



**Address by Rev. Fr. Hady Mahfouz, President of the Holy Spirit University of
Kaslik (USEK)**

USEK Patronal Feast

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Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

1. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the University bearing its name, has made its path in Lebanon. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, a constellation of students, professors and people have also made their path. This University is the daughter of the Lebanese Maronite Order; it therefore has its spirit, its engine spirit, which aims to work according to the mission of the Church, to the Order's charisma, whereby Church, Order and Country form a unified trinity. Let us ask the following question, 'Whose footsteps are we following?' In other words, 'Who did we follow till now and who do we want to follow?'
2. I raise this question, firstly on behalf of all the audience, for I wish to acknowledge the Founders' merit. I won't mention names, because, above all names, I would like to refer to the Lebanese Maronite Order, and to its very ancient heritage.
3. Secondly, as I imagine, future generations will ask the same question, holding us responsible for what we are doing now. Thinking of generations to come and the way in which they will raise this question, drives us more and more to a liberation from the

past and into a sense of joyful courage to move forward, cleaving the waves of history in the ship of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik; in a positive and administratively flexible mentality that is increasingly based on the ancient principles of the University.

4. Such an approach would lead us to go through the past, present and future, and invite us to take a courageous stand before history in all its dimensions. Let us consider the past without sticking to it, interact with the present, without being submerged by its concerns, and work for the future, without being devoured by the anxiety of preparing it or by the ignorance of its content. Let us listen and be inspired by all principles and commonalities across History, by the Founders' voice, by the Founding Order, the Lebanese Maronite Order that urges us to do one single thing: walk "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

A University Heritage lies in the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik

5. When speaking about foundation, a curious questioning as to the history of educational work in education and higher education within this Order is activated. I'm not here to enumerate all the phases of this history. However, it is noteworthy that education and higher education have been associated with many monasteries since the beginnings of the Order founded in 1695, especially through the sciences of philosophy and theology. In fact, this is compatible with several western universities that began teaching philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages and then developed to cover all fields in later stages. This is an extension of our monastic, Lebanese and oriental heritage, whose main concern for books, education and higher education is reflected by its most distinctive manifestation, the introduction of the first printing press in the East; within the Monastery of Saint Anthony - Kozhaya in 1610. Being in line with that heritage, and establishing a direct connection with higher education within its monasteries, the Lebanese Maronite Order decided, in February 21, 1939, to build the Kaslik campus, thereby aiming at gathering its youth and offering higher education in many fields. With the outbreak of World War II, the implementation of this decision was delayed until the Order Authority, then existing, confirmed this previous decision on the 28th of April,

1947. The cornerstone was put in place on April 15, 1949, and in 1950, first classes were held, in order to provide students with higher education. In late 1961, the first law of higher education was issued in Lebanon, according to which the Lebanese Government acknowledged existing universities, including the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, that presented its credentials, in accordance with the law, at the beginning of 1962. A new start was launched in our University, as well as in other universities that then existed. Fifty years have passed, as the University has mentioned so many times previously, since that recognition of the private universities then established in the territories of our beloved Lebanon. The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik indeed represents the expansion of higher education in the different monasteries of the Order, in a new geographic location and a new structure that has allowed it to expand to the state we have reached today, and to look forward to meeting the needs of its people in terms of new specializations. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this rich heritage has lain in the campus of Kaslik; this charming site at the heart of a city nestled between the mountains and the sea, that soothes and relieves a person of his daily occupations and concerns, lifting him up above everything, within the direction of the Lord, the Creator. This is how students, instructors, personnel and visitors feel when they take a minute to contemplate the surrounding mountains and the serenity of the golden sea, stroked by the sun, or the raging waves breaking on the shore, moving as if they are teaching a lesson on revolution and rebellion, against the reality of the flat sea.

Evolution in continuity

6. The scene gets more amazing when one meditates on the history, architecture and boundaries of our University. One would feel the touch of every year, every term, every president, every dean, every administrator, every instructor, every employee, and every student, who may have reformed some areas, made mistakes in some fields, and excelled in others. It is amazing how the construction has progressed from one era to another! It is amazing how the inner campus has become more attractive from one era to another! It is amazing how the University geography has changed from one era to

another! It is amazing how the number of Faculties has increased and how new ideas of disciplines have emerged! It is amazing how governance was formulated, developed and changed, and how University laws were set forth across the different eras witnessed by the University! It is amazing how programs were elaborated and how regional and international linkages were established! It is amazing how advanced technology was introduced and developed and what a high position it now occupies in our University! It is amazing how much research has been carried out and how important the intellectual production of the University has been! The University is also amazing for its love of its Country and the role it played at the national and liturgical level in various fields, especially in Maronite liturgical renewal.

“Evolution in continuity” is an expression which has been repeated many times recently in numerous of our University events. How true this expression is and how lovely would be a meditation upon its content. It constitutes an acknowledgment of the merit of each person who holds responsibility within the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik. It is an acknowledgment of the growth of the University, based on the different pillars that have, over a period of time, been put in place. How grateful we are to each one who faithfully served the University! It is indeed a march “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”. It is a march inspired by virtuous principles, rooted in tradition, and which aspire for a better future. It is a permanent march towards a persevering dynamic development. Allow me then to highlight certain points concerning the University. I don’t want to make a thorough report at this moment, but I would like to shed light on the logic that stimulates its actions and its governance.

Quality, Accreditation and Participation in Growth

7. This is what we are. It’s our past, our beautiful, amazing past that we cherish and are proud of. This is the double edged sword of our heritage and tradition. For some of us, it is a matter of pride passivity and assuring rigidity, while, for some others, it is a push towards the joy of progress, growth and development resting upon a stable and safe basis. Suffice to echo Abu Tammam’s saying; "The brave young man is the one who says:

I am what I am not what my father was". Hence the final word, which refers to "quality" would be the essential criterion of work. It is our target; the target which has been driving all our actions onward. In 2009, we have been pioneers in the evaluation of the European University Association and we are currently working to achieve an accreditation according to the highest European standards, whilst also preparing the University for an American Accreditation, in accordance with international standards. It is noteworthy that, two years ago, the University established the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office, in order to ensure an appropriate environment for teachers, staff, students, and all stakeholders, through different methods and climates. Therefore, various procedures have been developed and fundamental texts have been published in the University. The University launched a student evaluation process of their teachers, in addition to the "life-on-campus" evaluation process carried out by all members of the University family. We were extremely joyful last week, for this Office has introduced a program to evaluate, online, a teaching methodology carried out by the students themselves. It is noteworthy that the aforesaid program is used in many renowned western universities. Every member of the University family had the opportunity to express their comments, suggestions through an email address specifically allocated for this purpose administration@usek.edu.lb. The administration benefited greatly from received comments and suggestions that were added to the agenda of the periodic administrative meeting. Requests were answered as much as possible, according to the data possessed by the administration. This has been a truly effective contribution by the University body. Therefore I wish to reiterate my thanks to each member who expressed their opinion via this email; whether for suggestion or for constructive criticism. I would like to emphasize one more time how important it is for each member of the University family to remain or become involved in the positive logic of constructive criticism, in order to improve University affairs. I also stress the importance of possessing a spirit of proactive dynamism and initiative, and the necessity to put aside any negative spirit.

Our main concern is to build a Society of communion, rights and duties, enabling the University to become an oasis of refinement, of civilization, and a place of noble sharing between all the factions involved. This should be the concern of every one of us, because we all know that we need to effectively implement this target; not relying on officialdom, but rather becoming mindful that each one of us is responsible for their direct entourage.

Upholding the University Community can also be achieved through the activation of research, in a country that urgently needs better performance in this field. This would also be possible through the rationalization of human resources, time management and by allocating special care for the University Campus within the framework of a complete strategy that respects environmental conditions and University needs. At the architectural level, three objectives will be set ahead: making the inner Campus more attractive, building a sports complex, and creating new parking lots.

Partnership with Other Universities

8. Our University is aware of its tradition and working methods; it stresses the importance of being open to all the components of our country, specifically Lebanese higher education institutions that are recognized by the Lebanese government. Our University seeks to achieve the common good as well as our youth and society well-being. The fundamental criterion for dealing with any university is “quality”. Hence, in a brotherly manner, I would like to address all university presidents and their representatives present among us.

Speaking about universities, I would like to draw attention to the importance of redoubling our efforts, which are aimed at establishing relations with international foreign universities, in order to provide an even higher quality education in our University. “Coopetition” is a new word, formed from “Cooperation” and “Competition”, or “Competitive Cooperation”, or “Cooperative Competition”, which defines and inspires not only a new principle of university cooperation, but also defines

the inspiration within our work and our university partnership, both in Lebanon and abroad.

Electronic Thinking, Renewal of Educational Logic and Online Education

9. I previously praised the technological progress made in our University. In fact, our IT team has won numerous awards in many worldwide competitions. We updated our website, a mobile application was created and a Smartphone application will soon see the light; to better facilitate communication between our University and the different stakeholders. This electronic thinking, based on the digital world requires a major effort, in order to bring about a change in university mentality, which is not easy at all, despite the tremendous progress in this field. Digital changes and changes in educational logic urge us to update teaching methods, in order to activate student creativity and attain a greater interaction between students and professors. This is why we have established a cooperation plan with the British University of Chester, known for its interest in educational methodology, to organize training sessions for a team of our professors, in order to reach an optimal interaction with technical and educational developments. This change also encompasses educational logic and online teaching. David Brooks, author of the article entitled "The Campus Tsunami" that was published, at the beginning of this month, in The New York Times newspaper, talked about the invasion of online education in universities at the expense of face-to-face education. Traditional higher education foundations are now shaken, but we shouldn't surrender to scaremongering and seclusion, we should rather absorb this rapid change and adopt it carefully and wisely in the University. This is what has made us seek, in this same context, means of cooperation with one of the American universities.

"I "and "We", Communion and Accountability

10. These points highlight the essence of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, and promote its name. However, there are other names in the University. Let us take a close view of the University, in order to reveal its inner workings. In the "we", representing the University,

there is every "I", or in other terms, each one of us who is present in the University or dealing with it for one reason or another. The human being is at the core of the community. Every one carries his/her own history, characterized by his/her own attitudes, ambitions, worries, family or social problems, and personal experience. These "I"s do not come to the University deprived of everything that I mentioned above, they bring their whole history into the University; and this same individual history will become, in one way or another, one of the University components that should be taken into account in every step the University takes. Faithful to the mission of the Order and Church, the University cares about the person, every person and the whole person that constitutes its path and its objective. This justifies its interest in the institution and the "we", for the "I" does not live without the "we", and the opposite is true. The word of Jesus is enlightening in this regard: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (Jn 12:24). The human self does not evolve if it does not go out of itself through a love move towards the other. This is the "I" that grows accordingly with the "we", and this is the "I" which, God forbid, falls accordingly with the "we". Let us think, for instance and not exclusively, about the global financial crisis, originally resulting from individuals' greed and their consumption of the existing economic system, and about the global environmental crisis resulting from the excessive exploitation of natural resources by individuals or groups. When one realizes that one's success is derived from the community's success, one will certainly contribute to its growth, and hence will grow accordingly. This logic has been positively and clearly proven throughout the ages, yet rarely adopted in many cases; for slyness that is based on egoism, often misleads the person in question, and makes him/her tumble into a lack of intelligence. Only love, kindness and goodness are capable of sharpening up the person's intelligence and goodness. Don't we say to the Lord in Psalm 18; "To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity; to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd? (Ps 18: 26-27). In this context, many men remain persistent in the community, as they actually prove their belonging to it.

When a man really belongs to Society, communion will become its logical mainstream, rather than accountability. In this communion logic that best manifests itself within the family, neither the father, nor the mother and the children remind each other of a favor they did for the family, but, each one of them will evolve through every action they undertake. Needless to mention that the “we” and the “I” will undoubtedly in the absence of such logic fall. Thus, we only aspire to partnership in our family, that is our University. We all know that any of us, regardless of his/her position in the University, cannot pay tribute to oneself for a favor one did for the University, because family partnership is wonderful and sublime in itself. Let us all follow the word of the Lord; “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’ ” (Luke 17:10). The one who abandons the communion logic, even if he/she remains within the family, will lose in the accountability logic.

Every official plays a role in the growth of the “we” and the “I”. I am not only referring to the premier official but also to all officials, for everyone in Society is responsible. Truth, good will, love and the “we” protection are essential foundations for a lasting Society. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI stated in his encyclical letter, entitled *Charity in Truth*, “Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation” (N. 5). Truth and justice require the love and determination of the authorities, regardless of the importance of the decision which needs to be taken and the intensity of determination, even if love and truth were manifested through very strict decisions. Given such data, many are puzzled over their perspective on the University community.

Positive Vision

11. There is no doubt that the University environment is, in general, a developed and refined place. However, like every society, it has its administrative constraints and selfish calculations. Only a positive and realistic vision is needed. In a similar context, let

me open a window upon the Lebanese reality. Anxiety is overwhelming our spirit because of the current events. I don't want to tackle any of these issues at the moment, but we should look to our Lebanese reality in a positive and realistic way, for our country is not only beautiful because of its geography but also because of its human resources. We must realize that whatever country we visit carries its own share of existential anxiety. Only the fusion of realism, wisdom and good will guarantee release from this, helping us to absorb the problem, whatever it is, overcome it in a steady and noble way, and move forward joyfully. Therefore, every citizen should seek to positively and peacefully reinforce his/her small world, thereby affecting and reinforcing the larger environment, which is Lebanon. I think that a positive and realistic vision to life, in general, falls into the global and faithful vision of History. We work in the History and we change it. Let us always do the good in it. We are not the masters of History; every wise person knows well that one doesn't control History and its components; only God is the Master of History – He is the Protector and Guardian of all time.

Let us then promote our University life. Distanced from "intellectual luxury", which often leads communities to crumble, and that is indifferent to real data, we are trying to approach reality through the principles previously mentioned, according to Church teaching, to the spirituality of the Order and to the directives of our Superior General. We approach reality, as we want to move relentlessly forward, dealing with administrative constraints and selfishness, knowing that rapid growth is indeed possible, and that keeping pace with global university waves can be consciously and securely achieved, because we are moving "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit".

A Word to Students

12. Dear beloved students, you are the core of our spiritual and educational action. It is through you that the University interacts with the community and the nation. Our forward march "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", is inspired by the saints of the Lebanese Maronite Order; Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa, Saint Nemattallah and Blessed

Brother Estephan, who teach us not to have a narrow view about religion, but to be open to the other and to the absolute through multiple ways of life, and walk forward joyfully, overcoming daily problems. Your University keeps pace with technical progress and monitors the movement of university communities throughout the world, in order to give you the best. Its spirit is rooted in the virtues and mission of the Catholic Church and stems from its desire to move forward. Therefore, the University is working for everyone, without discrimination of any kind, and for every person and the whole person in all their dimensions, including the spiritual one. Dear beloved students, the University system teaches you discipline in a developed community, through your duties and your respect for the rules, and invites you to claim your rights and give your comments, in a civilized way as well, through the Student Affairs Office. You know very well that our Order is here for you through your financial hardships, and our Social Office, which has become an institution that we are proud of, is here for you. Hence, we invite you to resort to it truthfully whenever the need arises. Whoever has had recourse to this office, would be the best witness of its helpfulness. The Order is spiritually by your side through the University Pastoral Work. You can be proud of your belonging to the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, whether for its programs, technology, international affairs or campus. The Alumni Office will take, this year, the quantum leap forward so you will be able to preserve and enhance close ties with your University. I am conscious that you know very well how the University adopts any language that will contribute to your growth. Your University loves you and may God bless you all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to revert to the question I raised in the introduction, 'Whose footsteps are we following?' In other words, 'Who did we follow and who do we want to follow?' I talked about ancient times, meandering through the world of various principles and concrete actions we are undertaking. I revealed to you how the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik increasingly falls into the global university network, how its thinking is also exploring various aspects of globalization, and how it is vigilantly keeping

pace with the conditions of the international university world. I have already mentioned that we are Catholic and we seek to fulfill the utmost holistic growth of the person, every person, without any discrimination. I have said that we are the sons of the loving mother, the Lebanese Maronite Order, whose mission we seek to achieve. I have stated that we deal with our problems in a realistic, positive and faithful vision.

All of the above-mentioned points are the Holy Spirit's graces for us. So, to directly answer the question I have raised, I would say that the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik is indeed making its path, confidently, "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit".