

Address of Father Hady Mahfouz  
President of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik  
USEK Patronal Feast Day  
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1. "The University of the Spirit and the Truth". The truth is at the core of the university work. This is what Saint Pope John Paul II teaches us in his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities "Ex Corde Ecclesiae". He says: "The Catholic University shares with each university the principle of the 'joy of the truth'... It is the joy of seeking, discovering and disseminating the truth to others in all knowledge fields" (n. 2). The act of going back to the concept of truth in the University is in line with the Church's concern, as it is in line with our concern to maintain loyalty to our slogan, which we have drawn from the words of Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16: 13).  
If the University of the Spirit decides to move forward "Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", and its members wonder "What shall we do?", we would be heading towards the truth to which the Holy Spirit leads us; we will rejoice in its welcoming world, which embraces our own world.
2. We enter the world of the truth through the door of our longing for knowledge, the door of our yearning for honesty, the door of our passion for the right and for its prevalence, and through the door of our thirst for our rights. It is noteworthy in this regard that the Arabic language uses the same root for both terms, the 'right' (الحق) and the 'truth' (الحقيقة). The 'right' actually renders 'truth', which is, hence, correlated with human rights. What is qualified as true respects human rights and helps the human being grow without any discrimination, in all his/her dimensions. In fact, the University, through its continuous quest for the truth, is a *de facto* nurturer of the right in its direct and indirect community.
3. On such thresholds, the truth increasingly draws us to delve into its world; the much deeper world than we imagine. Reflecting on the Greek meaning of the word 'truth' can enlighten our reasoning. Indeed, the word truth, in the language of the ancient Greeks, is equivalent to 'not to forget' or 'not to disregard reality'. According to many intellects, this meaning is a Greek call for philosophy, a call 'not to forget' the transcendental meaning of tangibles in the daily life of the person.

4. In that world, a new characteristic of the truth is unveiled. It is beautiful to think about the roots which carry the meaning of 'truth' in Semitic languages, namely, Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew and Aramaic. In fact, it also bears stability and steadiness. However, the 'truth' is not a fossilized concept, yet its steadiness is mirrored by its good nature. In our faith, 'truth' is constant because it is absolute goodness, absolute eternity and the absolute solid rock; It is God and it can only be found in the essence of God. We, as Christians, know that the truth is in the One who told us: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14: 6). Within this very framework, it is pleasant to talk about 'truth' in 'love'. Indeed, in his encyclical letter entitled "The Light of Faith", Pope Francis says: "If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Love and truth are inseparable" (n. 27).

Seeking truth is to explore the horizons of the world and what is beyond the world *per se* and to reach what gives the truth a steady meaning, allowing the human being to move forward. Amid the struggles of life and the diverse cultures, the person enquires about the meaning of work and the meaning of life, which is tinged by absurdity and precariousness, and which is touched by the uniqueness of each and every person who might mark the other's journey. Every single day that passes provides the person with new discoveries about life and about the mystery of human beings. The truth and principles that humans believe in, when in a direct encounter with reality, are marked by every single experience, be it positive or negative. No one is spared from a strange matter that might occur, from oppression or injustice caused by a certain situation or simply by another person. In light of the existential dizziness, reverting to the truth, which is the right, emerges as a solid reference in human life. It is the steadiness that stamps the truth.

5. Within the lure of that world, we go back to the idea of 'not to forget' which distinguishes the truth, so we can be certain that it is not only related to the 'not to forget' philosophy and principles by themselves, but it is also a call in order 'not to forget' reality. Truly, through the doors which led us to its world, the truth travels with us and accompanies us in our existential journey. Truth does not feel at ease with those who seek it to evade reality and dive in the intellectual wealth that has no limits. Rather, it instills the tangible with the principle and makes the reality a good companion of the idea. It is the truth embodied in human reality in the service of humans.
6. The last consideration makes us aware that our quick intellectual journey aims to reflect our tangible reality, and namely our University, bearing with us, joyfully, what we have acquired from the world of truth. This reflects an administrative belief widespread in management: The principles guiding administrations and societies highly influence the success or the failure of a project. Strategies, planning and hard work are not enough, but principles and the will underlying the work highly influence the course of events. If the

truth is a unified principle adopted by all University members, the reality of this University will change and numerous people will rejoice in belonging to it.

7. In this part of our reflection, we might feel that our intellectual journey did not touch yet our reality, a reality tinged with some imperfections. Some of us point out a lack of truth in the behavior of this person or that. These conclusions bring us back to the rule of 'not to forget'; neither the principle nor reality. Not recognizing that imperfection is part of human nature and of societies is a lack of realism by itself. It is a lack of realism to surrender to such a reality. It is a lack of realism not to walk forward, with what we have. We shall walk and never stop our journey. Undeniably, being realistic is being certain where human beings stand in the eternal historic journey, which is in God's hands. Being realistic is doing what we have to do in order to move forward, and to change reality towards goodness, knowing that we should not give up for, the goodness we sow in history meets the absolute goodness, who is the Lord of history.

It is the responsibility of each and every person to mark his/her reality by the spirit and the truth. This is true reality! When the chains of imperfections and absurdity tangle the person, the latter has to hang on to the truth and to the spirit with complete dynamism. This is how the state of perfection becomes more reachable; this is how the persons free themselves from their chains, while continuing their journey in a chaining reality. Wherever the spirit is, freedom is, just like Saint Paul teaches us (2 Cor 3: 17). The truth will make us free; this is what the Lord Jesus teaches us (John 8: 32). Therefore, being realistic is pumping the spirit and the truth in reality so that goodness effects become abundant and consequently, evil structures would diminish and vanish. Insisting on the right is what gives the person joy and freedom. It is nice that our concept meets the words of Saint Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter "The Splendor of Truth": "Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom" (n. 1). In all of this, the work of the person is not isolated; it rather changes the reality of the universe.

8. From this perspective, we can understand the act of stressing intellectual integrity in education and research. Therefore, we can understand the global practices of universities which have been adopted in our University, such as the assessment of faculty, administrators and life on campus. We can also understand making the University "within man's reach", where every person has his/her position. Here comes the importance of respecting every person and every stakeholder, especially students, in every activity of the University, be it education, research, service delivery and interaction with the society. We have to reflect the truth in all activities; starting from orientation and admission to dealing with students until they graduate. This also extends to the post-university period by helping graduates to find job opportunities and by enabling them to become members of the University Alumni family, a family deeply interested in every student who has enrolled in the University. This is why, every person in charge has to do right and stop any

person or structure that attempts to hamper truth in the University. Therefore, disciplinary measures take place and the order is maintained. What is of ultimate importance is that any measure should emanate from the concern for goodness and truth. The intention underlying any activity, and not the activity itself, is the basis and the standard. In fact, the activity might look hard in its form; yet it could be seeking the right and the truth. Similarly, the work can look good while its intention is nothing but the opposite; in this situation it will not be in line with the truth. Didn't the devil try to tempt Lord Jesus using the most sacred means, the word of God, to achieve his evil goals? (Mt 4: 1-11)... Yet, he failed.

9. The works reflecting the truth in the University are crystallized in setting the 2030 master plan for the Institution, whereby the person would be the core and the environment would be respected and in the service of the person. This is how we can understand the extension of green spaces, the restructuring of offices that serve the students, and the enhancement of procedures aiming to facilitate all their matters. From this perspective, the University is also undertaking accreditation and evaluation processes. In fact, in addition to the European Accreditation from Evalag and the distinguished classification we acquired from the World Bank, we have initiated a review process of the University by-laws in order to be fully prepared to proceed with American Accreditation. It was a great delight when we found out that the spirit of meeting accreditation standards is now prevailing in most of our academic units. Therefore, the requests to follow the track of accreditation have doubled. Moreover, we are about to conclude an agreement with an agency in order to acquire accreditation for student services.

In this context, the transparency in dealing with every component, through clear rules and regulations, can be understood, and the multidimensional academic work acquires a significant meaning. This is one of the students' rights, one of the staff rights at the University, and one of the stakeholders' rights. It is a genuine aspect of truth in the University.

10. When we delve deeper in our reflection, we discover that our University meets the steady truth, which is a dynamic, a complete dynamic, in an innovative evolution. In the University work, truth is steady. We seek what is right and what is good for the person. We seek the truth of the nature, the person and the universe. Looking for what is right in the University, in research and in education with the concept of life, makes the University work quite noble. We all know the importance of university life in societies and nations. Steadiness is also revealed through the identity of the University; its belonging to the Lebanese Maronite Order, which upholds higher education as a core service to the truth and to the human being, is quite steady; this very Order that cherishes Lebanon and that

spares no effort to fulfill the mission it has been entrusted with as per the heart and the will of the Church. Here, I cannot but address the Most Reverend Father Abbot Tannous Nehme my heartfelt feelings for upholding truth in the Order and for the paternal love and kindheartedness he spreads in the Order. I would like also to extend my deep thanks to the Assistants General for their invaluable solicitude for our university and for the monasteries and institutions of the Order.

At the same time, truth moves forward. This is also real. Who can stop time or evolution? Some people say that we are in the era of transformations on different levels, as if we were the only people in history who witness changes. Which generation did not experience changes in a form or another? Whether it was with the discovery of fire, firearms, the car, the train, the telephone, the plane, the radio, the television or what we witness in our own era.

As a result, truth, in any era, is a catalyst for or a companion of change. It injects right in this change and makes it a means to reach its main goal, solidity and steadiness. This implies that each seeker of truth has to work continuously for development with a positive spirit.

The truth is a never-changing substance or fabric. By its yarns the robes of generations are constantly knitted, yet, in different colors and different patterns.

11. This is what draws universities to the innovative spirit and to undertake research projects with other universities or organizations, advancing consequently science. This is what pushes the Holy Spirit University, just like its homologues seeking the truth, to exert relentless efforts to be a world class University. In the era of modern technologies, thanks to the USEK Mobile App, which we launched two years ago, and to high-performing software in different fields, and thanks to the work of our IT team, USEK was able to embrace the electronic mindset as a means to achieving its noble goals and to facilitate the work of all stakeholders.

In the University meetings, we reflected on our e-thinking, and, as a result, the number of e-forms had doubled; USEK has become a pioneer in electronic procedures. Hence, we took our further steps and introduced e-learning, blended courses and online courses; we launched the e-portfolio, which will be given to each student and to each faculty to facilitate the integration of our students in the labor market, and to give international reputation to our faculty. In addition, with the introduction of the TK 20 program, the administration in the University became an e-administration and planning became e-planning. After including it in the University strategy, this program helps in the follow up and assessment of what has been achieved, and in the assessment of administrative services, so that every person in charge will be held accountable before his/her supervisor. Speaking about strategies, I would like to mention the evidence-based decision making which reflects the principle of truth or the principle of “not to forget”, or “not to disregard reality”; this would lead to the rational decision making.

12. This academic development has taken into consideration globalization and the importance of the person, the logic of global intelligence rises and global competencies come into light among students and faculty. So we can approach a new concept of “themesters”, equal to regular ‘semesters’, whereby teaching and research pertain to global issues. Globalization promotes the characteristics of an academic institution to align international agreements with the university priorities.
13. In terms of following the path of world universities, it is joyful to shed light on the University’s achievements in teaching and learning. After the first cohort of faculty, among whom are three deans, who received the Teaching and Learning certificate from Chester University in the UK, becoming thus members of the UK Higher Education Academy, another group of our faculty enrolled in a similar program with an American University. Moreover, another British university is preparing for the same program to be launched next year. The University Council has also welcomed the idea of establishing a Teaching and Learning Excellence Center.
14. It is also joyful to know that we concluded an agreement with international academic experts so that next year they can undertake a field study to examine programs, material and courses, and come up, along with our academic experts, with recommendations and, accordingly, the University Council would make the appropriate decisions in this regard.
15. All what I have stated above, would have not been possible, had it not been for the work of a University team that makes us proud. This team has faith in the University, in the truth of its belonging to the Lebanese Maronite Order, and in the principle of truth that moves the person forward. Another source of pride is the innovative dynamic that characterizes the University community in various fields and their mindset that is becoming global. On behalf of the University, I would like to thank each and every one of you and all the University stakeholders and friends for your bond of truth with the University.
16. We talked a lot about reality, yet we did not forget the ‘not to forget’ realm. How could we forget truth and life is meaningless without it? How could we forget it and it gives meaning to a long and short journey at a time? It is the journey of our University, the journey of every one of us, within the journey of history. We are well aware that the truth is the salt of the human beings to be sprinkled on our daily life, so that we rejoice knowing that our society is always in need of this truth. This is what combines the journey of

reflection with our daily life along with all its difficulties. This is what draws a smile on faces, and this is what frees the person from the chains of life. This is how we make steady steps forward and this is how we embrace positivity, how we raise the name of our country Lebanon, which we love, and how we raise the banner of the creative and true person. This is how the University of the Spirit is the University of the Spirit and the truth.