

Speech of Rector René Chamussy, s.j.

## **The University and Research Training**

on the occasion of Université Saint-Joseph's Patron Saint Day  
celebrated on March 19, 2008



Rectors of the Universities of Lebanon,  
Presidents of Professional Associations and Syndicates,  
Instructors,  
Representatives of the General Service Staff,  
Student Representatives,  
Presidents of Alumni Associations,  
Dear Friends,

In the Apostolic Constitution dedicated to Catholic universities and promulgated by Pope John Paul II on August 15, 1990, the following can be read, *“The basic mission of a university is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society (...). A Catholic university, as any university, is immersed in human society... Included in its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of*

*human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level..."* (n. 32).

I think that such words cannot but have a great impact on each one of us. We all believe that the mission of our University is to transfer knowledge in order for new generations to be part of the construction process of the city; it must be important for us to see our University in the lead of research in many fields that concern us. We had previously mentioned this problem in 2004 when we were talking about instructors-researchers, but we wish to detail it this year, while taking into consideration the students' training, for it is essential to understand that our basic mission is this continuous quest for the truth, this always incomplete research that will lead us to the heart of the matter as well as to the depth of our society problems. We must talk today of this urgency, of this radical obligation. Our University should be a university always in quest for truth, always researching all the fields of its specialties, trying to develop them, day after day.

However, we should not delude ourselves. If we wish to be, as all academics should be, real researchers, it is important not to forget that this is not a talent sent by heaven, but an aptitude – manners and abilities at the same

time – that we should acquire and develop and the many parameters of which do not come down to such or such data. Research is indeed, first of all, the outcome of a training that would have taught us to weigh things as well as to discover methodological paths needed for any quest. Research is then the acceptance to work with others. Research must finally be a personal passion and a certain capacity to spread our creativity in order to allow the birth of new techniques, new concepts and, all in all, a different world.

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## **I- Research or the Outcome of a Training**

To assert that to be born is to come into the world with a more or less refined curiosity does not mean that we are born a researcher; this is perhaps one of the obvious truths we call truisms. However, this curiosity exists and it is important to say it when we see so many students confine their role to the mere act of repetition and so many instructors sometimes pleased with this imitation yet far from encouraging. It is obvious that if we wish to have students inclined to research, it is a whole training process that must take place, a training for a critical mind, a methodological training, and a training for what Paul Ricoeur called the “ethical competence”.

A training for a critical mind first of all. It is important not to be misled by the meaning of this expression for, in

our Jesuit pedagogical tradition, it is eminently positive. It involves a serious training for reflection, analysis, and debate without prejudices, so that the student can distinguish between “*the just and the unjust, the organized and the disorganized, and the worthy and the unworthy*” and can therefore become receptive to the truth. All in all, to have a critical mind does not mean to “criticize everything”, but to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, to be able to “solve” the data of any problem so that the research can start in a serious and organized manner.

We say “in a serious and organized matter” because no research can take place without this essential distinction, nor without a serious methodology. Others have often insisted on this necessary parameter for all those who wish – and our students should wish – to launch out into research. We assert that learning such a methodology is very important for us with regard to our pedagogical concern. It is clear that from the first years of the university training, courses that will allow the students to master their intellectual abilities and to create the first protocols that will enable them to discover and master processes necessary to any research should be implemented.

Finally, one thing should be said about what Ricoeur called the “ethical competence” or, in other cases, the “ethical aim”. It seems important to us that the apprentice researcher does not venture out without knowing where he is going and why he is acting this way. Ricoeur developed

his thought and stressed that the one who has an ethical aim is first of all the one who works from the viewpoint of a *life good for oneself and for the world*; he does not work blindly; he can organize his processes; he operates deliberately. Then he is the one who works in order to live well *with and for the others*, and it is in view of this altruistic “concern” that he should lead his research. The ethical aim finally means that we do not only work for interpersonal relationships, but that the institution as a whole should be taken into consideration; we must work with the prospect of *justice* for the historic community we belong to. Concern for oneself, concern for others, concern for the justice of human institutions, it is with this triple preoccupation that the researcher will be able to confront the world<sup>1</sup>, to work and to do his best to create new products that could transform life.

Training for a critical mind and distinction, acquisition of a methodological competence, immersion of sound values in a very open ethical aim, these are the main paths to set prior to any research attempt. It is obvious that this ability can only be acquired progressively and that it requires a consistent general knowledge basis. From this viewpoint, we can only be delighted we have a university system that, after offering very simple yet essential introductions to research in the Bachelor’s degree – i.e. our famous ‘TPC’

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1. Paul Ricoeur. *Lectures 1*, pp. 258-270. Seuil 1991. Cf. Paul Ricoeur. *Anthologie*, p. 312. Seuil-Essais 2007.

(controlled personal work) – allows us to have a fresh look at these first acquisitions in the Master's degree, prior to launching out into this famous research, this research whose true structures we must discover in the Doctorate.

## **II- Research, a Shared Task**

If research is the outcome of any training, it is also a dimension to build and rebuild through the process of its achievement. This work to be accomplished does not only lie in its achievement, but also in the context from which it is issued. It is from this viewpoint that we must recognize we should always work with other researchers, researchers from other fields and other cultures.

Teamwork first. It is not always very obvious. In several fields, the student will often discover and execute alone his first research work. This is how he will pursue his path in research, except for laboratory constraints. If a Faculty or USJ's Research Council itself decided to concentrate all research subjects on one theme, it would lead to a chorus of protests: each one takes a very limited view of things. Yet, it should be obvious that it is only when a researcher combines his efforts with those of another that he will be able to achieve his work, to be taken seriously and to find the means necessary for his research. True, working in the research field requires the scientist's personal commitment, yet it can only be achieved through the sharing of efforts within a real team.

This concern for teamwork can only lead to another infringement of the researcher's autonomy; it is clearly interdisciplinarity. Please allow me to quote here the sociologist Edgar Morin who boldly flays researchers who shut themselves up in their own field, "*The disciplinary frontier, its language and its own concepts will isolate the discipline from the others and from problems overlapping disciplines. The hyperdisciplinary spirit will become a spirit of ownership that forbids any foreign incursion into its plot of knowledge*". However, Morin stresses that, "*the history of sciences is not only the one of the making and the proliferation of disciplines, but also the one of the dissolution of disciplinary frontiers, of the encroachment of a problem or a discipline upon another, of the circulation of concepts, of hybrid disciplines that will end up autonomous; finally, it is the history of training centers where different disciplines will incorporate and congregate*"<sup>2</sup>. Some will probably think that Morin is carried away by his passion; nevertheless, by inviting researchers to open up to other skills – not to stop being themselves – the eulogist of complexity shows us the way that should allow us to work together. In fact, this is what discovered those who knew how to live in a company, during trainings.

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2. E. Morin. *La complexité humaine*. Textes choisis. Champs. Flammarion 1994.

While we are at it, and only because we are what we are, it is obvious that our researches, particularly those produced in human and social sciences, should bear the intercultural seal. For example, we can no longer think of democracy according to only the Western masters; other cultural zones can only enrich our thoughts and help us perhaps find new approaches in this field.

Teamwork, interdisciplinarity and interculturality, these could be the first dimensions of a real commitment from our University in research. It is obvious that this insistence on group research does not deny the importance of personal research; it simply situates it and shows the starting point and/or the safe rampart of a societal commitment that can only be more enriching.

### **III- Research in University, a Transformation**

We talked about the required skills and the main features of research. Prior to going any further, it is certainly important to note how considering research as an essential parameter of our University leads to changes in our thinking and acting habits. Research was certainly never forgotten in the ways we dream of and live the University: laboratories and research centers have existed for a long time and are even sometimes of high quality. We can mention our Medical Genetics Unit that was just recognized as an “Inserm Associate Laboratory”, our University Observatory on the

Socio-Economic Reality whose studies stand out, or our other laboratories in the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Sciences or the Faculty of Pharmacy, and many more. However that may be, we were first concerned with our students' professional training, and research only appeared at the end of the training and did not concern all students, as not many registered for Ph.D. studies.

I think that at the end of the war and with the proliferation of universities in Lebanon, our concern to improve our Ph.D. studies and to establish our doctorate schools was necessary to preserve our excellence. Thus, the pressure put in all faculties on research. It is clear that this dimension led to a real transformation, as did the high increase in our number of students these last years.

This transformation showed in the number of Ph.D. students, then Ph.D. holders, a new population that had its demands and that established the Research Council within the Rectorate and then other institutions such as Berytech and the Health and Technology Pole, while other demands showed in the researchers themselves. Beyond the knowledge of their specialty, they had to learn how to run a work with multiple parameters. One must acknowledge that it is not easy to prepare a research project, to evaluate it and to place it in relation with other research projects in and outside the University; it is not easy to obtain the needed grants, to plan for valuations, and to find the necessary collaborations. In short, it is not easy to be part of the corpus

of well-known researchers, a promotion that requires today original management skills in addition to a specialization.

At the same time, the University also has its responsibilities; it should allow the student to become a researcher, through its institutions. This requires very solid training and supervision structures. This also requires a very sound training for methodology, an institution policy regarding the theme choices so that the student does not get lost in the beginnings of a research or does not think that research is a mere formal display of unreliable and uninteresting data. Learning research, as well as the effective productions of the new researcher, involves skills that are not granted and that should be developed relentlessly.

We should insist on this point. Research is a work in itself, but choosing research themes, finding the finance as well as the commitment to enrich this research, i.e. before and after the research, are very important steps that should be taken into consideration in each institution of our University.

– *With regards to the theme problem*, the Vice Rector for Research set the framework in which it is possible to work. So did the officials of the Health and Technology Pole as well as the ones of the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Sciences. It is now important that each institution enables its budding researchers to elaborate their research subjects within these specific frameworks. It is clear that basic research to which we are less equipped will be less than applied research, the one that gives greater importance to

the fields where lie all the social problems that torment us: environment, risk management in all fields, construction of the city while respecting the citizens' security, etc.

– *With regards to financing these researches*, it is clear that the University cannot be absent from this field; it is worth mentioning that from 1995 until now, the Research Council was able to provide more than 6 million dollars for 400 projects of different scales. This commitment still exists. However, it is insufficient and should be completed by grants that the researcher will enjoy finding here and there.

– *As for enhancing the value of the research* finally, it seems to us that it should be taken care of by each institution: the integration to high quality indexed publications, the creation of patents or start-ups worthy of being part of Berytech, the effective participation in international conferences; all this helps create the image the whole University really needs.

These are the commitments we are bound to achieve if we wish to come through this transformation imposed by research in the University. Instructors and officials, we should all revise our teachings and our requirements regarding our students' performance in order to set a real research education with a true collaboration among all. Our former Rector, Father Ducruet said one day in a conference, *“There should be no difference between higher education and research. Higher education is shared research”*<sup>3</sup>.

3. Jean Ducruet. *L'Université et la Cité*, Beyrouth 1995, p. 94.

## **IV- Research, Create, Innovate**

Research at University is thus an essential dimension of our mission, but in this field, it would be illusive to make it a simple incantation, a “spirit” that would live in us because we have decided so; research exists because it is simply inherent in the teaching we have to offer, because we also live in a world, a region and a country that await answers to their questions from academics and researchers, and finally because to research means, at the same time, to refuse fate and to create, to innovate and to change the world.

We said that research is inherent in the teaching; this can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, research exists only if our instructors give us the taste for it and the skills that would help us achieve this research; we mentioned earlier the training for methodology and its very necessary set-up. On the other hand, it is research that allows us to energize our teachings and to build them differently. Of course, there are certain basic realities that will not change in the coming years and that will always be demanded. However, the one who is teaching and carrying on with his research cannot but see its course differently and present it with a new look and preoccupations, contrary to the one who keeps rehearsing the same course. The ossification of a teaching can certainly occur because of a great indifference to the pedagogical dimension of the knowledge transfer and we all know that our students

who are used to highly performing media today are very sensitive to this dimension. However, at the University, it is inevitably due to not taking into consideration problematics updated by research, as well as questions that suddenly arise here and there. This applies to “hard” sciences as well as human and social sciences. It thus seems very clear that a teaching that is not fed by the continuous movement of research (researches specially undertaken for teaching, applied research as well as basic research) will only decline and sink into insignificance.

Therefore, the first meaning of research at University is obvious; it must exist so that we can offer a high-quality teaching. But we cannot only have this prerequisite. Research is not only what nurtures a teaching; it is also this essential act we perform that discovers the keys of this world and that offers everyone the means to overcome fate. This is essential. From the most poignant poet – because the poet is of course a researcher! – to the most obscure laboratory assistant, from Einstein to our most humble discoverers, we move forward surrounded by a crowd of men and women eager to find out the mysteries of this world for it to be more able to let the people live and let them live together.

The mission of the University is to allow the men and women who live in it to serve their societies and to do their best, in all fields, to open them to new developments. At a first level, this involvement certainly calls for a social commitment, the commitment of the citizens that allows

all people to discover the true country that is ours and to act accordingly for it to emerge from its misery and misfortune. These first acts are essential and this is the meaning of what we called Operation 7<sup>th</sup> Day, a disinterested act that some of you decided to perform in favor of Lebanese citizens. At a second level, this involvement concerns us as professionals who have to build, develop and bring alive a country; this is how the achievement of the quality process must allow us to improve our performance in this field. Yet, at a third level, it is as researchers that we must be involved to discover what can help us eliminate obstacles, to transform the world, to simply innovate. Each and every one of us can be involved in these three levels: citizens, professionals, researchers, we can be all that at the same time; clearly, we can also be more one than the other. The important thing is that at the end we remain eager builders of this country that is always undergoing great ordeals and of this region that knows what it can expect from Lebanon.

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## **Conclusion**

Professor Mounir Chamoun, Vice Rector for Research, likes to say, *“The essential condition in order for university creativity to keep alive is that it leads to the training of competent, motivated and available researchers. Competent*

*means skilled and experienced enough to participate in a research or to lead one. Motivated means committed to a research considered a place for the achievement of oneself and where the researcher finds pleasure, an ever enriching interest. Available means able to grant the research the necessary time without becoming invading and without smothering the other fields necessary for the blossoming of the person's skills".* This objective, as expressed by Professor Chamoun, seems to me perfectly right. However, I think that it should be completed by the ability to work collectively on what we wanted to insist.

For us, it is not simply a question of manufacturing researchers, of giving them a better status, of providing them with the means needed to work, but we must turn our University into a place for research and creativity where all actors act and interact, search and lead this research, discover and share the wanted resources, produce and endlessly enrich new researches, for themselves and for those who are eager to obtain these products and these novelties that surround us.

It is easy to say that there is no University without research. It is more difficult for us to do this transformation we mentioned. Because, as we said, it involves a change in mentality, because it forces on us financial dependencies that may somewhat alienate our freedom. We often talk in the speeches on the University today about the dependency a subsidized research may entail. For us, we shall never

forget that we must always remain free with regards to the desires of power and commercial interests. “*The true place of the university in the city is not that of any other corporation, but it is Socrates’ (...), the one that bothers, disconcerts, destabilizes...*”<sup>4</sup>, wrote a professor of basic ethics at the University of Ottawa. If higher education adopts the principles, the approach and the language of industry and commerce, how could it remain free? We should never forget that this freedom is our living condition, even in research.

*Translated by Nadine Riachi Haddad*

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4. Aline Giroux. *Le pacte faustien de l'Université*, Liber, Montreal 2006, p. 172.

