

*Founders' Day
Haigazian University
Monday, October 13, 2008
12:10 PM*

President's Word

Your Excellency, Minister of Culture Mr. Tammam Salam,
Honorable Guests, dear Colleagues and Students,

During the end-of-year Graduation ceremony, we celebrate the accomplishments of the graduating students one by one, person by person. Whereas when we celebrate Founders' Day in October, we focus on the deep foundations of the university which make the end of year celebration possible and worthwhile. Graduation is rewarding and valued because Founders' day is meaningful. Today, two major characteristics of Haigazian University from days of foundation and throughout 53 years of educational mission come to mind:

On Profit

1. One of the ongoing strengths of universities such as Haigazian, is the healthy discussion of what constitutes profit. As you know, we are called "not-for-profit", which means that our mission is to serve the real educational interest of individuals, groups, and communities without any commercial profit. When one is founded on a not-for-profit basis one feels that earthly roots join the heavenly roots of life.

On the one hand, being not-for-profit is a virtue, because an institution with a mission to serve should never become hostage to greed. On the other hand being not for profit is a challenge, because all humans and institutions need resources to continue and develop and serve.

The discussion therefore is what type of profit we should pursue. Obviously, for a university it is not monetary profit. It is not sectarian profit. It is not profit for the strong, and not profit that is temporary. We have learnt well, that one may gain the wealth of the whole market but lose oneself. We have seen that profit that is not sustainable is no real profit. Profit that is not shared in community and profit that is not shared globally is short-lived, short-sighted profit. It is shameful profit to dump extra food in one place when another faces hunger and starvation.

Profit is determined by the degree of edification, harmony, dialogue, selflessness, goodness, creativity, balance, and wisdom that we can conceive in our midst. It is in the image of a loving God that we live out.

On Culture

2. From its very inception, culture has been most emphasized at Haigazian University and has shaped the curriculum, the community, the atmosphere, and even the extracurricular activities. Since 1955, cultural events, lectures, performances, people and courses have created an intercultural mood. In fact, every discussion of Armenian culture has been a dialogue with adjoining cultures. Every presentation of Lebanese culture has highlighted the wealth of outside influence on what we call Lebanese. Even the founding of this institution has been an intercultural enterprise, Armenians from Lebanon and the USA envisioning a dynamic

partnership for the sake of an enriched Lebanese identity. It is so natural for us here to call the sequence of courses where cultural education is given as *Intercultural Studies*. That is because all fine culture is fundamentally intercultural. Intercultural does not mean lack of culture or diluted culture or confused culture. Rather it means good communication, learning, and sharing.

The year 2008 has been declared as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue simply because the various components of European culture need to be highlighted for the benefit of all.

On the other hand, American author Greg Tanaka in his The Intercultural Campus: Transcending Culture & Power in American Higher Education suggests that for people of various cultures and belongings to enrich their shared life, small groups of storytelling need to be encouraged. Stories of past and place need to be shared.

Many in Lebanon and even Haigazian assume they know enough about the others. But I am sure there is much that is critical and enriching that people do not know about the other cultures and communities with whom they live. Of course, we cannot also *over-share* our stories and dismiss others' stories, nor can we make Lebanon clash over my story versus your story, my culture versus yours. In Lebanon there is much emphasis on what cultural, sectarian, political group we belong to, yet not enough emphasis on what contribution each has to bring to the common arena.

Let us remember, good life is always intercultural. Sustainable college education is always intercultural.

We thank God today for all those who transmitted to us the heritage that I have just described, where profit is as shared and broad as possible, and where cultured people are bred in an intercultural atmosphere. We often call this the Haigazian experience.

Thank you, and may our foundations keep lifting us high.

Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D.
president