforeseen events, which are beyond the person’s control, are sometimes poured to change the person’s course of life, the course of the society or even the entire world. On the other hand, we also know that the person can, and even should, work with a dynamic and positive spirit for the good, development and

joy of everyone. Every person has to sow the good, to grow and multiply the talents wherever he/she is. These two constituents of the human story guarantee success in life.

As a matter of fact, these two correlated truths are reflected in each endeavor on earth and, consequently, in our University work too. "What shall we do?" We shall make of what lies behind our actions, in other words of our intentions, a haven for these two truths. We know that our life is so minute compared to the eternity of God; yet, it is so important in His eyes. We accomplish our deeds to contribute to the good and the development of societies and persons, for God, the God of absolute goodness, is the Lord of History, and it is only with Him that victory and success prevail. The human being has to work for the good regardless of any judgments, except for when these judgments mirror the truth. The human being has to look at the Lord of History and cease saying "History will judge", for history is transmitted by humans, and it remains as imperfect as humans. The human being has to say: **"The Lord of History will judge"**.

4. Such a conviction leads to **the culture of a positive spirit** in life. We move forward full of dynamism and energy despite all the setbacks that might arise, multiplying our talents, and pleased with what we achieve for the service and the development of the person. It is this culture that conquers the culture of defeat, which considers the person incapable of influencing his/her own environment. This is equally what makes the culture of frustration fade away. The culture of positive spirit defeats the culture of the easygoingness; in other words, the culture of being indifferent, accepting things as they are and tolerating a society rotted by corrupt structures that cannot be easily demolished. The culture of positive spirit contributes to the development of society and, consequently, the development of each individual.

5. Within this framework of the culture of positive spirit, I would like to refer to a piece of land distinguished by its human and geographical characteristics, drawn on a tiny piece of planet Earth. I would like to mention the **culture of the love of Lebanon**. Lebanon is our homeland; we inhale its air, and its resources nurture us. At the same time, we often witness various hurdles and many violated rights. We witness growing difficult life conditions, economic problems, emigration, voidness, inquietude, lack of organization and work mechanism disorders. These problems engender frustration among a high majority of our compatriots. We have been lately bringing up a lot emigration that has its hazards and risks in our society. A sociologist, a historian or an economist might tackle the positive aspects of emigration as being one of the Lebanese identity constituents and as being a global phenomenon not restricted to Lebanon. They might as well highlight the fact that Lebanese emigrants eventually remain attached and render economic benefits to their homeland; thus, the debate on the repercussions of emigration remains open.

However, what is truly void of any positive aspect and what is lethal and dreadful are the spirit and culture of emigration whereby the person lives in his/her homeland while he/she loses any positive interaction with it and remains emigrant in mind. We sometimes fail to notice, in spite of the available success opportunities in any given country, that existential anxiety is omnipresent, but it takes on different facets. Dissipating it resides in the two previously mentioned principles. "What shall we do?" We shall always have faith that Lebanon is our beloved homeland and that our existence is entangled with it. We have to be positive in Lebanon in every endeavor we accomplish and every responsibility we bear. The University of the Spirit is aware that its radiance, away from any political affiliations and divisions, is a positive contribution to the building of our beloved country. For great is the contribution of the positive spirit. This is the line we should follow, and this is what we are achieving with the guidance of our Superior General Most Reverend Abbot Tannous Nehme and the General Council of the Order.

6. This is the positive spirit that has always marked the Lebanese Maronite Order, which started with two or three monasteries more than three hundred years ago and has spread today all over Lebanon and the world. The Order has extended its lands, cultivated them and established educational, cultural, medical, social and pastoral institutions. It interacted with Lebanon and all its constituents, and it even bore Lebanon in its name. This Order allowed us, thanks to the liturgical reform it has lately undertaken, to have well-structured mass and prayer books. It is this **positive and dynamic spirit** that was relayed to the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in order to make the will to develop and grow prevail. It is no secret to anyone that USEK has recorded significant developments on various levels since education, which started long ago in the Order, was initiated in Kaslik campus more than sixty years ago. The Order achieved several projects in terms of construction, establishment of programs, faculties, linkages, building staff capacities and information technology until the picture became clearer regarding what has been lately reverberating: "Evolution in continuity". This is what has consolidated our conviction that our achievements stem from the positive, innovative and gratuitous spirit of the Order. This is our pride, not the pride of the individuals but rather the pride of our mother Order.

7. The work at the University was not solely the work of monks. I think now of every student, academic, administrative and technical staff member; I think now of every person who worked with the University and helped it grow. This is why I mentioned the University community where the principles are common to all its members. I seize the opportunity to bring up the **culture of recognition and appreciation** and to thank all those who have sown the good in the University throughout its history and contributed to

its development. I know many persons have already found, and still find, their life and social growth in the University; this is a source of joy for each person who believes in its noble cause. “What shall we do?” We can have an answer from those who believed in the words of Peter and started to live a **culture of communion**, and to build communities as marvelously described in the Acts: “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44). They were “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). They excelled in the interaction of the “I” and “we”; therefore, both the “I” and the “we” grew. “What shall we do?” We shall have a **culture of communion and mutual growth**, instead of the culture of favoritism, easygoingness and of abusing the common good or the common cause. It is the **culture of the institution** that hampers the culture of “individual interests” and protects the communion of individuals with their society. The communion equally reaches all those who have frequented the University in the past as well as its prospective stakeholders in the future in a bond that elevates the individual and the community at the same time. This is why the University is proud of its plans for its alumni, our pride wherever they are.

8. As I previously mentioned, it is the culture of a positive spirit that has allowed the University to grow. In the documentary, we have seen some significant achievements that have taken place between the Pentecost of 2012 and this year’s Pentecost. I would like to thank God and all those who contributed to these achievements in any possible way. Our faith is deepened that each individual in the University is somehow contributing to its growth. Our conviction is consolidated that all the University officials have to nurture **the culture of responsibility and decision making**, the culture of creating the needed procedures and mechanisms and ensuring appropriate environments for joyful, productive, dynamic and positive work. The officials have to be in control and daringly prohibit any person or event, whether internal or external, from obstructing the advancement of the community even if it requires hard decisions. This is the culture of the simultaneous growth of individuals, communities and societies. This is what we shall do according to the Acts of the Apostles who have eliminated all that impedes the advancement of the community that stands for a noble cause. This is all part of **the culture of accountability**.

9. The logic of positive communion is what leads the officials to think of each person in or benefiting from the work of the University in any possible way. This is the culture of love that **takes into account the being of each person within the community**. This line of thought is reflected as care and concern on different humane, relational, material, architectural and environmental levels. This is what the University is striving to achieve with its staff, faculty members and students throughout the years by all possible means. It

is this very spirit that has led to the modernization of the administrative services and the elaboration of better e-mechanisms as a sign of respect to the person. It is this very spirit that has led to the adoption of the architectural master plan of the University by the Order's local and general authorities. This same spirit made the University a green oasis reflecting serenity in the University community. It has similarly led to the building of new modern and spacious parking lots, with fine touches throughout, and electric shuttles that draw smiles on the faces of their riders. As such, the University would be applying the grand principle "esthetics brings ethics". It is equally this same spirit that has led to various decisions in a range of areas that are meant to promote a continuous state of being within the University, making it a haven of peace.

**10.** It is this same spirit that makes the University commit to comprehensive excellence and adopt a broad-based **quality culture**. This is why we were thrilled during this year to acquire European accreditation from Evalag that mentioned in its report:

*"USEK presented itself as a modern and dynamic university moving forward at great speed. The university has an exceptionally clear mission and vision that indeed influences the activities and the everyday life at the university. USEK's mission to provide high quality education and to serve Lebanese society is underlying all activities of the university and is implemented consistently. The dedication of the university to its mission and to the well-being of its students exceeds the usual commitment of a university. The experts were also impressed by the dynamism of the professors and administrative staff and their identification with the university and its mission. Although USEK is focused on its regional and local community, it is open to new ideas and the international environment while at the same time preserving its traditions [...]"*

Thanks to this same spirit, the University was ranked by the World Bank among the five "high performing" universities in the MENA region.

**11.** "What shall we do?" We shall always delve into the quality culture. Only such a performance would allow a university to be globally engaged by following global trends in teaching and learning, research and student exchange. USEK global engagement is also centered on attracting high skills and competencies, acquiring grants meant to advance noble causes, and endowing students, academic and administrative staff with international competence that enables them to adapt to any work environment in a continuously globalized world. It is evident that globalization is not to be disregarded in the university realm nowadays. Within this framework, USEK has conducted equally this year, in collaboration with American and British universities, training workshops for a pool of its academic and administrative staff. These training workshops aimed at achieving steady and continuous steps **in teaching and administration**, rendering them

more dynamic and interactive instead of drowning in a world that did not witness digitalization and social media as in our era. This also comprises a continuous **technological** development. This is why we were delighted with the launching of USEK smartphone application with a new technology in Lebanon. We are also pleased to be about to finalize major changes in our IT network; thus rendering USEK the first University in Lebanon to acquire the used technology.

Students have also been given the opportunity, thanks to an advanced program adopted in American universities, to evaluate curricula, faculty members and the University life in general. This is what consolidates the culture of **rights and duties and the culture of transparency**. Moreover, we have received several suggestions and comments on the administration mail ([administration@usek.edu.lb](mailto:administration@usek.edu.lb)) and have included them in the regular administrative meetings. Such courses of action involve all the stakeholders in a shared governance process.

**12.** In the face of this broad picture, the illusion of triumphalism becomes alarming for it tears down positive spirit. Pentecost, with its cortege of events described in the Acts, leads us to what we shall do. Just as the Apostles who continued after every success to spread their beliefs to the ends of the earth, Pentecost teaches us also that a positive spirit means a **culture of perseverance** in order to make history according to the plan of God. It is worth quoting here His Holiness Pope Francis during the morning mass of April 12:

“Triumphalism is a great temptation...it is the belief that everything has been accomplished... but the truth is that everything has just started...this is why we should always move forward”. This is the core of the culture of perseverance; for the most magnificent glory loses its splendor if it is not but an introduction to what is even more glorious. This is what is considered as moving ahead according to the plan of God, the Lord of History. This is the becoming.

**13.** Within the culture of perseverance lies a discovery of a constantly changing history. Here also we are inspired by Pentecost. Peter explained the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles as a prophecy in its most general and comprehensive meaning. Prophecy is not a mere prediction of something to come in the future; it is rather the good reading of and acting in the present, every present, by delving into the values and glowing through them. This is the **culture of prophecy** that means also the courage to say the truth and to alter reality for a better one. This is why we shall always have strategic aspirations for the better.

Last year, I said that we are planning to evolve on the constructional level by building a parking lot, achieving the first part of the green university plan and initiating the project of a sports club. The first two projects have already been achieved, and the plans of the sports club are underway.

This year, I say we are aspiring for American accreditation of the University and of various programs. We are getting prepared by an enormous workshop on various levels in terms of governance, mindset, work mechanisms, teaching and learning and research. We are aspiring to spare no effort and to run steadily with the help of God.

Finally, I would like to point out instructional technologies. USEK has embraced a new international e-learning platform that was adopted by a great number of faculty members. There is another aspect of e-learning that was introduced in many universities, but it remains confusing for the university realm: online learning which means the establishment of e-campus or blended learning. This point is worth pondering upon in order to meet the requirements of the global electronic development. "What shall we do?" We shall steadily follow the global trend and not fear change.

14. My address today is an attempt to find an answer to an existential and Pentecostal question: "What shall we do?" I went through several principles and cultures to be adopted: the culture of love and individual attention, the culture of the love of Lebanon, the culture of returning to the principles, the culture of positive spirit, appreciation, communion, mutual development of the "I" and the "we", institutionalization, responsibility and decision making, quality, accountability, rights and duties, transparency, perseverance and prophecy. I have also tackled some cultures that are worth discarding: the culture of defeat, frustration, easygoingness, favoritism, indifference, abusing the common good, mind emigration and individual interests.

The focus was on sublime concepts and practical examples. But, after the focus, "what shall we do?" We, USEK community members, shall be inspired by the Disciples who, after Jesus was taken up, as stated in the same Acts, were looking up into the sky, in other words they were in a state of focus on the sublime world. What happened afterwards? The two angels coming from Heaven told them: "Why do you stand here gazing up into the sky?" (Acts 1:11). As though an invitation from the two angels to the Disciples to move forward, at all times on earth, after the focus on the sublime world, for the sake and for the love of the person and for the sake of the entire society, inspired by the principles inherited from Heaven on earth. This is what the Disciples joyfully did after having received the Spirit of the Pentecost. It is an invitation for us to joyfully spring over and



over again at the University of the Spirit, the University of the Pentecost, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to achieve “What shall we do?”.