

*Founders' Day Celebration  
Haigazian University  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Monday, October 18, 2004*

#### PRESIDENT'S WORD

Mr. Baalbaki,  
Mr. Ambassador,  
Dear friends, colleagues, and students,

First, let me say how honored we are to have Mr. M. Baalbaki as our guest of the day. There is no better symbol of the nation to host today, than the symbol of knowledge, information and the freedom of the press, the press...our partners in learning and enlightenment.  
Therefore, I would like to present to Mr. Baalbaki a token of our friendship.

Today's event marks the start of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. We start to celebrate by remembering those who founded this institution. Proper tribute was given to the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE) and the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and the leadership of Revs. H. Aharonian, and P. Kalfayan, and also to Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Mehagian and Mr. Stephen Philibosian of the USA. Mention was made of two high schools whose programs led to the establishment of a College. All of the above, in one way or another, are considered as founders of Haigazian.

I would dare to say, however, that Armenag Haigazian, in whose name and memory the university was established, is symbolically *a founder behind the founders*, and therefore I would argue that the foundations of the founders need to be discovered, and I believe they have lessons for all.

Let me now name three of these foundations:

1. A sense of calling and service: One does not live for oneself alone. Armenag Haigazian's significance was not his personality, talents, and prestigious education alone, but rather his willingness to put these all in the service of God and the people. Even more radical is the fact that he risked his life by returning from the safety and promise of New Haven, Connecticut to the genocidal soil of unpromising and unsafe Turkey. And he eventually fell victim to the disasters that befell his people, and died. Is this sense of **Service** not a key motto of our university today, derived from our faith in a God who calls all to service?
2. A true and comfortable belonging to his people and context. It is no accident that Armenag Haigazian, and the two major donors of our university in 1955 came from a town in Eastern Turkey, the Armenian populated Hadjin. Not only that Haigazian felt he strongly belonged to his people, but one of his students, Stephen Mehagian, later his son-in-law, and another friend from the same background, Stephen Philibosian, felt they had to proudly and humbly honor their people through the honoring of a symbol, martyr of their town and nation. Denial of identity, insecurities of belonging, deception, and alienation stand behind many crises. Is it not a major concern of ours in Lebanon that one should make the best of one's identity and people? Is it not a concern that some groups and nations in the world want to annihilate other

- groups and identities thus living the lie that all identity should be one identity? **Truth**, another component of our motto starts with the discovery of the self, and the discovery of the truth God the creator represents.
3. It is no accident that the experience of an Armenian-owned university only succeeded in Lebanon! Lebanon had been a haven of the free in a context of education, openness, dialogue of civilizations, and continuity with the outside world. It is what Armenag Haigazian's context missed early in the twentieth century Ottoman Empire. In this sense, this American style institution, with Armenian identity and Lebanese outlook not only integrated the Armenians with non-Armenians, be they Arabs, Greeks, or Americans, but initiated in 1960 a scientific symbol of freedom, that is, a series of rockets called the Cedar to stamp its first decade with innovation and advancement. Thus, the third part of our motto, **Freedom!**

Let us remember that "Truth, Freedom, and Service" with their highest meaning challenge us today.

I feel comforted by the fact that we do not need to say everything here today in order to pay respect to all those who have deserved it in the 50-year history of Haigazian. This is only the first occasion, and many will follow.

I cannot close here before I acknowledge the presence of a number of significant people.

- First, I would like to respectfully greet Mrs. Maggie Matossian, who has been a member of the Board of Directors of Haigazian since the very first year, and later the founder of the Women's Auxiliary.
- Then, I would like to greet a number of alumni who represent the first class to register as students at Haigazian in 1955. (*Lucy Tabakian, Salim Dally, Vartkes Eskibashian, Basim Maamary*).
- And I would like to greet General Joseph Wehbe, who represented the Lebanese Army early in the 1960's in the Lebanese Rocket Society founded by Haigazian. (*Flowers*)
- Add to that our respect to all those who have made Haigazian what it is today, and who will be remembered in later celebrations next June. So many people in Lebanon and the USA, who had identified themselves for some time with Haigazian University have worked, prayed, paid, planned, studied, taught and then moved on. Our deep respect to them. Persons are the key to institutions, we say. But then the persons disappear. But the institution carries on the torch and the motto. Therefore, their work does not go in vain. Still, respect if due also to the anonymous or unrecognized persons.

May Haigazian University remain true to its noble ideals, and may God sustain Lebanon as an educational haven where we can all serve and build.

*Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D.  
Beirut*