REMARKS BY THE AGA KHANS III & IV ON VARIOUS RELIGIOUS AND INTELLECTUAL ISSUES IN ISLAM
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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on secularism and Islam's reconciliation with it

"The Muslim world offers deep roots in a system of values emphasising service, charity and a sense of common responsibility, and denying what it sees to be the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Massachusetts Institute of Technology Commencement Ceremony address (Cambridge, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1/

"God has favoured me with the blessing of Islam. I think that many religions find it difficult to adapt to or to live in an evolving world. Not so with a Muslim who believes in the omnipresence of God. In Islam, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal. I have endeavoured all my life to live and work in accordance with this integrated philosophy. I think that many of us, Muslims who were educated in the West or have been imbued with Western ideas, forget that there are certain Christian traditions which go back to the teachings of Saint Augustine and which sharply separate the religious from the secular. These are not the traditions of Islam. Quite the contrary, Islam forbids the separation between the way you deal with people in society and that in which you discharge your religious duties. The meanings of life, its aims and ethics are part and parcel of the integrated unity of the Muslim environment in which I believe and through which I work."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1986 Riad Naguib El-Rais Interview, 'The
"With the deaths of King Charles the First, and Louis the Sixteenth, Western culture initiated a process of secularisation which grew into present day democratic institutions, and lay cultures. Islam, on the other hand, never endorsed any political dogma. So the historical process of secularisation which occurred in the West, never took place in Muslim societies. What we are witnessing today, in certain Islamic countries, is exactly the opposite evolution, the theocratisation of the political process. There is no unanimity in the Islamic world on the desirability of this trend but it would certainly be less threatening if the humanistic ethics of the faith were the driving force behind the processes of change."

Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: Does daily life carry the same importance as eternal life?

Aga Khan: In Islam, they are the same thing. One cannot separate faith from the world. This is one of the greatest difficulties that the non-Muslim world has, because the Judaic Christian societies developed with that notion of separation. For the Muslims, that separation is not possible. We are expected to live our faith every day, in every hour. One of the difficulties that we are facing in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, is the articulation of the difference in values in a comprehensive form. However, this does not mean that we are in conflict. They are just different values. [Emphasis added]

Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: One of the differences is locality, debated in countries such as Portugal, Turkey, and France.
For many, faith should remain confined to a private space. You mentioned that Islam doesn’t separate faith from the world. How do you perceive this notion?

**Aga Khan:** I would like the non-Muslim societies to accept the values of Islam. If Islam says that we do not separate the world from faith, the Western world should accept that. I would go further and say: it is a wonderful way to live! It is an extraordinary blessing to be able to live our faith everyday! Making ethic the way in which you live your daily life, and not only in occasions such as death, a marriage or a birth. I am not criticising anyone. I am saying that secular society, by the nature of secularity and the demands of time, provokes in people the need to first place the world and faith after. This is not a part of Islam.

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**Stefan Aust / Erich Follath:** Provocative, sad and distasteful. But the freedom of the press is one of the highest values in our democracy. We have to balance one thing against the other and we will allow non-believers to express even outrageous opinions.

**Aga Khan:** I think that you are now referring to one of the most difficult problems that we have and I don’t know the answer. The industrialised West is highly secularised; the Muslim world is much less secularised and that stems largely from the nature of the faith of Islam, which you know and I know has an intrinsic meshing with everyday life. And that is a scenario where people of goodwill need to think very, very carefully.

**Stefan Aust / Erich Follath:** In some of your speeches you mentioned Kemal Ataturk in a positive context. Turkey followed his path and is one of the very few countries with a predominant Muslim population where there is separation of church and state. Would you like to see others go the same way?
Aga Khan: I am not opposed to secularism as such. But I am opposed to unilateral secularism where the notions of faith and ethics just disappear from society.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Spiegel Online Interview (2nd), Stefan Aust and Erich Follath, 'Islam Is a Faith of Reason' (Berlin, Germany) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7900/

"Historically, the arts, including architecture, have taken their principal inspiration from religious faith. But when art is separated from faith-based roots, other influences can dominate -- including soulless technology and empty secularisation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 Aga Khan Award For Architecture Prize Ceremony address (Doha, Qatar) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9616/

"I fully understand the West's historic commitment to separating the secular from the religious. But for many non-Westerners, including most Muslims, the realms of faith and of worldly affairs cannot be antithetical. If 'modernism' lacks a spiritual dimension, it will look like materialism. And if the modernising influence of the West is insistently and exclusively a secularising influence, then much of the Islamic world will be somewhat distanced from it."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement address (New York, USA) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/

"[I]t is striking to me how many modern thinkers are still disposed to link tolerance with secularism and religion with intolerance. In their eyes -- and often in the public's eyes I fear -- religion is seen as
part of the problem and not part of the solution. To be sure, there are reasons why this impression exists. Throughout history we find terrible chapters in which religious conflict brought frightening results. Sometimes, a part of the problem grew; it came from proselytising in which faith was not so much shared as imposed. Again in our day, many ostensibly religious voices aggressively affirm a single faith by denying or condemning others."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 Acceptance Address for the Tutzing Evangelical Academy’s ‘Tolerance’ Award (Tutzing, Germany)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7706/

John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: You’ve spoken in the past, well before September the 11th, about some of the difficulties or challenges of Muslim nations to secularise. Is that still a great challenge for those countries, and do you foresee it happening in the near term?

Aga Khan: I can’t give you a single answer to that, and the reason is that the history of these nations is very different one from the other. If you were to take the Central Asian republics, their relationship to the faith of Islam, relationship to democratic processes is very different from what happens in other parts of the world. But I think the more over-riding issue is the issue of theocracy versus secular state, and I think that at this point in time, the vast majority of countries within the Muslim world have recognised the difficulty of a theocratic state, and these difficulties are due to many different forces in these countries. But also, the pluralism within Islam. Because if you create a theocratic state, automatically you are saying there must be an interpretation which is the state interpretation of the faith. So that alone is a very, very difficult question to ask. And you can see, I don’t have to name the countries, you can see what happens when these internal stresses occur in states which would present themselves as theocratic states. So I think the answer is most of them are going towards a secular state, but I would want to avoid the notion of a secular state without faith. What we are talking about are states that want to
have modern forms of government but where the ethics of Islam remain the premises on which civil society is built. And I think that's where we see this -- to me very exciting -- effort to maintain the ethics of Islam, but in a modern state. And I think when we're talking about the ethics of Islam, it's easier to have civil society institutions built on the ethics of the faith, than a theocratic state in the full form.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 Globe and Mail Interview (3rd) with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6120/

Michael Charlton: Is there an ideal form of Islamic government?

Aga Khan: I don't think, you know, you can talk about Islamic government. If you go back to the Qur'an, there is no government mentioned in the Qur'an.

Michael Charlton: I know, you all say that. All Imams and all political leaders in Islam say that. On the other hand, it seems to me that those divisions between the religious and secular life in Islam are, in fact, the, at the heart of all development and they have to be addressed ...

Aga Khan: They have got to be addressed, that is absolutely correct.

Michael Charlton: Who wins? What comes out top, religion or the secular process?

Aga Khan: I couldn't generalise on that. It depends entirely on the society of the land you are talking about. You know, I simply can not make a comparison between an Arab country in the Middle East and Indonesia, but they are there. We are talking about too...it's too vast an Empire, you know, we are talking about hundreds and millions of people covering so many different races and languages.

Michael Charlton: But is it a genuine revival of religion in your
view? There [sic] consistency that appears to be against secularisation?

**Aga Khan:** You could interpret it that way. You could also interpret it as a desire of certain peoples within the Muslim world to return to a pre-colonial position.

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"During the long periods of interregnum between the destruction of empire and the re-attainment of sovereignty, Islamic culture -- already, as I have said, forced into hibernation -- was further weakened by the West becoming the focal point of international economic development, with a resultant emphasis on Western cultural and artistic values.

"Even when the Islamic states did recover political independence, sometimes within freshly-drawn frontiers, they were brought into being as reflections of Western concepts of nationhood. The most obvious example of this was Turkey, which Ataturk reshaped from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire as a secular state in the belief that the adoption of Western patterns would enable his country to achieve a Western degree of economic development."

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"There is still time to prevent the repetition here of that clash between the conservative and modernist elements in Muslim society. I know that the educated classes hope that with the general spread of instruction and learning amongst the people, there will be no need
to work for a better understanding of dynamic Islam as it prevailed in the first century. But if a middle way is not found now, while there is time, there is almost a certainty that the day will come when the progressive elements faced with the dangers of being left far behind amongst the nations of the world, will clamour and demand a secular state, or decay. But now is the time to build up that free Islamic state mentality of toleration, mental and spiritual charity, forgiveness towards each other, on one side, and, what [the] Qur’an and the Tradition both insisted on, namely, that nature is the great daily book of God whose secrets must be found and used for the well being of humanity. Islam is essentially a natural religion, the miracles quoted in the Qur’an are the great phenomena surrounding us and we are often told that all these manifestations can be used and should be, with intelligence, for the service of man. Let us never forget that in the struggle for existence of the future only those will survive who control the forces of nature to the greatest extent.”

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1950 broadcast message on Radio Pakistan, ‘Build up that free Islamic state mentality’ (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10452/

"[T]he fact must be faced that there is either an open or hidden clash between the conservative and the progressive elements in Muslim society. In Turkey this clash had led to a secular state. In Egypt it is there between the Ikhwan and the Governing classes. It threatens itself in the opposition between the so-called Darul-Islam and the responsible Government in Indonesia. Thank God it is not in Pakistan. But unless a healthy middle way such as existed in the first century is found, the ship may be on the rocks again. Pious Muslim thinkers who face realities in Egypt, North Africa and Iran known all about it. I hope and pray that it may be the destiny of Pakistan whose creator Quaid-e-Azam was essentially a modern man to bring about this spiritual and intellectual unity. Here and now and by not only its example but its mediation and influence prevent it ever again from leading to final break as it did in Turkey, in any other Muslim state and society. With this prayer I wish you every success
both in the material, intellectual and the spiritual world."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1950 Pakistan Institute of International Affairs address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10053/

"Today, the world is divided into theocracies and secular states. Sometimes people talk -- quite rightly -- about the three nations which are, each in its own way, theocratic, namely Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia. If they were to change, you would have a different world. If I dare say it, politics should be left to politicians, and God to God."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 Politique Internationale Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye, 'The Power of Wisdom' (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/

"Second, you [graduands] are graduating with a professional qualification. The courses that led to your degree have their powerful internal logic; your profession has its assumptions about standards, and increasingly about its rights and privileges. But the world you enter will not be labelled physiology, cardiology and genetics; it is a world of unwell, fearful people. Professional standards and assumptions can provide a form of intolerance, pride and myopia as intractable as the rigidities of traditional societies. As you know far better than I, science alone will not give us much guidance on when to prolong human life and whether to intervene in its creation.

"The industrialised world only rather recently has rediscovered that these questions engage not merely professional ethics and standards; they touch the deeply held convictions of a Judeo-Christian tradition, an idea of humanity that has challenged the prophets and philosophers for thousands of years. Nations cannot assign these issues to a priesthood of scientists; they require the resources of the human spirit as well as the mind. The Islamic world is dealing with
these questions on two fronts simultaneously; first, in the reintroduction of science and its sceptical world view that it is not part of current tradition; second, Islamic societies are rediscovering the importance of the modern, secular world of their Islamic ethical underpinning. Is it any surprise that there is soul-searching and social upheaval, but also intellectual vitality and tumult, among the people of the Islamic world?"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1987 McMaster University Convocation Ceremony address (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3409/

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Massimo Nava: According to many scholars, it is the very absence of a spiritual authority which 'excommunicates' radicalism which is the principal obstacle for the evolution of Islam. Do you agree?

Aga Khan: The problem is wrongly posed and it does not concern the fundamentals of Islam. In fact, in the Shiite credence, one exalts the value of the intellect, of the spiritual guide, therefore of interpretation. But Western thought tends to confuse the bond between spirituality and secularism with a sort of compromise between State and Church. These are different levels, which involve the individual and the community in which one lives, not the political authority of the State. The Qur'an prohibits judging the way in which another Muslim practises faith, but it also prohibits the enforcement of a religious practice or of a faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Corriere della Sera interview with Massimo Nava (Italy) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6010/

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on secularism and Ismailism

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the need to revive spiritual traditions as a prerequisite to restoring public integrity


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 3/4: 'Progress does not mean occidentalisation'


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the theocratic state and democracy


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Islamic concept of statehood


See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on what Muslim education needs from nursery school to university

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan's cautionary notes on Western values

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains his intellect is in the West but his heart is in the East

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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on Din and Duniya

"I think one of the specifics of Islam is that you live your faith. And you are not one day in your faith and the next day out of your faith. It is a permanent presence. It is a presence which brings you happiness. It brings you objectives in life and therefore, I don't think that one can make this sort of dichotomy. It is a permanency of thought, of attitude, of ethics.... It's not that if you are in a meeting on a given issue, that you forget that behind these decisions you are taking are the ethical principles of your faith. And they have to be there all the time. Whatever you do."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2004 DD TV (Delhi Doordarshan) Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (New Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7089/

Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee: Does daily life carry the same importance as eternal life?

Aga Khan: In Islam, they are the same thing. One cannot separate faith from the world. This is one of the greatest difficulties that the non-Muslim world has, because the Judaic Christian societies developed with that notion of separation. For the Muslims, that separation is not possible. We are expected to live our faith every day, in every hour. [Emphasis added]

One of the difficulties that we are facing in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, is the articulation of the difference in values in a
comprehensive form. However, this does not mean that we are in conflict. They are just different values.

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** One of the differences is locality, debated in countries such as Portugal, Turkey, and France. For many, faith should remain confined to a private space. You mentioned that Islam doesn’t separate faith from the world. How do you perceive this notion?

**Aga Khan:** I would like the non-Muslim societies to accept the values of Islam. If Islam says that we do not separate the world from faith, the Western world should accept that. I would go further and say: it is a wonderful way to live! It is an extraordinary blessing to be able to live our faith everyday! Making ethic the way in which you live your daily life, and not only in occasions such as death, a marriage or a birth. I am not criticising anyone. I am saying that secular society, by the nature of secularity and the demands of time, provokes in people the need to first place the world and faith after. This is not a part of Islam.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation]*

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/

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**Aftab Ahmad Khan:** Some people are surprised that, as a spiritual leader, you are also involved in material and mundane matters of the world. What would you say?

**Aga Khan:** The answer to question which is asked especially in the Western secular world is that as Muslims, we have to be very careful not to apply to our lives a philosophy which is not Islamic. The division between the spiritual and the material is a concept which I consider essentially of the Western World and substantially linked to the name of St Augustine. My understanding of Islam is that it is a total faith, it does not only govern the way a man or a woman of the Muslim faith practises faith but it governs his relations with his family and with society. It has an all enveloping sense of direction. It
does not tell him you cannot have wealth but it does tell him you cannot be greedy. It does not tell him you cannot be active in business but it tells him to be ethical in business and, therefore, it has an extremely strong moral involvement in every aspect of man’s life. I think it would be completely wrong for me or frankly for any other Muslim leader, to restrict his effort and his endeavour simply to the spiritual aspects.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on identity

**Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation:** [Y]ou yourself are, one has to say, you are cosmopolitan.

**Aga Khan:** I am Muslim.

**LBC:** You do not have another identity? None whatsoever?

**Aga Khan:** No, none, none!

**LBC:** You do not have an attachment to your country of origin?

**Aga Khan:** You tell me my 'country of origin'. I wouldn't even be able to define it for you, because I am born in Switzerland, I have parents who are from the Muslim World and from the Christian World, I have had my initial education in Africa then Switzerland and then in the United States, I have travelled all my life. And the only guideline that I have in my life, the dominant one, is the religion in which I was raised.

**LBC:** How can a man live without [a country of origin]? That is, not have a place, a precise geography?

**Aga Khan:** But on the contrary, I am freer! I am much freer!

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Interview (Aleppo, Syria and Lebanon) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/
**John Tidmarsh:** You were saying that it's very much an international Community, you yourself, what about you, I mean you were born in Switzerland, you went to school there, then you went to Harvard in the United States, your mother British, so was your former wife, do you have a nationality?

**Aga Khan:** I don't think of myself as a person with a nationality. I was brought up since my youngest age as a Muslim. My university studies were in Islamic studies. So that is -- if I have any sense of identification -- that would be it.

*His Highness the Aga Khan's 1997 BBC Radio Interview with John Tidmarsh (London, United Kingdom)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5301/

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**Geoffrey Barker:** Do you regard yourself as an Eastern or a Western man?

**Aga Khan:** I would hope as a world citizen in the sense that I have no problems with the East or West. Really, I think that one's dealing in my position with humanity. You see humanity, you are aware of humanity. You know the problems are different but the basic issues are the same.

**Geoffrey Barker:** I've been told that you seem a different personality in the East. Are you aware of any change in your mental attitude when you are in the East?

**Aga Khan:** No. I think there is certainly more empathy with the East emotionally, culturally, historically. That is natural. I was brought up in the West but I don't always understand the West.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffrey Barker (Melbourne, Australia)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains his intellect is in the West but his heart is in the East


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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam's and the Qur'an's assent of freedom of individual interpretation

"[I]n the Qu'ran it very clearly says no Muslim may judge the strength of another Muslim's beliefs."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview, Part II, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10176/

"Faith is not, is not something which you can quantify. People practice, they don't practice. Sometimes they do, more in certain generations, less in others. It's an extremely fluid situation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton (London, United Kingdom)

"... I cannot judge an individual's belief at any given time, in his life or mine. My experience is that belief is not necessarily constant; it varies according to age, to one's circumstances and the family in which one was educated."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Paroquias de Portugal Interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/
Aga Khan: However, in the Islamic world, as in the Christian world, there have existed attempts of normatism — that is, the imposition of a unique perspective within the Ummah [community of believers]. That has been rejected since the time of the Prophet, because he himself acknowledged that, in his time, diversity in the interpretation of faith already existed. If you read the hadith [teachings of the Prophet], you will note that he was called upon many times, by the members of the Muslim community, to interpret the Qur’an or a specific ayat.

Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee: Then, there can be various interpretations?

Aga Khan: The diversity in interpretation is something that is inherent to human society. The attempt to normatise has a very little chance to succeed and it would be unethical to the essence of Islam. There is a very famous ayat in the Qur’an that says: ‘To yourself, your faith. To myself, my faith.’ There is a great debate about whether this ayat refers to the intra-Muslim relationship or to the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. But the ayat is there!

"Even with regard to these four schools (Hanafite, Shafi’ite, Malikite and Hanbalite), an individual Muslim is free to choose among them the rules to follow on different points; and to do that, he may not be obliged to strictly adhere to a single school. The practical result of this universally admitted freedom is quite obvious; it simplifies the carrying on of law and more easily meets modern conditions of life."
"Soon after the founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad died, issue concerning the religious and secular leadership of the Muslim community arose. By and large, the Sunni Muslims maintained that after Prophet Muhammad's death each Muslim was left to interpret and practise his faith according to his understanding although every mosque has its own Imam to lead the prayers."

"The faith of Islam recognises and sustains the right of people to be their own masters of the judgements that they make."

"I think we are experiencing a time of, in a sense, the search for a legitimacy in interpretation of Islam in relation to the modern world, in relation to modern society, in relation to non-Muslim societies and in that search there are all sorts of interpretations being put forward. I personally am very cautious about seeking a formalistic approach, because I think that one of the great risks -- apart from the fact that it does tend to deny individuality which is, of course, something strongly upheld in the Islamic faith -- is the fact
that it tends to anchor a faith in one time and that is one aspect of my faith which I would never accept."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

"I think that [Ismailism] is a sect which has developed its influence through a number of areas: its approach to Islam, its philosophy. It has a philosophy which is very interesting, very different from other sects of Islam. The technicians call it esoteric, an esoteric interpretation. I wouldn’t say it's non-conformist. I would say that there is a search to find a meaning in Islam which allows the individual a particularly intimate role of participation in the practice of the faith."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton (London, United Kingdom)

"[T]he commonality among the Shia is the role of Hazrat Ali. He was the great intellectual force of his time. Because of him, Shi'ism is an intellectual interpretation of Islam. The direct impact is the reduction of conflict between the spiritual and the temporal. The other fundamental element resides in the personal spiritual search. The individual is perhaps more important for us than among the different Sunni traditions....

"Well before the invasion of Iraq, the principal watchword of al-Qaeda was to normatise Islam according to one fundamentalist Sunni interpretation. The exclusivist attitude is a form of theological colonialism, and it has spread throughout the whole of the Islamic world."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 L'Express Interview with Eric Chol and
Nuno Rogerio: What do you think of the present discussion in Islam, of people that think that the faith -- the Muslim faith -- should be a personal faith and not something that should be directed by Imams, by mullahs. That it should be something between you and your Creator? There are some people that discuss that now.

Aga Khan: Yes, but I think that's always going to be the case. Every individual is expected to use his intellect, his knowledge, to help him understand his faith -- at least that is the way we interpret the faith. So I don't see a conflict of any sort whatsoever. Obviously you can get back to the question of interpretation of the Qur'an, interpretation of the sunna, interpretation of the hadith, but that is as diversified in Islam as it is in the Christian world. In fact there's probably more diversity in what we call the Ummah, which is the community of Muslims worldwide.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Sociedade das Nacoes Interview with Nuno Rogerio (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8856/

"An infinite part of the sheer interpretation of Islam is the rational process. And I attach enormous importance to that because it's a significant part of the way we live and work. So I encourage that."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/

"What should have been brotherhood has become rivalry, generosity"
has been replaced by greed and ambition, the right to think is held to
be the enemy of real faith ..."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th
Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

"One of the beauties of ceremonies like this one is that they link us to
people in other places -- and to people of other ages. I remember, to
mention just one example, how the 1000th anniversary of the birth
of Syedna Nasir-i-Khusraw coincided with our foundation stone
ceremony five years ago....

"This ethic of connectivity with others has deep spiritual roots -- in
Islam as for other faiths. It stems ultimately from humankind's sense
of humility in the presence of the Divine. In this light, human
diversity itself is seen as a gift of Allah, cultural differences are
embraced as a blessing, and different interpretations of faith are
seen as a mercy, one that nourishes the Ummah's vast identity, and
its constructive interface with society at large."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2009 Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony
address (Dushanbe, Tajikistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9331/

"This programme is also an opportunity for achieving insights into
how the discourse of the Qur'an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and
allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-
spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of
interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which
the Qur'an confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction
that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere
attempts to understand His word. Happily, as a result, the Holy
Book continues to guide and illuminate the thought and conduct of
Muslims belonging to different communities of interpretation and
spiritual affiliation, from century to century, in diverse cultural environments. The Noble Qur'an extends its principle of pluralism also to adherents of other faiths. It affirms that each has a direction and path to which they turn so that all should strive for good works, in the belief that, wheresoever they may be, Allah will bring them together."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

"According to the Sunni school -- the majority of Muslims -- the Prophet's religious authority came to an end at his death, and he appointed no successor to his secular authority. According to Sunni teaching, the faithful, the companions of the Prophet, the believers, elected Abu Bakr as his successor and his Khalif; but Abu Bakr assumed only the civil and secular power. No one had the authority to succeed to the religious supremacy, which depended on direct Divine inspiration, because the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an declared definitely that he was the final messenger of God, the Absolute. Thus, say the Sunnis, it was impossible to constitute an authority similar to that of the Papacy; it remained for the Faithful to interpret the Qur'an, the example and the sayings of the Prophet, not only in order to understand Islam but to ensure its development throughout the centuries. Fortunately the Qur'an has itself made this task easy, for it contains a number of verses which declare that Allah speaks to man in allegory and parable. Thus the Qur'an leaves the door open for all kinds of possibilities of interpretation so that no one interpreter can accuse another of being non-Muslim. A felicitous effect of this fundamental principle of Islam that the Qur'an is constantly open to allegorical interpretation has been that our Holy Book has been able to guide and illuminate the thought of believers, century after century, in accordance with the conditions and limitations of intellectual appreciation imposed by external influences in the world. It leads also to a greater charity among Muslims, for since there can be no cut-and-dried interpretation, all
schools of thought can unite in the prayer that the Almighty in His infinite mercy may forgive any mistaken interpretation of the Faith whose cause is ignorance or misunderstanding.

"I am trying to put before my Western readers, not the doctrine of the Ismaili sect to which I belong, not Shia doctrine, nor the teachings of the Sufi school of Islamic mysticism, of men such as Jalaleddin Rumi or Bayazid Bostami, nor even the views of certain modern Sunni interpreters who, not unlike certain Christian sects, look for literal guidance in the Koran as Christians of these sects find it in the Old and New Testaments; but the main and central Sunni stream of thought, whose source is in the ideas of the school founded by al-Ghazali and whose influence and teaching have flowed on from century to century."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"Within the Ummah it is a recognised and established historic fact that communities have the right to their own interpretation of the Faith. Whether it is the interpretation of one branch of Islam or of the other, of Sunni or Shia, whether of one tradition within either of those branches, or of another, the right of interpretation belongs to each individual.

"[It is] important to remember that such situations are not unique in history -- the Inquisition in Spain was every bit as cruel and destructive as any case that one can imagine.... What is not acceptable is any attempt to impose a particular interpretation on an unwilling individual or population. The Holy Qur'an says that there shall be no compulsion in religion. What is even worse, is when such an imposition causes degradation of all civilised standards of human behaviour."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 address to the two houses of the Kyrgyz Parliament (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)
Massimo Nava: According to many scholars, it is the very absence of a spiritual authority which 'excommunicates' radicalism which is the principal obstacle for the evolution of Islam. Do you agree?

Aga Khan: The problem is wrongly posed and it does not concern the fundamentals of Islam. In fact, in the Shiite credence, one exalts the value of the intellect, of the spiritual guide, therefore of interpretation. But Western thought tends to confuse the bond between spirituality and secularism with a sort of compromise between State and Church. These are different levels, which involve the individual and the community in which one lives, not the political authority of the State. The Qur'an prohibits judging the way in which another Muslim practises faith, but it also prohibits the enforcement of a religious practice or of a faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Corriere della Sera interview with Massimo Nava (Italy) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6010/

Gunter Knabe: Tolerance and pluralism are ranking very high on your agenda to improve the situation of mankind. Is it because your own followers, the Ismailis as a minority are also discriminated against, sometimes they are even called by other Muslims as heretics.

Aga Khan: Well I would start by saying that in all faiths there are differences of opinion between on interpretation and another. Today I wouldn’t say that the Ismailis are discriminated against, on the contrary I think we are building more and more bridges with more and more different interpretations because the notion of pluralism in Islam is one which is well established. There are Hadith about the number of interpretations that would exist so the difference of
interpretation is not an issue with Islam. I would go further. I would say that Islam is an encompassing faith. There is a very, very famous ayat in the Qur’an, for example, where Allah says I have created you -- meaning mankind -- from one soul.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2004 Deutsche Welle interview with Gunter Knabe (Berlin, Germany)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7106/

"I would go even further and say that the inability of human society to recognise pluralism as a fundamental value constitutes a real handicap for its development and a serious danger for our future. Since the end of the Cold War, a number of factors appear to have been common and significant ingredients, if not the primary cause, of many of the conflicts we have witnessed. Perhaps the most common of these ingredients has been the failure of those involved to recognise the fact that human society is essentially pluralist, and that peace and development require that we seek, by every means possible, to invest in and enhance, that pluralism. Those groups that seek to standardise, homogenise, or if you will allow me, to normatise all that and those around them must be actively resisted through countervailing activities.

"Whether it be in Central Europe, the Great Lakes region in Africa, or in Afghanistan -- to cite just one example from three different continents -- one of the common denominators has been the attempt by communal groups, be they ethnic, religious, or tribal groups, to impose themselves on others. All such attempts are based on the principle of eradicating the cultural basis that provides group identity. Without cultural identity, social cohesion gradually dissolves and human groups lose their necessary point of reference to relate with each other, and with other groups."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2002 Concluding Address to the Prince Claus Fund Conference on Culture and Development (Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6351/
"The effective world of the future is one of pluralism -- that is to say, a world that comprehends and accepts differences. But such a world must be based on a new intellectual and spiritual equality and it must be educated to see in pluralism, opportunities for growth in all areas of human endeavour. History has shown in every part of the world and at every time, that the rejection of pluralism and the attempt to normatise the human race has always resulted in factionalism, oppressiveness and economic and social regression."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Aga Khan Academy, Kilindini, Opening Ceremony address (Mombasa, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6848/

**Aroon Purie:** As the Imam of the Ismaili community, do you see the fundamentalist revival which is going on in many Middle East countries as a threat to the identity of your community?

**Aga Khan:** Well, I think if it means that a sect of Muslims seeks to impose its interpretation of Islam on other sects, it would be serious. For the moment I do not see this. On the contrary, in many of the countries where there is an Islamic revival, they are becoming more aware of the differences that exist and are seeking to make provisions, within the overall envelope of Islam, that each sect is free to practise its own interpretation of Islam.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 India Today interview with Aroon Purie (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4315/

"'The Worlds of Islam' is an exhibition which tries to reflect, through works of art of different periods and geographic origins, the splendour of Muslim culture in all its diversity. The exhibition
highlights the pluralism of Islam, which can be seen both in the interpretation of Qur’anic faith as in the variety of styles, materials, and techniques, which characterises its artistic expressions. The objects exhibited cover a period of more than one thousand years ...”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2009 Introduction to ‘The Worlds of Islam in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum’ (Madrid and Barcelona, Spain) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10027/

"Persistent confusion about the existence and legitimacy of different communities of interpretation within Islam is another source of misunderstanding. No one in the West sees Christianity as an undifferentiated monolith, and yet this is the commonly held perception of the peoples of Islam, while the reality is quite different. Pluralism in the practice of Islam and its expression in the cultures of Islamic civilisations have been validated by nearly 1400 years of history, including the history of its art and architecture. Indeed it is precisely this pluralism in architectural greatness that has led many authorities to consider the Islamic architectural heritage superior virtually to all others. It is essential that we respect and value that plurality; that we do all in our power to have it strengthen us in our determination, to build unity in diversity, rather than conflict within constraints.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Eighth Aga Khan Award For Architecture Prize Ceremony address (The Citadel, Aleppo, Syria) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6043/

"In fact, in the interest of the universal unification of mankind the Qur’an ignores the minor differences and says: ‘Come, let us unite to what is common to us all’, which obviously encourages Muslims to assimilate ideas and even customs from others.”

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1951 reply to The Times of London, ‘The Tolerance of Islam’ (London, United Kingdom)
"In sum, what we must seek and share is what I have called 'a cosmopolitan ethic,' a readiness to accept the complexity of human society. It is an ethic which balances rights and duties. It is an ethic for all peoples. It will not surprise you to have me say that such an ethic can grow with enormous power out of the spiritual dimensions of our lives. In acknowledging the immensity of The Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding.

"In that light, the amazing diversity of Creation itself can be seen as a great gift to us -- not a cause for anxiety but a source of delight. Even the diversity of our religious interpretations can be greeted as something to share with one another -- rather than something to fear. In this spirit of humility and hospitality the stranger will be welcomed and respected, rather than subdued or ignored.

"In the Holy Qur'an we read these words: 'O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul ... [and] joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace ye became brethren.'

"As we strive for this ideal, we will recognise that 'the other' is both 'present' and 'different.' And we will be able to appreciate this presence and this difference as gifts that can enrich our lives."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 10th Annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, Institute for Canadian Citizenship (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9601/

"In my presidential address [to the Seerat Conference, Karachi, 12 March 1976], I appealed to our ulama not to delay the search for the answers to the issues of a rapidly evolving modernity which Muslims of the world face because we have the knowledge that Islam is Allah's final message to mankind, the Holy Qur'an His final Book,
and Muhammad, may peace be upon him, His last and final Prophet.

"These are the fundamental principles of faith enshrined in the Shahada and the Tawhid therein, which bind the Ummah in an eternal bond of unity. With other Muslims, they are continuously reaffirmed by the Shia Ismaili Muslims of whom I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet's daughter....

"In keeping with our historic tradition of ever abiding commitment to Muslim unity, we reaffirm our respect for the historical interpretation of Islam by our brother Muslims as an equally earnest endeavour to practise the faith in Allah and emulate the example of our Holy Prophet, may peace be upon him, which illuminates Muslim lives and which, In'sha'Allah, will elevate all Muslim souls."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Message to The International Islamic Conference (Amman, Jordan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7426/

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See also: TH Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on interpreting the Qur'an
http://www.facebook.com/notes/nanowisdoms-archive/excerpt/363830926968431

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See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islamic Law and the Sharia


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imam's authority and discretion in interpreting the Qur'an


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on thinking independently and the search for new knowledge -- the spirit of adventure


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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 1/4: "Islam is for all places and all time"

"In Islam right from the time of Prophet Muhammad, there has been a compatibility between the faith and the world in which the faith is practised at any given time. And I am not willing to make any compromise on that compatibility ... I would never accept that the concept of Islam, the practice of Islam, cannot be fulfilled in the modern world or in the world of tomorrow."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

Aftab Ahmad Khan: How would you comment on the notion popularised by Western critics that scientific and technological progress is incompatible with the practice of Islam?

Aga Khan: I think that's one of the most offensive things that can be said about Islam and I take issue with it in every way. In the first place, to say that science in the modern age is incompatible is the same as saying that Islam is the faith of the past and that is totally unacceptable. In the second place, Islam's message contains a central theme which is the total power of Allah and therefore my conviction is that the discoveries which the human mind can make are really simply a minute perception of Allah's creation and I know no scientist in any domain who has been able to answer the ultimate question. So, from my point of view, Islam is a faith which cannot be
relegated to the past.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

"My concept of Islam is [that it is] a faith for all time, not backward looking."


"I apprehend that in certain educational institutions respect for tradition has restricted academic study to the accomplishment of the past. However, our faith has never been restricted to one place or time. Ever since its revelation the fundamental concepts of Islam have been its universality and the fact that this is the last revelation, constantly valid, and not petrified into one period of man's history or confined to one area of the world. Islam is for all places and all time."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/

"[I]nsofar as people's knowledge today is significantly different from what it was thirteen hundred years ago, we have to live in our time. And indeed I would vigorously oppose anybody who would claim that the faith of Islam cannot be of the twentieth or the twenty-first or the twenty-third, twenty-fifth century."
His Highness the Aga Khan's 2004 DD TV (Delhi Doordarshan) Interview
with Rajiv Mehrotra (New Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7089/

"I think that one has to be very careful in the interpretation of Islam, not anchoring that interpretation at one time in history. If you make Islam a faith of the past, you in a sense make it impossible for the Muslim to practise his faith today and in the future. And as a Muslim I totally reject the concept that the message of Islam is tied to any given time after the revelation of the faith. And Islam must be practised by people today and in hundred years, two hundred years. And if Islam is a faith forever, then [the] leadership must be very careful not to harness it to concepts of a given time."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview
(London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

"Those who wish to introduce the concept that you can only practise your faith as it was practised hundreds of years ago are introducing a time dimension which is not part of our faith today. It is a very delicate issue, whether it is in science, in medicine, in economics."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1991 The (Manchester) Guardian Weekly interview with Akbar Ahmed (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10697/

Times of India: What is our most precious asset as human beings?

Aga Khan: A value system that is both time-resistant and time-adaptable.
"[In terms of] the philosophical environment in which an individual lives, there is no doubt that the faith of Islam places the individual in society in the world in which he lives, in a position where he is not in conflict with his time and he is not in conflict with science and technology of his time. The eternal values of Islam are such that whether the man lived a hundred years ago or lives a hundred years from now, he is always in his correct position. There is no conflict. So in terms of the humanistic, permanent values of a faith, I would say that obviously Islam puts an individual in a very privileged position.

"... I believe in the eternity of the faith and I believe it is the faith for man. And in that sense, Muslims will find within their faith all the dimensions they need to live satisfactorily in the future. The question is not one of the faith; it is a question of what man does. The faith gives him the environment in which to function today and tomorrow. It is what we do as individuals in our lives."

"As Imam of the Ismaili sect, I am in a position to adapt the teachings of the Qur'an to the modern condition. On the question of modernity the issue is essentially whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society or whether one is affecting the fundamentals of religious practice. As long as these two aspects are safeguarded the rest can be subject to adjustment."
"[It] is not a simple matter for any human society with a concern and appreciation of its history to relate its heritage to its contemporary conditions. Traditions evolve in a context, and the context always changes, thus demanding a new understanding of essential principles. For us Muslims, this is one of the pressing challenges we face."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

"Many today across the Muslim world know their history and deeply value their heritage, but are also keenly sensitive to the radically altered conditions of the modern world. They also realise how erroneous and unreasonable it is to believe that there is an unbridgeable divide between their heritage and the modern world."


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part
3/4: ‘Progress does not mean occidentalisation’


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See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 4/4: Innovate; ‘Discover new knowledge’


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Excerpts: TH, Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 2/4: Towards "new understandings of essential principles"

"[It] is not a simple matter for any human society with a concern and appreciation of its history to relate its heritage to its contemporary conditions. Traditions evolve in a context, and the context always changes, thus demanding a new understanding of essential principles. For us Muslims, this is one of the pressing challenges we face."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

"I think we are experiencing a time of, in a sense, the search for a legitimacy in interpretation of Islam in relation to the modern world, in relation to modern society, in relation to non-Muslim societies and in that search there are all sorts of interpretations being put forward. I personally am very cautious about seeking a formalistic approach, because I think that one of the great risks ... is the fact that it tends to anchor a faith in one time and that is one aspect which, of my faith which I would never accept."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/
Michael Charlton: But in this conflict between the orthodox, who say that the Qur’anic teaching, like Khomeini appears to be saying in Iran, are immutable and even if the majority wishes them to be changed -- they can not be changed because the teaching itself is unchanging and must not be changed -- in that context, between those who think like that and those who think that Islam can not survive unless it adapts, where do you stand yourself?

Aga Khan: I think the question is where you start from. Are you starting from the Qur’an? Are you starting from the Sharia? Are you starting from secular Christian law? Where are you starting from? The Qur’an is not a body of law, and that, I think, is a statement that every Muslim will make. What is referred to today as Islamic law is a compilation of views expressed by law makers who lived well after the revelation of the Qur’an, well after the time of the Prophet. The interesting thing is that in the Qu’ran, for example, a lot of the things which I would refer to as punishment, are punishment as deterrent. The punishment itself is not the issue at stake. The question is you have got to stop certain things from happening for the good of society. Now if that's the starting point, then I would say a lot of things do not have to be done, which maybe being done today in the Muslim world. That is my position, because I will start from the Qur’an. I will not start from an interpretation made five or six generations after the life of the Prophet. If we're talking about fundamentalism, lets start at the revelation of Islam.

Michael Charlton: That puts you fairly firmly in the minority in view of what appears to be happening in Iran and Pakistan.

Aga Khan: No. Not at all. Not at all. I think you have to be very careful in the West not to consider that the more rigid forms of Islam today are typical of the Muslim world. That is not the case. It's very far from the case.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview (London, United Kingdom)
"If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting as practised at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain Ibn 'l-Waqt (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practise and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1934 Foreword to ‘Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations’ by Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazb hoy (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10546/

"It must not be forgotten that, according to the principle of Ijma already mentioned, the interpretation of the precepts and laws which regulate the lives of the Faithful, as laid down in the Qur’an and in the Traditions of the Prophet, can be done at any time and for any generation. Such an interpretation, by means of the Ijtihad which is a personal and living research, can be made, within the general limits of the Qur’an and Traditions. The suppleness of Muslim Law enhances its value, and its broad lines leave room for vigorous growth and adaptation to the changing and unforeseeable circumstances of international life. Muslim Law must, therefore, be freed of the rigid character, given to it by ancient codifications. It would be erroneous to assume that the door to interpretation has been shut, because the four leading juridical schools of Muslim orthodoxy had already decided, for all time, as to the prescriptions of Muslim Law....

"As regards the Qur’an, we stress the fact, that to be better understood -- without being blindly attached to the exegesis of ancient authorities -- it would inspire Muslims to a revival of
religious thought and action. The Traditions and Sayings of the Prophet are to be seriously and critically studied with a view to freeing them from posterior deviations and infiltrations. As regards the four juridical schools, we may point out that their divergences are of little importance, and there are no antagonisms between them."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, (with Dr Zaki Ali) in 'The Religious Revival of Islam', Chapter 4 of their book 'Glimpses of Islam', 1944
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10456/

"Is religion different from Science or Philosophy? Is the former so interpreted and understood? No, there is possibility of bringing about the greatest intellectual reconciliation not only with modern philosophy and science but even with other subjects....

"Once upon a time I said somewhere that other religions have taken in formalities, but Muslims have outformalised the formal. Both Christians and Hindus have made progress in Scientific education but Muslims have lagged far behind. What has happened in a country that is looked upon as the capital of Islam has inevitably happened in every Muslim country. This does not mean that the faith of Islam is not true. Nay Islam is the most rational, most social, of all faiths.

"It only means that our substitution and interpretation of Islam totally fails us. To this work gentlemen, however unpleasant and offensive it may be to the conservatives, thought is necessary if we are to keep alive the name of Muslim University and Muslim Educational Conference.... Howsoever unpleasant it may be, this task of reinterpreting Islam will have to be done. The work which Christianity has done, we must do for Islam. In fact without serious effort on these lines, we should not be able to hold up our own in face of the stress and strife of modern life.

"A faith that can be believed in sincerely by philosophers, of whom any country can be proud, can never be in contradiction with the
"History, both Muslim and non-Muslim is studded with examples of societies which have stagnated through failing to adapt to new historical and human trends. Paralysis gained control of the body of these groups through a progressive attack on the military, moral, material, social and economic features of these societies. From this gradual paralysis death has invariably ensued, either after longer or shorter periods. I believe, therefore, that a continuous review of the history which is being made every day is necessary so that the processes of adjustment for the bases of our society are brought up-to-date, and I would say even more, are projected into the future so that specific goal can be obtained over a number of years. One fact seems to hold true throughout human history and that is that any society or nucleus of human beings, which has moved in a specific direction, regardless of the environing historical trends, has met with dismemberment or destruction."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1964 First World Socio-Economic Conference address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9999/

"[O]ne cannot change religion overnight. This evolution is a slow thing, and it is, therefore, an everlasting job with its own rhythm, usually a lot slower than the political and economic upheavals of the present time."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1975 L'Expansion Interview with Roger Priouret (Paris, France) [Translation]
**Aroon Purie:** As Imam of your sect, you are also an interpreter of the Qur’an for your followers, but on the other hand, you are a man with a modern education and background. How do you reconcile these two aspects on subject like women’s rights, family planning and other related matters?

**Aga Khan:** As Imam of the Ismaili sect, I am in a position to adapt the teachings of the Qur’an to the modern condition. On the question of modernity the issue is essentially whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society or whether one is affecting the fundamentals of religious practice. As long as these two aspects are safeguarded the rest can be subject to adjustment.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 India Today Interview (India)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4315/

**Rajiv Mehrotra:** The other philosophical dimension that in Islamic world view must come up for you in some measure is in the development models that you might be seeking to encourage. I think so that Islam decrees a societal framework which may seem somewhat strained relationship to modern technology modern practices, structures, financial institutions. How would you reconcile those?

**Aga Khan:** Well I say this with deference that I am not entirely convinced that the faith itself has decreed any particular form rather that the people have interpreted it. And if my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue which is, well, anything that we are doing is in conflict with the ethic of Islam. If it is not in conflict with the ethic of Islam then I must interpret it as being possible.
**Rajiv Mehrotra:** Spirituality, or the religion or the faith is frequently threatened by technology. You have a passion and a great interest in technology. How have you managed to reconcile that?

**Aga Khan:** Well, from the moment that I am not willing to say that the faith of Islam is of a particular time, when I have to search within Islam what are the elements which allow me to interpret within the modern world and my interpretation is that Allah's message and His power is not limited. And in fact that modern science simply allows us to discover more and more of the miracles that He has performed, perhaps continues to perform, and we are blessed with the faculty of intelligence. And I cannot understand why we would be blessed with that faculty unless we were mandated to use it.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

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"My grandfather gave, and I have myself given, a certain interpretation to Shiism. The intellect is seen as a facet of faith, in the service of faith. Reason, reflection, form part of the process of decision making. This reflection is desirable, is necessary in the interpretation of religion. This means that we invest in the intellect of the community. This is one of the elements which has made it possible for the Ismaili Community to respond to the problems of ... [sentence is incomplete]."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 La Croix Interview with Pierre Cochez and Jean-Christophe Ploquin (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6592/

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See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam's and the Qur'an's assent of freedom of individual interpretation

https://www.facebook.com/notes/nanowisdoms-archive-of-imamat-speeches-
Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 3/4: "Progress does not mean occidentalisation"

Aga Khan: we're also trying to work with young people in various areas -- just tell to them 'Create according to your own value system.' You don't have to have to copy other people's value systems. Modernisation does not mean occidentalisation....

Reem Haddad: And just at the end, Your Highness, is there a message that you would like to leave the Syrian people?

Aga Khan: Progress does not mean occidentalisation. Progress in the Ummah means moving forwards in quality of life, but not giving up your identity, not giving up your value systems. Indeed our value systems are massively important for the future. [Emphasis original]
find different forms, perhaps better forms, of solutions. So, I don't think one can equate 'progress' exclusively with what is happening in the industrialised world now, very far from it.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Pakistan Television Corporation Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3209/

"One of my objectives [for the Ismailis] was to help the community adjust to increasingly rapid forces of modernisation and what I would call threats of extreme secularisation, the imbalances which one notes in certain parts of the world caused by the unequivocal search for material wealth, which passes the limits of reason. I think that was a problem: not of one time but a continuing problem. A delicate balance had to be found between living in the twentieth century, with all that means in terms of technological knowledge, of aspirations for material well-being and at the same time, the actual turning into practice of the spirit of the Muslim brotherhood, the practice of one's faith and the concern for the betterment of the people. That was one issue which I sought to deal with."  

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

"How can we inspire people to reach beyond rampant materialism, self-indulgent individualism, and unprincipled relativism?"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement Ceremony address (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/
"Material progress apart, I do not think it should ever be assumed that only the smaller, poorer nations are faced by apparently insoluble problems. Western Europe and North America possess much that can be envied. They also face social and moral conflicts which are far more daunting than known in Asia or Africa. Increasingly, I believe, thinking people both in Europe and America are asking: Where is this all prosperity leading us? Are we any happier? Do we get as much satisfaction out of living as did our fathers and forefathers? ...

"It is my deepest conviction that if Islamic society is to avoid following blindly the course of Western society without taking the trouble to raise guards against the latter's weaknesses and deficiencies, a thorough rediscovery, revitalisation and reintegration of our traditional values must be achieved."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1967 Peshawar University Convocation Address (Peshawar, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1494/

"Not everything within traditions is old and outmoded and not everything within modernity is a vehicle for progress or highly effective."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1986 Third Aga Khan Award For Architecture Prize Ceremony address (Marrakesh, Morocco)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3347/

"A great risk to the modernisation of the Islamic world is identity loss -- the blind assumption that we should give up all our essential values and cultural expressions to those of other civilisations. In order to contain this risk, for it cannot be totally eliminated, we must re-invigorate our own value systems and cultural expressions. This includes the sciences and the ethical structures that go with them, but also architecture and the design of landscape and towns,
literature, music, philosophical thought, and the free space they require, which are unfailing signs of a nation’s vitality and confidence.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7587/

"[T]he two main tendencies [of the Ummah], traditional and modern, are trying to maintain, indeed to develop, their Islamic legitimacy. Loss of identity, anxiety about the risk of being caught up in a process of Westernisation that is essentially Christian and is perceived as becoming less and less religious, are deep and very real concerns.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Address at the 'Musı·ес' Round Table Conference, Louvre Museum (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8283/

See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on secularism and Islam's reconciliation with it

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan's cautionary notes on Western values
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains his intellect is in the West but his heart is in the East


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 1/4: 'Islam is for all places and all time'


See also: TH, Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 2/4: Towards 'new understandings of essential principles'


See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 4/4: Innovate; 'Discover new knowledge'


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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 4/4: Innovate; "Discover new knowledge"

"The past cannot be repeated. By copying it, it proves that one cannot do better. By repeating the past, by designing the same thing is not the solution. Modernity cannot be denied. How do we merge the two? That is continuity. We can’t ask people to live in mud houses. We have to come up with new solutions."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2004 Times of India Interview (New Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7094/

"I believe that today the Islamic world’s view of its own future is seriously affected by a divergent squint. It is a world split into two tendencies: on the one hand, modernisers and believers in progressive change, on the other, traditionalists who might even be described as hidebound. Both seek to determine future directions to be taken by the Ummah which will reinforce its identity, or rather its identities, while remaining rooted in a truth which is firmly Muslim. In practise, these two tendencies can be seen in the political domain in the differences between theocratic governance and the secular state; between the application of Sharia in all legal fields and the complete absence of Sharia or its application only in the domain of civil law; between economic and financial systems based on Sharia and systems that are essentially liberal and Westernised; between religious education at every level and a national system
with no reference at all to religion throughout the whole educational process, apart from the madrasa option for very young children.

"In this context, we thought it essential, whichever choice Muslim populations may indicate to their governments, to clarify certain aspects of the history of Muslim civilisations in order that today’s two main tendencies, modern and traditional, can base their ideas on historical realities and not on history that has been misunderstood or even manipulated."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 Address at the ‘Musée-Musées’ Round Table Conference, Louvre Museum (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8283/

"If ignoring the past was a problem on one side, then the opposite danger was an exaggerated submission to the past, so that some creations and creators became prisoners of dogma or nostalgia. There is a danger, in every area of life, everywhere in the world, that people will respond to the hastening pace of change with an irrational fear of modernism, and will want to embrace uncritically that which has gone before. The Islamic world has sometimes been vulnerable to this temptation -- and the rich potential for a new ‘Islamic modernism’ has sometimes been under-estimated.

"The Aga Khan Award was designed, in part, to address this situation, encouraging those who saw the past as a necessary prelude to the future and who saw the future as a fulfilling extension of the past.... In my view, a healthy life, for an individual or a community, means finding a way to relate the values of the past, the realities of the present, and the opportunities of the future. The built environment can play a central role in helping us to achieve that balance."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 (10th) Aga Khan Award For Architecture Presentation Ceremony address (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8280/
"There the Imam is responsible for interpreting. But he will look back into history with others and see how certainly Islamic history was dealt with, how current issues were contextualised at the time. There are periods in our own history which are exemplars or case studies, where there is an enormous amount to be learned. So we're not always trying to develop new solutions. We may be looking at methodologies which were used in the past, which were legitimised in history, which showed that they were good solutions. And which we can simply try to adapt to our times. So it's not a process where there is a deliteralisation of the past. It's a process, on the contrary, of learning and interpreting. That is a very, very important aspect of the work. But as I said, it's not cast in stone. Research cannot be simply rooted in history; it needs to be future oriented, too."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/

"Diversity, in fact, is part of the essence of Islam. The unity of the Ummah does not imply sameness. Working in an Islamic context need not confine us to constraining models. Nor does respecting the past mean copying the past. Indeed, if we hold too fast to what is past, we run the risk of crushing that inheritance. The best way to honour the past is to seize the future. In sum, an Islamic architectural agenda involves a dual obligation -- a heightened respect for both the traditions of the past and the conditions of the future."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 Aga Khan Award For Architecture Prize Ceremony address (Doha, Qatar)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9616/
"In the face of this changing world, which was once a universe to us and is now no more than an overcrowded island, confronted with a fundamental challenge to our understanding of time, surrounded by a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships which have broken loose, I ask, do we have a clear, firm and precise understanding of what Muslim Society is to be in times to come? And if as I believe, the answer is uncertain, where else can we search then in the Holy Qur’an, and in the example of Allah’s last and final Prophet? ...

"The Holy Prophet’s life gives us every fundamental guideline that we require to resolve the problem as successfully as our human minds and intellecs can visualise. His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, correctly understood and sincerely interpreted, must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic Society in the years ahead. [Emphasis added]"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1976 Presidential Address to the International Seerat Conference (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1804/

"Let me turn to another aspect of Islamic society: our intellectual elite. In the past, much of the dynamism of Muslim society was born from the leaders of the faith: the Imams, the Pirs and Mullahs. This identity between the leaders of the faith and the empire’s intellectual elite was a continuous source of strength both to the faith and those whose duty it was to govern the empire. How many aspiring Mullahs or Imams today enter secular universities and obtain degrees in secular subjects? And vice-versa, how many university graduates, after completing their degrees, turn their lives to directing the flock of the faithful?"
"Let me not be misunderstood -- I criticise neither Pirs nor Mullahs nor Imams nor degree-holders. I simply state that in future I believe it will be in our society's interest to have a much wider platform in common between our religious and our secular leaders. Our religious leadership must be acutely aware of secular trends, including those generated by this age of science and technology. Equally, our academic or secular elite must be deeply aware of Muslim history, of the scale and depth of leadership exercised by the Islamic empire of the past in all fields.

"It is through the creation of such a new elite, inspired by, and widely read in everything related to our heritage, that there must come about a revival in Muslim thought."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1970 University of Sind Convocation Ceremony address (Hyderabad, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1602/

"Certainly no Muslim nation can endure unless its leaders, its teachers, its parents and its youth hold fast to the faith which should inspire their whole outlook. This has been said to you before -- and by men who are more experienced and better qualified to speak than I. As a young man, however, perhaps I may be permitted to add this further reflection. Without Islam, the very idea of Pakistan would have been an absurdity. But as a modern state striving to establish itself in an uncertain world, I feel sure that her Muslim inspiration must move with the times. The recent decision to make Islamic teaching compulsory in the schools will, I believe, prove a very wise one. But its benefits will not be fully experienced if that religious instruction is too hidebound by dogmas of the past. There is no need to discard the great traditions of our faith. There is every need to adapt and invigorate them in the light of the quite altered circumstances of today."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1958 Takht Nashini (Enthronement) Ceremony address (Dacca, East Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1062/
"The Muslims must now awake, and taking their example from the glorious life and the marvellous teachings of the Holy Prophet build their spiritual and religious faith on Muhammad and work for the development in science, knowledge, and political and social advance along the lines of the most progressive races of mankind.

"Formalism and verbal interpretation of the teaching of the great Arabian are in absolute contradiction with the whole history of the Prophet. We must accept his Divine Message as the channel of our union with the Absolute and the Infinite, and once our spiritual faith is firmly established, fearlessly go forward by self-sacrifice, by courage, and by application to raise the scientific, the economic, the political, and social position of the Muslims to a place of equality with Christian Europe and America.

"Our social customs, our daily work, our constant efforts must be tuned up, must be brought into line with the highest form of possible civilisation. At its greatest period Islam was at the head of science, was at the head of knowledge, was in the advanced line of political, philosophic and literary thought.

"Today we are in our middle-ages. We must get out of it, and begin our new era with strength and will power for the coming development of our people."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1934 article 'A Call to the Islamic World. Muslims Awake!' (London, United Kingdom; Calcutta, India) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10396/

"[T]he key to intellectual progress will not lie in any single body of instruction, but in a spirit of openness to new expression and fresh insights.... The fundamental reason for the pre-eminence of Islamic civilisations lay neither in accidents of history nor in acts of war,
but rather in their ability to discover new knowledge, to make it their own, and to build constructively upon it."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7997/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on knowledge as a key to the dream of renewing Islam to 'the cutting edge of world progress'

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on thinking independently and the search for new knowledge -- the spirit of adventure

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on knowledge societies: past, present and future

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 1/4: 'Islam is for all places and all time'
See also: TH, Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 2/4: 'Towards 'new understandings of essential principles''


See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 3/4: 'Progress does not mean occidentalisation''


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Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on the state of the Ummah today

"One of the challenges that has concerned me over many years, and which I have discussed with leading Muslim thinkers, is how education for Muslims can reclaim the inherent strengths that, at the height of their civilisations, equipped Muslim societies to excel in diverse areas of human endeavour. Clearly the intellectual development of the Ummah, is, and should remain, a central goal to be pursued with urgency if we wish the Muslim world to regain its rightful place in world civilisation. Today, any reasonably well-informed observer would be struck by how deeply this brotherhood of Muslims is divided. On the opposite sides of the fissures are the ultra-rich and the ultra-poor; the Shia and the Sunni; the theocracies and the secular states, the search for normatisation versus the appreciation of pluralism; those who search for and are keen to adopt modern, participatory, forms of government versus those who wish to re-impose supposedly ancient forms of governance. What should have been brotherhood has become rivalry, generosity has been replaced by greed and ambition, the right to think is held to be the enemy of real faith, and anything we might hope to do to expand the frontiers of human knowledge through research is doomed to failure for in most of the Muslim world, there are neither the structures nor the resources to develop meaningful intellectual leadership.

"You will forgive me, I hope, for presenting to you such a grey picture of where we in the Ummah stand today, but, unless we have the courage to face unpleasant reality, there is no way that we can aspire realistically to a better future."
His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/  

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"Let me turn to another aspect of Islamic society: our intellectual elite. In the past, much of the dynamism of Muslim society was born from the leaders of the faith: the Imams, the Piras and Mullahs. This identity between the leaders of the faith and the empire’s intellectual elite was a continuous source of strength both to the faith and those whose duty it was to govern the empire. How many aspiring Mullahs or Imams today enter secular universities and obtain degrees in secular subjects? And vice-versa, how many university graduates, after completing their degrees, turn their lives to directing the flock of the faithful?

"Let me not be misunderstood -- I criticise neither Piras nor Mullahs nor Imams nor degree-holders. I simply state that in future I believe it will be in our society’s interest to have a much wider platform in common between our religious and our secular leaders. Our religious leadership must be acutely aware of secular trends, including those generated by this age of science and technology. Equally, our academic or secular elite must be deeply aware of Muslim history, of the scale and depth of leadership exercised by the Islamic empire of the past in all fields.

"It is through the creation of such a new elite, inspired by, and widely read in everything related to our heritage, that there must come about a revival in Muslim thought. The whole approach to education, without becoming archaic, should begin now to re-introduce, as widely as possible, the work and thought of our great Muslim writers and philosophers. Thus, from the nursery school to
the university, the thoughts of the young will be inspired by our own heritage and not that of some foreign culture.

"Again, let there be no misunderstanding: I am not in any way opposed to the literature or the art or the thought of the West. I simply maintain that the Islamic heritage is just as great and that it is up to us to bring it to the forefront again. When our nursery school children first begin to read, why should they not let their imaginations build upon the prowess of the Great Khaled rather than Wellington or Napoleon? And if the student of philosophy seeks a degree, should he not be encouraged to read about even Al-Hallaj rather than Hegel or Kierkegaard?"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1970 University of Sind Convocation Address
(Hyderabad, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1602/

"[H]ow are we to save both teaching of Islam, knowledge of nature and our daily Islamic life of kindliness, gentleness and prayers? If the present method by which the Ulema being brought up on one line of studies and the scientific youth on a different one continues, then disaster will come because there will be a fundamental misunderstanding in the outlook of intellect and faith in the soul of the nation. We must learn ... what saved Christianity for Europe. It was the fact that, as the universities at the time of the Renaissance and centuries that followed went forward with natural studies, at the same time, the same universities had faculties of divinity in which the priesthood was trained. The atmosphere of science permeated the atmosphere of Christian divinity studies and the atmosphere of the Christian divinity students permeated the atmosphere of the scientific studies; thus both grew and developed together. Christianity adapted itself to science ...

"Alas, Islam, which is a natural religion in which God’s miracles are the very law and order of nature, drifted away and still drifting away, even in Pakistan, from science which is the study of those very laws and orders of nature...."
"The only practical hope I see is that all your universities in Pakistan should have a faculty of Islamic religious and philosophical studies attached to ordinary curriculum for post-graduate students, who alone could be recognised as Ulemas. Something of the kind I know is being prepared in Egypt. A great Muslim divine, alas dead far too soon, the late Sheikh al-Maraghi, insisted in Azhar that natural laws should be taught according to the latest discoveries; but if we turn to Iran, Pakistan, North Africa, outside Egypt, we find that the Ulemas are being still brought up on the same old lines and the modern students on a totally different line. There is no unity of soul without which there can be no greatness....

"Unless our universities have the keen graduated Ulema school for men brought up in the same atmosphere as the science students, realising the fundamental truth that Islam is a natural religion of which the Ayats are the universe in which we live and move and have our being, the same causes will lead to the same disastrous results....

"Without Aligarh [University] no Pakistan would have come, but to live we want many Aligarhs with science and religious philosophy and education blended in one atmosphere realising that God of the Qur’an is the one whose Ayats are the universe."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1952 letter to H.E. Dr. Zahid Husain, President of Arabiyah Jamiyyat, 'What have we forgotten in Islam?' (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1253/

"While I am speaking to you about education, I would like to add that I do not think it is sufficient that Muslim children should be taught Islamic theology without corresponding secular education [or secular education] without religious training. Both of these must go hand in hand, and I see no reason why they should not do so in the schools which we build and have already built....

"Having lived in the Western world for many years, I know that
people have found it difficult to reconcile their faith with the pace of modern life. This problem should at all costs be minimised for our brother Muslims who live in these fast progressing countries. You cannot give a child secular education and then expect him not to ask questions about his religion. This is one more reason why your schools should have well-qualified teachers giving courses on the background of Islam, its history, theology, philosophy and all the other subjects which pertain to its glorious past.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1957 address at the Annual General Meeting of the East Africa Muslim Welfare Society (Mombasa, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/895/

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"But adaptation [to newly adopted homelands] is neither a simple process, nor one that can be completed in one or two generations. Still, today, there are Ismaili children born in this country, who like many other immigrant children, grow up sometimes unable to speak their ethnic language and who learn and adopt as their own ways which their parents always considered alien or worse. Many of these young people themselves seek to preserve their cultural heritage and to strengthen their bonds to their communities of origin. For this to happen, educational materials that reflect the rich humanistic and cultural dimensions of Islam have to be accessible to them in English. Such materials of the required calibre, unfortunately, are not always available, either in the country of settlement, or in the country of origin. Also, for religious education effectively to complement what children learn in secular schools, it has to be intellectually stimulating and pedagogically sound."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1994 remarks at the Ismaili Council Dinner (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4833/

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"The problems facing Muslims in East Africa today are not far
different from elsewhere. The same problems confront [Pakistan]. Here, with the goodwill and active co-operation of your own government, you have already made great headway and you have had something positive to guide you. This lead has tried to preserve the faith, to guide the people and in general terms to force the nation to work on modern progressive lines, without abandoning Muslim traditions and belief. In Africa, inevitably progress is much slow [sic]. Government support for education in the Muslim schools for example, is by no means automatic. Higher standards have to be reached before they can qualify for official recognition and financial support. This can only be achieved if there is an overriding will to modernise the whole approach of Islamic teaching and attitude to our way of life. Again, though the lead to modernisation of religious teaching is often resisted and even resented, the fact remains that the direction has been given to you. In East Africa no such guidance has been forthcoming. It is only when this lead is given, that the reforming spirit, which is at work among the younger generation of Muslims today, can find a constructive outlet. Then 'ijma' will pay its proper role and if the social scientists are correct in saying that public opinion is generally conservative, then we need not fear of going too far.

"[For Pakistan] to hold its own in modern world, to come to terms with the highest and the latest developments in science and technology, a radically new approach will be needed. If Islam aspires, as I believe she must, to recapture the glories of the past, she must be ready to adapt -- I do not say abandon her own traditions -- to the entirely different circumstances of today. If we fail to do this, not only shall we fail to progress ourselves, but the younger generation will become disillusioned and fall prey to alien and materialistic creeds, which have nothing whatever in common with Islam."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1958 Pakistan Institute of International Affairs address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1164/
See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on secularism and Islam's reconciliation with it


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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Islamic concept of statehood

Pakistan Television: And what would be your ideal world view of the future of Islam? And what kind of world, Islam as a faith and followers of Islam would envisage where really we can say that yes this is an Islamic country with the best of ideals and practices?

Aga Khan: I would like [the] essence of the faith to be more predominant in everyone's life. Go back to the origins of Islam. It was a faith practised in a land with no physical frontiers. The concept of the modern state is not really an Islamic concept. Islam was a brotherhood, is a brotherhood. That is the first thing -- the free movement of people, the generosity of people's attitudes towards their brothers around the world, that is itself I think is important. Secondly, living in the context of the moral discipline of Islam, I think, is important because living in a society where freedom eventually becomes equated with license, is not what I would want....

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Pakistan Television Corporation Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3209/

"The issue, very simply, is this: what kind of nation states do we hope will emerge in the Muslim world during the next century? What are we looking for? What do we want of our society? What kind of institutions should we seek to create? ...
was in one form or the other subjugated by the will of the West. England and France between them controlled most of the Middle East including Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, the whole of North Africa with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya; most of those parts of Africa south of the Sahara which had substantial Muslim population such as Nigeria, Senegal, Dahomey, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zanzibar; and finally most of those parts of Asia which were totally or substantially Muslim, including the Indian subcontinent, and Malaysia. Thus at the dawn of the twentieth century, practically no Muslim areas of the world were self-governing. This is a startling fact, but none the less true.

"One of the many consequences was that the concept of Muslim statehood was broken in time and in action to be replaced by the concepts which were Western in inspiration as well as in practice. The art of government no longer directly involved the Muslims of the world. Those who did concern themselves were never in the position of testing their ideas against the harsh realities of nineteenth and twentieth century power politics. I suggest therefore that there has been a very prolonged vacuum in Muslim responsibilities in this field and that this vacuum in turn provoked a deep apathy towards problems of Islamic statehood. Few men in their daily lives have time to worry about other peoples' problems, and at the dawn of the twentieth century, problems of Muslim statehood were completely dormant.

"Within the last 30 years, most of the Muslim world has regained its independence, and now is totally in control of its own affairs. But the loss of control of government in the recent past has left the Muslims of today in a situation either of prolonging the inherited forms of Western government or of adopting a pragmatic approach, the results of which are impossible to forecast."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1970 University of Sind Convocation Address
( Hyderabad, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1602/
"During the long periods of interregnum between the destruction of empire and the re-attainment of sovereignty, Islamic culture -- already, as I have said, forced into hibernation -- was further weakened by the West becoming the focal point of international economic development, with a resultant emphasis on Western cultural and artistic values.

"Even when the Islamic states did recover political independence, sometimes within freshly-drawn frontiers, they were brought into being as reflections of Western concepts of nationhood. The most obvious example of this was Turkey, which Ataturk reshaped from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire as a secular state in the belief that the adoption of Western patterns would enable his country to achieve a Western degree of economic development."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1984 address on receiving the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Medal for Architecture at the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, USA)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3006/

John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: You've spoken in the past, well before September the 11th, about some of the difficulties or challenges of Muslim nations to secularise. Is that still a great challenge for those countries, and do you foresee it happening in the near term?

Aga Khan: I can't give you a single answer to that, and the reason is that the history of these nations is very different one from the other. If you were to take the Central Asian republics, their relationship to the faith of Islam, relationship to democratic processes is very different from what happens in other parts of the world. But I think the more over-riding issue is the issue of theocracy versus secular state, and I think that at this point in time, the vast majority of countries within the Muslim world have recognised the difficulty of a theocratic state, and these difficulties are due to many different forces in these countries. But also, the pluralism within Islam. Because if you create a theocratic state,
automatically you are saying there must be an interpretation which
is the state interpretation of the faith. So that alone is a very, very
difficult question to ask. And you can see, I don’t have to name the
countries, you can see what happens when these internal stresses
occur in states which would present themselves as theocratic states.
So I think the answer is most of them are going towards a secular
state, but I would want to avoid the notion of a secular state
without faith. What we are talking about are states that want to
have modern forms of government but where the ethics of Islam
remain the premises on which civil society is built. And I think that’s
where we see this -- to me very exciting -- effort to maintain the
ethics of Islam, but in a modern state. And I think when we’re
talking about the ethics of Islam, it’s easier to have civil society
institutions built on the ethics of the faith, than a theocratic state in
the full form.

Michael Charlton: Yes. In these [Iran's 1979 revolution] situations
has normally led to an autocracy of some kind or another. Anarchy
and disorder has been replaced by a much stronger form of
leadership. Is that the general pattern?

Aga Khan: No, I would say it has been replaced by an individual
or an idea and that individual doesn’t have to be autocratic,
although he may be called upon to do certain things to restore
national integrity or law and order.

Michael Charlton: Is there an ideal form of Islamic government?

Aga Khan: I don’t think, you know, you can talk about Islamic
government. If you go back to the Qur’an, there is no government
mentioned in the Qur’an.

Michael Charlton: I know, you all say that. All Imams and all
political leaders in Islam say that. On the other hand, it seems to me that those divisions between the religious and secular life in Islam are, in fact, at the heart of all development and they have to be addressed ...

Aga Khan: They have got to be addressed, that is absolutely correct.

Michael Charlton: Who wins? What comes out top, religion or the secular process?

Aga Khan: I couldn't generalise on that. It depends entirely on the society of the land you are talking about. You know, I simply can not make a comparison between an Arab country in the Middle East and Indonesia, but they are there. We are talking about too...it's too vast an Empire, you know, we are talking about hundreds and millions of people covering so many different races and languages.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton (London, United Kingdom)

See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on secularism and Islam's reconciliation with it

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the theocratic state and democracy
Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on Islam and misguided, Western perceptions of it

"Today in the Occident, the Muslim world is deeply misunderstood by most. The West knows little about its diversity, about the religion or the principles which unite it, about its brilliant past or its recent trajectory through history. The Muslim world is noted in the West, North America and Europe, more for the violence of certain minorities than for the peacefulness of its faith and the vast majority of its people. The words 'Muslim' and 'Islam' have themselves come to conjure the image of anger and lawlessness in the collective consciousness of most Western cultures. And the Muslim world has, consequently, become something that the West may not want to think about, does not understand, and will associate with only when it is inevitable.

"The second reason why the Islamic world and the West should seek increased mutual understanding is that in the wake of the Cold War, it has become obvious that violence and cruelty of all ilk are a plague gaining ground around the globe. It can be military or paramilitary and brutal, or it can be structural and inconspicuous, and no less brutal. It ranges from suicide bombings to ethnic cleansing to the forgetting and abandoning of large segments of society, even by industrialised nations such as this one.

"Against this worrying global background it must be made utterly clear that in so far as Islam is concerned, this violence is not a function of the faith itself, as much as the media would have you believe. This is a mis-perception which has become rampant, but which should not be endowed with any validity, nor should it be accepted and given credibility. It is wrong and damaging. The myth
that Islam is responsible for all the wrong doing of certain Muslims may well stem from the truism that for all Muslims, the concepts of Din and Duniya, Faith and World, are inextricably linked. More so than in any other monotheistic religion of the world. The corollary is that in a perfect world, all political and social action on the part of Muslims would always be pursued within the ethical framework of the Faith. But this is not yet a perfect world. The West, nonetheless, must no longer confuse the link in Islam, between spiritual and temporal, with that between state and church.

"With the deaths of King Charles the First, and Louis the Sixteenth, Western culture initiated a process of secularisation which grew into present day democratic institutions, and lay cultures. Islam, on the other hand, never endorsed any political dogma. So the historical process of secularisation which occurred in the West, never took place in Muslim societies. What we are witnessing today, in certain Islamic countries, is exactly the opposite evolution, the theocratisation of the political process. There is no unanimity in the Islamic world on the desirability of this trend but it would certainly be less threatening if the humanistic ethics of the faith were the driving force behind the processes of change.

"The news-capturing power of this trend contributes to the Western tendency to perceive all Muslims or their societies as a homogeneous mass of people living in some undefined theocratic space, a single 'other' evolving elsewhere. And yet with a Muslim majority in some 44 countries and nearly a quarter of the globe's population, it should be evident that our world cannot be made up of identical people, sharing identical goals, motivations or interpretations of the faith. It is a world in itself, vast and varied in its aspirations and in its concerns. Is there not something intellectually uncouth about those who choose to perceive one billion people of any faith as a standardised mass?"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Brown University Commencement Ceremony address (Providence, Rhode Island, USA) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5089/
Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on diversity as a strength in Creation, in religion, in culture and intellectual endeavour

"In the final analysis, no nation, no race, no individual has a monopoly of intelligence or virtue. If we are to pursue the ideal of meritocracy in human endeavour, then its most perfect form will grow out of a respect for human pluralism, so that we can harness the very best contributions from whomever and wherever they may come."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2009 University of Alberta Graduation Ceremony address (Edmonton, Alberta)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9281/

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"The spirit of the Knowledge Society is the spirit of Pluralism -- a readiness to accept the Other, indeed to learn from him, to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat. Such a spirit must be rooted, I believe, in a sense of humility before the Divine, realising that none of us have all the answers, and respecting the broad variety of God's creation and the diversity of the Human Family."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7997/

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"In a world that claims to be globalised, there are some who might regard cultural standardisation as natural, even desirable. For my part, I believe that marks of individual and group cultural identity generate an inner strength which is conducive to peaceful relations. I also believe in the power of plurality, without which there is no possibility of exchange. In my view, this idea is integral to the very definition of genuine quality of life."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Address to the Avignon Forum 'The value and importance of cultural diversity and its role in promoting peace and development' (Avignon, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9065/

"The second point I would emphasise today is that our Academy initiative -- in Dhaka and elsewhere -- is one that strongly affirms the integrity of local and national cultures. To be sure, this new Academy will connect its students to global perspectives. But it will also respect the central role of each person's particular heritage as a cornerstone of his or her identity and an enriching gift of the Creator. The beauty of Creation is a function of its variety. A fully homogenised world would be far less attractive and interesting. The roots we inherit from our history -- linking us to a particular past -- are a great source of strength and joy and inspiration."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Aga Khan Academy, Dhaka, Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Dhaka, Bangladesh)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8787/

"Why would homogenisation be such a danger? Because diversity and variety constitute one of the most beautiful gifts of the Creator, and because a deep commitment to our own particularity is part of what it means to be human. Yes, we need to establish connecting bonds across cultures, but each culture must also honour a special sense of self. The downside of globalisation is the threat it can present to cultural identities...."
"In the final analysis, the great problem of humankind in a global age will be to balance and reconcile the two impulses of which I have spoken: the quest for distinctive identity and the search for global coherence. What this challenge will ultimately require of us, is a deep sense of personal and intellectual humility, an understanding that diversity itself is a gift of the Divine, and that embracing diversity is a way to learn and to grow -- not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 'The Peterson Lecture' at the Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate (Atlanta, Georgia, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8435/

"One of history's great lessons is that a society can underwrite human progress only when it overcomes its insularity and suspicion of 'the other,' and instead, looks upon difference as a source of strength. For, while our new century continues to be marred by conflict and tension, the effective world of tomorrow is a pluralist one which comprehends, welcomes and builds on diversity. That is why I passionately view the struggle against poverty, and respect for the values of pluralism, as two of the most significant tests of whether the 21st Century is to be an era of global peace, stability and progress."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Acceptance Address □ Honorary Doctorate, University of Evora (Evora, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7654/

Rajiv Mehrotra: I think there is an anxiety in many developing societies including India, that modernisation is frequently meant Westernisation, that technology is meant a sense of alienation from the community, from one's immediate environment, the disintegration of the family etcetera, etcetera. When you go in with development strategies and development models, is there an
overview of an ideal society that you seek to perpetuate or encourage?

**Aga Khan:** No, there is no total view in my perception, simply because I view diversity as strength, and that may be a funny statement to make, but I think that in diversity there is great strength if it is understood that diversity must not be encouraged to become conflict. But the different cultures, different faiths, different languages, different traditions should be looking at common issues and starting from different standpoints but trying to resolve them collaboratively. That is a major force and it is only divisive if it is to turn into something divisive. Otherwise it’s very powerful. I am personally concerned about a loss of cultural tradition and I would like to see cultural traditions enhanced but it doesn’t have to be at the exclusion of others. What it means is that a cultural tradition is a human inheritance in a given society. Let that be continued and enhanced....

**Rajiv Mehrotra:** You said you are not a politician. What kind of role do you see for yourself, beyond the context of being the Imam for your community?

**Aga Khan:** Well, I would like to be able to convince people that they can work towards common objectives, no matter what backgrounds they come from in language, in faith, in society, that one doesn’t have to give up one’s heritage or one’s individuality or one’s faith. To set and achieve common goals so long as they are well determined and shared, and if that can happen in the developing world -- and certainly not through my input alone -- but to me, it would be a substantial achievement, because it would be convincing people from different backgrounds, different societies, that their differences are not weakness and they do not have to be translated into conflict. They can be translated into immense strength and benefit for everybody.

*His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/
"Surely, one of the great questions of our time is whether we can learn to live creatively with both the global and the tribal impulse, embracing the adventure of a broader internationalism even as we drink more deeply from the wellsprings of a particular heritage."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1986 Commonwealth Press Union Conference Keynote Address (Cape Town, South Africa)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5137/

"Since the end of the Cold War, a number of factors appear to have been common and significant ingredients, if not the primary cause, of many of the conflicts we have witnessed. Perhaps the most common of these ingredients has been the failure of those involved to recognise the fact that human society is essentially pluralist ...

"Whether it be in Central Europe, the Great Lakes region in Africa, or in Afghanistan -- to cite just one example from three different continents -- one of the common denominators has been the attempt by communal groups, be they ethnic, religious, or tribal groups, to impose themselves on others. All such attempts are based on the principle of eradicating the cultural basis that provides group identity. Without cultural identity, social cohesion gradually dissolves and human groups lose their necessary point of reference to relate with each other, and with other groups."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 Concluding Address to the Prince Claus Fund Conference on Culture and Development (Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6351/

"This brings me to the story of Canada, shaped so fundamentally by two European cultures. This dual inheritance was an apparent weakness at one point, but it was transformed into an enormous
strength thanks to leaders like LaFontaine and Baldwin, as well as those who shaped the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, and so many others who contributed to a long, incremental process.

"That process has been extended over time to include a broader array of peoples, the First Peoples, and the Inuits, and a host of new immigrant groups. I am impressed by the fact that some 44 percent of Canadians today are of neither French nor British descent. I am told, in fact, that a typical Canadian citizenship ceremony might now include people from two dozen different countries. [Emphasis original]"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 10th Annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, Institute for Canadian Citizenship (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9601/

"Canada has for many years been a beacon to the rest of the world for its commitment to pluralism and its support for the multicultural richness and diversity of its peoples. It is precisely this diversity that sustains the moral and dynamic coherence in public life that Canada has so successfully constructed, and is predicated on the ethic of respect for human dignity. The country has fully embraced pluralism as a foundation for its strength and growth and I am convinced that this is absolutely necessary for the stability of an interdependent world....

"The need for better understanding across cultures has never been greater -- or more pressing. It is important that the diversity of cultures -- and the inherent pluralism that characterises many societies today -- be acknowledged as a vital asset and a prerequisite for progress and development."

His Highness the Aga Khan's Preface to the 2008 book 'The Aga Khan Museum' by Philip Jodidio (Aiglemont)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8373/
"Muslims are spread around the globe -- basically in the Third World -- from the hottest of deserts to the wettest of flood plains, to the coldest of the highest mountains. Their countries are of infinite variety and have been born from and have given birth to great civilisations. They come from numerous ethnic backgrounds and speak hundreds, if not thousands, of local languages. Yet all 800 million share the same faith. I believe that like Canadians, Muslims can draw strength from their diversity but they certainly cannot be condemned if they sometimes fail."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony address (Burnaby, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3183/

"Within the Islamic world there is work to do as well [in addressing the mutual 'clash of ignorance'], starting with a better understanding and appreciation of the pluralism of cultures and interpretations among Muslims. The legacy is rich, a source of strength, and needs to be encouraged and celebrated. It is also crucial that the Islamic world develops a creative and reasoned response to the impact of Western popular culture, which coupled with the dominance of modern electronic media by Western corporations, poses a serious threat to local and national identities and cultures, and their creative and sustainable evolution."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 address at the Banquet in Honour of the Governor of Texas (Houston, Texas, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6256/

"... I think we have difficulty making people around the world realise what is the Islamic World. One should not confuse Sub-Saharan Africa with Central Asia. One should not confuse Central Asia with countries of Asia such as Malaysia and Indonesia. These
are different peoples, with different histories, that have been converted to Islam at different times, that have evolved since then, that have different languages, that have different interpretations. What is the big problem? It is to know if that diversity is a strength or a weakness. And what I say is that the Muslim World -- well, what I wish -- is that the Muslim World looks at that situation as if it was a marvellous opportunity. Not that diversity weakens us. That is the fundamental problem."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Interview (Aleppo, Syria and Lebanon) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/

"[A]s all segments of the Islamic world are healthy, lively and creative, that diversity is a source of strength and not weakness. Those who seek to impose a political view on the Islamic World or a religious view are, in my opinion, really not working for the benefit of the Islamic World. There is no way that you can impose a single view on nine hundred million people in so many different countries of the world."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

"... I believe, that Britain will serve the Commonwealth best in the material sense if she concentrates her limited resources on technical projects of immediate and practical value. And if she hopes to win the ideological battle she should not be afraid to encourage the natural flowering of different national personalities within the Commonwealth. They will not always follow British precedents, but in their very diversity will be born a new and lasting strength.

"Such strength in diversity is a quality which can be of immense value in the modern world whose problems are less and less
national and increasingly global, before long even inter-terrestrial, in scope."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1960 Lecture at Oxford University under the auspices of the Royal Commonwealth Society, 'Ismaili Community and its Contribution to the Commonwealth' (Oxford, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1322/

"My hope for Uganda is that it can continue to build a culture which sees diversity and difference, peacefully expressed, as a source of potential strength rather than a cause of harmful division. Even as we take deep pride in our own personal traditions we also know that we can learn a great deal from those who have come from different backgrounds and who hold different perspectives.

"As this resurgent cosmopolitan spirit continues to develop in Uganda, it can be a profound source of strength for this country and indeed for the entire world. All across our planet in these early years of the 21st century, people are learning to live with other people who are different from them but who are suddenly and closely connected."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 address at the Banquet Hosted in Honour of the President of Uganda (Kampala, Uganda)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8256/

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Aga Khan: ... First of all I start from the premise of Pakistan -- a big country, a big population, a spread of Muslims from all interpretations of the faith, a rural country with a reasonably developed industrial sector, but not an extensively developed industrial sector, that makes me think of a country whose development could, and In'sha'Allah will, be multi-faceted; not a monolithic economy; not a monolithic society; perhaps not even a monolithic interpretation of the faith. In that sense, Pakistan represents the multifaceted face of the Islamic World. Therefore,
within its frontiers it contains all the challenges, all the opportunities of the Islamic World. What I hope is that in its diversity, there will be a sense of strength rather than a sense of antagonism, or conflict. And that sense of strength which could come from many different peoples, many different attitudes, is perhaps one of the greatest opportunities.

Pakistan Television Corporation: Here we talk of the classical heritage of Islam and of course the rapid, endless innovations of modern architecture. There are some very strange buildings that we see and come across in our television programmes as well sometimes from the West. Do you think it is possible to create a meaningful blend of the two in the future? Or would they just go in different directions?

Aga Khan: No. I again think there is strength in diversity. Let me explain. I don’t think the type of architecture you will get in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia will be identical to the type of architecture you get in the Gulf. I don’t think the Gulf will be identical to the architecture you get in the mountains in Hunza and Chitral. You will always have a local element in that architecture. I am looking at the inspiration behind that. What is man’s relationship to his family? What is man’s relationship to his environment? God’s blessings in the forms of water, sand, colour -- how are those used? How do we use them to improve our living conditions? Those, I think, are the inspiring forces that Islamic architects, Muslim architects will revitalise. Now I hope they will revitalise. Now I hope they will revitalise this in a form which is appropriate to their own culture, their own climate, and their own environment. The inspiration is there.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Pakistan Television Corporation Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3209/

"Some years ago we gathered a group of eminent scholars of Islamic culture and distinguished architects and designers representing all
major faiths, in a series of seminars to wrestle with the challenge of coming up with a definition of Islamic architecture. One of the first outcomes of the effort was the conclusion that no single definition exists because over its long and distinguished history, Islamic architecture has reflected different climates, times, materials, building technologies and political philosophies.

"But this is a very important finding in itself. It shows that trying to establish a norm would be counter productive, because it would stifle that strength which comes from the diversity and pluralism of Muslim societies, past and present, and the creativity of those who will build around us in the years ahead. Unfortunately there are forces at work in the Islamic world that seek to establish just such a norm. This makes it all the more important that we strive to counter such efforts by employing all the means of intellectual discourse -- research, discussion, celebration of innovative projects, and the commissioning of freshly conceived but well researched new buildings."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 Ismaili Center Opening Ceremony address (Houston, Texas, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6245/

"The diversity of architecture in secular and in religious buildings in the Islamic World is extraordinary, is an important strength, and is a resource for the community. This plurality of cultural traditions within the widest interpretation of the all-encompassing faith of Islam is, however, relatively unknown and very poorly understood, particularly in the West, which thinks, too often, of all things Islamic in narrow, normative terms."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1997 Stone Town Cultural Centre Opening Ceremony address (Zanzibar, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5264/
"In many areas it is also possible to revitalise or strengthen cultural assets -- be they buildings, musical forms, or crafts -- as potential attractions or products for those tourists interested in mountains and mountain cultures. The point was made in the opening plenary that mountain areas have the highest level of bio-diversity of any ecological zone. It is equally true that mountains have more cultural diversity than any other physical setting. This is a great source of strength and an asset and should be supported as such."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2002 Bishkek Global Mountain Summit
Keynote Address (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6382/

"The distinctive nature of the Aga Khan University is not put forward as a [model?] for all others to follow. In fact, the very diversity of institutions of higher education in Pakistan and in the developing world is a source of strength that should be multiplied, not limited."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1991 Aga Khan University Convocation
Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4486/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on balancing the global and the local: the hazard of a superficial, homogenised mega-culture

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on the continuous, limitless nature of Creation and man's relationship to Creation

"There is no limit to the power of God. Even the successes of modern medicine are additional proofs of the unlimited power of Allah. It is He who wishes to give to mankind a chance to prolong their worldly life, in so far as it is not illusory. Landing on the moon shows less the power of man than the power of God. Allah has put in the universe much more than what humans have thought to see. It is for this reason existence is exciting and one should act fully, participating as much as possible in everything of life that represents dignity and eternal hope."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1969 Elle Magazine interview with Paul Giannoli (France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/

"If, now, we turn from its historic background to its doctrine and to its possibility of development in the future, we will find the same potential universality. Take the central principle of 'Allah O Akbar.' Here we find on one side divinity, on the other side infinity. For what is the greater -- time, space, the starry heavens, intelligence, knowledge? -- wherever existence goes there His greatness extends. Greaterness here, to anyone who understands the implications of the Arabic language, does not mean 'greaterness' as literally translated into English. It means that everything else is within the womb of the greater -- everything else is maintained and sustained by Divine
Power, including the furthest spaces of imagination."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III foreword to 'Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations' by Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazbhoy (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10546/

"It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur'an, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely. But when we realise the meaning of this saying, we are already preparing ourselves for the gift of the power of direct experience.

"In spite of its great spiritual strength, Jewish monotheism has retained two characteristics which render it essentially different from Islamic monotheism: God has remained, in spite of all, a national and racial God for the children of Israel, and His personality is entirely separate from its supreme manifestation, the Universe....

"Once man has thus comprehended the essence of existence, there remains for him the duty, since he knows the absolute value of his own soul, of making for himself a direct path which will constantly lead his individual soul to and bind it with the Universal Soul of which the Universe -- as much of it as we perceive with our limited visions -- is one of the infinite manifestations. Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: 'Allah-o-Akbar'. What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul. Imam Hassan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the Sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain; there is certainly a reflection or image of the Sun, but with what poverty and with what little reality; how small and pale is the likeness between this impalpable image and the immense, blazing, white-hot
glory of the celestial sphere itself. Allah is the Sun; and the Universe, as we know it in all its magnitude, and time, with its power, are nothing more than the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the fountain.

"There is a fundamental difference between the Jewish idea of creation and that of Islam. The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will. I think that I have sufficiently explained the difference between the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God and, on one side, the theistic ideas, founded upon the Old Testament, and on the other, the pantheistic and dualistic ideas of the Indian religion and that of Zoroaster. But having known the real, the Absolute, having understood the Universe as an infinite succession of events, intended by God, we need an ethic, a code of conduct in order to be able to elevate ourselves toward the ideal demanded by God....

"Islamic doctrine goes further than the other great religions, for it proclaims the presence of the soul, perhaps minute but nevertheless existing in an embryonic state, in all existence -- in matter, in animals, trees, and space itself. Every individual, every molecule, every atom has its own spiritual relationship with the All-Powerful Soul of God. But men and women, being more highly developed, are immensely more advanced than the infinite number of other beings known to us."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"Islam's message contains a central theme which is the total power
of Allah and therefore my conviction is that the discoveries which the human mind can make are really simply a minute perception of Allah's creation ... The message of Islam with regard to Allah's power and His creation is essential to our faith. We have every day evidence of that and we must be thankful.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

"Whereas a few hundred years ago man suspected and imagined that the universe was, for all intents and purposes, limitless, today he knows this to be true. His improved understanding of the material world around him has given him the means to make sure that his original conception of the universe was correct, in that every day its limits are being pushed aside and new horizons appear.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1964 First World Socio-Economic Conference address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9999/

"If the frontiers of physics are changing, it is due to scientists discovering more and more about the universe, even though they will never be able to probe its totality, since Allah's creation is limitless and continues.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/
"And in fact that modern science simply allows us to discover more and more of the miracles that He has performed, perhaps continues to perform ..."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

"I have ... met many persons nominally Christian who seem to think that in the beginning God created the world and then left it to its own devices. They seem to regard Him as a Being infinitely removed from them and their affairs. Whereas my Faith is, as you say yours [(Christianity)] is, that God is ever present, ever creative ...

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's Daily Sketch Interview answer to the question 'Is Religion Something Special?' (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/

"[O]ne strength of Islam has always lain in its belief that creation is not static but continuous, that through scientific and other endeavours, God has opened and continues to open new windows for us to see the marvels of His creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 address on the Acceptance of the Charter of the Aga Khan University (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2817/

"In Islam the Divine is reflected in Nature's creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7314/
"[A]bove all, it has been the Qur'anic notion of the universe, as an expression of Allah’s will and creation, that has inspired in diverse Muslim communities, generations of artists, scientists and philosophers? Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour are all seen as the response of the faithful to the recurring call of the Qur'an to ponder the creation as a way to understand Allah’s benevolent majesty. As Sura al-Baqara proclaims: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.'"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

"For [Muslims] there is no fundamental division between the spiritual and the material: the whole world is an expression of God's creation and the aesthetics of the environment we build are correspondingly important."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1984 Opening Remarks, Ninth Seminar, 'The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo', The Aga Khan Award For Architecture (Cairo, Egypt) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3101/

"The Qur'an itself repeatedly recommends Muslims to become better educated in order better to understand God's creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Address at the 'Musee-Musees' Round Table Conference, Louvre Museum (Paris, France) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8283/
"[Y]ou educate the individual to understand better the creation of God. Therefore education is part of the manifestation of faith because you seek to understand what you would not normally understand."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2009 ZDF (Enterprises) Interview (2nd) for the documentary 'Islam and the West' Part 3, 'Morgenland' ('Orient') (Germany)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9266/

"In Shia Islam, intellect is a key component of faith. Intellect allows us to understand the creation of God."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/

"[I]n Islamic thought, as in this building, beauty and mystery are not separated from intellect -- in fact, the reverse is true. As we use our intellect to gain new knowledge about Creation, we come to see even more profoundly the depth and breadth of its mysteries.... And the more we discover, the more we know, the more we penetrate just below the surface of our normal lives -- the more our imagination staggers. Just think for example what might lie below the surfaces of celestial bodies all across the far flung reaches of our universe. What we feel, even as we learn, is an ever-renewed sense of wonder, indeed, a powerful sense of awe -- and of Divine inspiration."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Opening Ceremony address (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9151/
"My forefathers founded al-Azhar University in Cairo some 1,000 years ago, at the time of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. Discovery of knowledge was seen by those founders as an embodiment of religious faith, and faith as reinforced by knowledge of workings of the Creator’s physical world.... [T]hat reciprocity between faith and knowledge remains a source of strength."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Massachusetts Institute of Technology Commencement Ceremony address (Cambridge, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1/

"The relationship between the intellect of man and faith has always been of fundamental importance to Muslims. How can a modern university respect and re-enforce that relationship? The Divine Intellect Akl-i-kul', both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dedicated by the faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given and that he should know himself. It is the light of intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal and developing that intellect requires free enquiry. The man of faith who fails to pursue intellectual search is likely to have only a limited comprehension of Allah’s creation. Indeed, it is man’s intellect that enables him to expand his vision of that creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/

"[Education] must also stimulate students to consider a variety of perspectives on some of the fundamental questions posed by the human condition: 'What is truth?' 'What is reality?' ..."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s vision for the Aga Khan Academies: 'What
"Then came Hafiz -- by far the greatest singer of the soul of man. In him we can find all the strivings, all the sorrow, all the victories and joys, all the hopes and disappointments of each and every one of us. In him we find contact, direct and immediate, with the outer universe interpreted as an infinite reality of matter, as a mirror of an eternal spirit, or indeed (as Spinoza later said) an absolute existence of which matter and spirit alike are but two of infinite modes and facets."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1936 Iran Society Inaugural Lecture (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1273/

"I can only say to everyone who reads [my memoirs] that it is my profound conviction that man must never ignore and leave untended and undeveloped that spark of the Divine which is in him. The way to personal fulfilment, to individual reconciliation with the Universe that is about us, is comparatively easy for anyone who firmly and sincerely believes, as I do, that Divine Grace has given man in his own heart the possibilities of illumination and of union with Reality. It is, however, far more important to attempt to offer some hope of spiritual sustenance to those many who, in this age in which the capacity of faith is non-existent in the majority, long for something beyond themselves, even if it seems second-best. For them there is the possibility of finding strength of the spirit, comfort and happiness in contemplation of the infinite variety and beauty of the Universe."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9937/
See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on miracles in Islam


Click here for this post in PDF format.
Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on having 'humility before the Divine'

"The superiority of man-made structures over natural environment is a concept alien to Islamic belief."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 Address to the Asia Society (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2010/

"The famous verse of 'light' in the Qur’an, the Ayat al-Nur, whose first line is rendered here in the mural behind me, inspires among Muslims a reflection on the sacred, the transcendent. It hints at a cosmos full of signs and symbols that evoke the perfection of Allah’s creation and mercy....

"Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour are all seen as the response of the faithful to the recurring call of the Qur’an to ponder the Creation as a way to understand Allah’s benevolent majesty. As Sura al-Baqara proclaims: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.' ...

"The Qur’an’s is an inclusive vision of society that gives primacy to nobility of conduct. It speaks of differences of language and colour as a Divine sign of mercy and a portent for people of knowledge to reflect upon."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2003 Address to the International Colloquium ‘Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions’ organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom)
"[The challenges of design for the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat] call for translating concepts that have a context in our faith and our history, yet stride boldly and confidently ahead, into modernity; for expressing both the exoteric and the esoteric, and our awe and humility towards the mysteries of Nature, Time and beyond.... In Islam the Divine is reflected in Nature's creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7314/

"A central element in a truly religious outlook, it seems to me, is the quality of personal humility -- a recognition that strive as we might, we will still fall short of our ideals, that climb as we might, there will still be unexplored and mysterious peaks above us. It means recognising our own creaturehood, and thus our human limitations. In that recognition, it seems to me, lies our best protection against false prophecies and divisive dogmatism."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Address to the Evora University Symposium (Evora, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/

"The spirit of the Knowledge Society is the spirit of Pluralism -- a readiness to accept the Other, indeed to learn from him, to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat. Such a spirit must be rooted, I believe, in a sense of humility before the Divine, realising that none of us have all the answers, and respecting the broad variety of God's creation and the diversity of the Human Family."
"In acknowledging the immensity of the Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding. In that light, the amazing diversity of Creation itself can be seen as a great gift to us -- not a cause for anxiety but a source of delight. Even the diversity of our religious interpretations can be greeted as something to share with one another -- rather than something to fear. In this spirit of humility and hospitality the stranger will be welcomed and respected, rather than subdued or ignored."

"Diversity itself is a gift of the Divine, and that embracing diversity is a way to learn and to grow -- not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge."

"One of the great stumbling blocks to the advance of pluralism, in my view, is simple human arrogance. All of the world's great religions warn against self-righteousness -- yet too many are still tempted to play God themselves -- rather than recognising their humility before the Divine."
"The spiritual roots of tolerance include, it seems to me, a respect for individual conscience – seen as a Gift of God – as well as a posture of religious humility before the Divine. It is by accepting our human limits that we can come to see The Other as a fellow seeker of truth and to find common ground in our common quest. Let me emphasise again, however, that spirituality should not become a way of escaping from the world but rather a way of more actively engaging in it."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 Acceptance Address  □  Tutzing Evangelical Academy’s ‘Tolerance’ Award (Tutzing, Germany)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7706/
Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imamat

**ITV:** Your Highness, if a complete stranger who had no idea who you were or what you were, came up to you and said, 'What you do for a living?' What would be your reply?

**Aga Khan:** I would say that my role is -- I am the Imam -- the hereditary Imam of the Shia Muslim community; the international Shia Muslim community.

**ITV:** And that your influence in the world is?

**Aga Khan:** I am responsible for guiding the interpretation of the faith for the Ismaili Muslims and advising them on issues of everyday life that they bring to me or that the Imamat as an institution has to decide upon....

**ITV:** What do you think of are the qualities that you'll look for when it is your turn to appoint your successor?

**Aga Khan:** I think I would hope the next Imam has a thorough and deep understanding of the faith which he has to represent and lead in its interpretation. I think he must have a good understanding of the issues which the Ismaili community and the countries in which they live will have to be addressed and that is essentially the countries of Asia and Africa. He will have to have a good understanding of the forces that are at play and that are likely to be at play. Therefore, he is going to have to be well equipped to deal with the leadership office....

**ITV:** One of the myths surrounding you is that some people in the
West think of you as a living God. Not only is that not true, it is also blasphemous.

*Aga Khan:* Absolutely. I mean as you know the faith of Islam was revealed at a time when the Arabian continent was idolatrous and idolatry, all forms of idolatry, are totally prohibited by Islam. It is certainly true to say that the Western World doesn't necessarily understand the theology of Shi'ism nor indeed the theology of many mystical sects whether they are Shia or Sunni or Christian. Mysticism, in its, in its essence is difficult....

*ITV:* Are you a democrat?

*Aga Khan:* Insofar as a [sic] institution can be democratic, yes. There are areas where in the interpretation of faith, democracy cannot, cannot play. But in the choice of leadership, in consultation on decisions, I do seek to consult as widely as possible.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview*  
(London, United Kingdom)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Message to The International Islamic Conference (Amman, Jordan)


Our historic adherence is to the Jafari Madhab and other Madhahib of close affinity, and it continues, under the leadership of the hereditary Ismaili Imam of the time. This adherence is in harmony also with our acceptance of Sufi principles of personal search and balance between the zahir and the spirit or the intellect which the zahir signifies.

Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim.
I am happy that we have been invited to participate in the International Islamic Conference being held in Amman, from the 4th to the 6th of July, 2005, under the auspices of the Hashemite Kingdom. In light of the purpose of the Conference, I find it appropriate to reiterate, in my message of greetings, the statement that I made in a keynote address at a gathering of eminent Muslim scholars from 48 countries who attended the Seerat Conference in Karachi on Friday, 12th March, 1976, nearly 30 years ago, which I had the honour to preside at the invitation of the then Minister for Religious Affairs, Government of Pakistan.

In my presidential address, I appealed to our ulama not to delay the search for the answers to the issues of a rapidly evolving modernity which Muslims of the world face because we have the knowledge that Islam is Allah’s final message to mankind, the Holy Qur’an His final Book, and Muhammad, may peace be upon him, His last and final Prophet.

These are the fundamental principles of faith enshrined in the Shahada and the Tawhid therein, which bind the Ummah in an eternal bond of unity. With other Muslims, they are continuously reaffirmed by the Shia Isma’ili Muslims of whom I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatima-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet’s daughter.

I applaud Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, for the foresight in hosting and organising this International Islamic Conference for the purpose of fostering unity in the Ummah and promoting the good reputation of our faith of Islam. Let this Conference be part of a continuous process of dialogue in the true spirit of Muslim brotherhood so that the entire wealth of our pluralist heritage bears fruit for the Muslim world, and indeed the whole of humanity; for ours is the heritage which premiates human dignity, transcending bounds of creed, ethnicity, language, gender or nationality.

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I agree with our distinguished hosts and conference participants that there is a need today to define which Madhahib will apply to the Ummah. This clarity is critical for modern life in Islam as is evident in areas such as law, access to Islamic banking, or in dealing with the challenges of the rapid generation of new knowledge such as in biomedical and other scientific fields.

In keeping with our historic tradition of ever abiding commitment to Muslim unity, we reaffirm our respect for the historical interpretation of Islam by our brother Muslims as an equally earnest endeavour to practise the faith in Allah and emulate the example of our Holy Prophet, may peace be upon him, which illuminates Muslim lives and which, In’sha’Allah, will elevate all Muslim souls.

Once again, I congratulate His Majesty and the Hashemite Kingdom for this timely initiative, and I pray for the successful deliberations of the Conference in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood.

With fraternal greetings,

His Highness the Aga Khan
49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims

SOURCES

- http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=105673
Message to The International Islamic Conference, Amman, Jordan – 4th-6th July, 2005

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AIGLEMONT, 60270 GOUVILLE, FRANCE
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With fraternal greetings,

Aga Khan

His Highness the Aga Khan
49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims
Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III on the final reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni doctrines

"It is more than ever necessary that the foundation of Imami-Ismailism should be understood by the new generation of Ismailis throughout the world. If those who believe that Hazrat Ali was the rightful successor of the Prophet to be the 'Ulu'l-amr Menkom must accept the principle of that succession for the same reasons they accept in the case of Hazrat Ali his rightful Imam descendants.

"The Imami Ismailis maintain that the position of the 'Ulu'l-amr Menkom never dies out and this succession goes on till the Day of Judgement on Earth. For this reason Ismailis celebrate the exceptionally long Imamat as they would celebrate every ascension to the spiritual throne of the Imamat in each century. In the present Imamat the final reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni doctrines has been publicly proclaimed by myself on exactly the same lines as Hazrat Ali did at the death of the Prophet and during the first thirty years after that. The political and worldly Khalifat was accepted by Hazrat Ali in favour of the three first Khalifs voluntarily and with goodwill for the protection of the interests of the Muslims throughout the world.

"We Ismailis now in the same spirit [as Hazrat Ali had done] accept the Khalifat of the first Khalifs and such other Khalifs as during the last thirteen centuries helped the cause of Islam, politically, socially and from a worldly point of view. On the other hand the Spiritual Imamat remained with Hazrat Ali and remains with his direct descendants always alive till the Day of Judgement. That a spiritual succession to the Imamat makes the Imam the 'Ulu'l-amr Menkom
always according to the Qur’an and though he has his moral claim
to the Khalifat as well, always he can, like Hazrat Ali himself owing
to the conditions of the world, accept and support such worldly
authorities as the Imam believes help the cause of Islam. Thus a
final reconciliation without upsetting either Sunni or Shia doctrine
has been proclaimed always by me as the faith of all the Ismailis.”

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s article ‘The final reconciliation
between the Shia and Sunni doctrines’
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10120/

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imam’s authority and discretion in interpreting the Qur’an

Aroon Purie: As Imam of your sect, you are also an interpreter of the Qur’an for your followers, but on the other hand, you are a man with a modern education and background. How do you reconcile these two aspects on subject like women’s rights, family planning and other related matters?

Aga Khan: As Imam of the Ismaili sect, I am in a position to adapt the teachings of the Qur’an to the modern condition. On the question of modernity the issue is essentially whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society or whether one is affecting the fundamentals of religious practice. As long as these two aspects are safeguarded the rest can be subject to adjustment.

Rajiv Mehrotra: The other philosophical dimension that in Islamic world view must come up for you in some measure is in the development models that you might be seeking to encourage. I think so that Islam decrees a societal framework which may seem somewhat strained relationship to modern technology modern practices, structures, financial institutions. How would you reconcile those?

Aga Khan: Well I say this with deference that I am not entirely
convinced that the faith itself has decreed any particular form rather that the people have interpreted it. And if my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue which is, well, anything that we are doing is in conflict with the ethic of Islam. If it is not in conflict with the ethic of Islam then I must interpret it as being possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

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**ITV:** Are you a democrat?

**Aga Khan:** Insofar as a [sic] institution can be democratic, yes. There are areas where in the interpretation of faith, democracy cannot, cannot play. But in the choice of leadership, in consultation on decisions, I do seek to consult as widely as possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

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**Pranay Gupte:** How would you be liked to be remembered as on four counts: First, as the Imam, what would you have done to this community? ...

**Aga Khan:** As the Imam, I think it would be important to try to have been an interpreter of the faith which enabled people to continue to look to a spiritual world and a world of faith, which is not only a material world. I feel very, very strongly about that. So interpretative nature of the role of the direction it gives seems to me central to the nature of the office that I have.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)
Roger Priouret: What is your role as head of the community?

Aga Khan: It is two-fold. The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practice of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur’an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam’s authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible. This is fundamental to our religion -- perhaps something similar is found in the case of the Pope in the Catholic religion....

Nicholas Tomalin: You have been compared to the Pope. Is your word, like his infallible?

Aga Khan: The Imam’s word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it. The Community always follows very closely the personal way of thinking of the Imam. It’s one of the particularities of Ismailis. An Ismaili who did not obey my word in matters of Faith, would not be excommunicated, he would still be a Muslim. He simply would no longer be a member of the Jamat -- the Community of Ismaili Muslims.

One has to make a very careful distinction here between worldly and religious matters. An Ismaili may ask my advice on a worldly problem, then not accept it. But if he were to ignore the Imam’s decision on matters of Faith, the Community pressures on him would be very strong.

Nicholas Tomalin: Have you used your power to make any radical changes in the Ismaili religion?
Aga Khan: You don’t change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, my grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. But I hope I am modern in my outlook, and I know that in many ways I am a different sort of person from my grandfather. This will necessarily subtly change the character of the Faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/

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Aga Khan: I always say this: one cannot change religion overnight. This evolution is a slow thing, and it is, therefore, an everlasting job with its own rhythm, usually a lot slower than the political and economic upheavals of the present time.

Roger Priouret: Does the religious nature of the Ismaili community remain unchanged?

Aga Khan: As far as I can tell, yes. In all Muslim countries, I would say yes also. As for telling you if that will continue, I will not risk such a prophecy.


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"Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules; even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s autobiography: ‘The Memoirs of
Roy Bonisteel: How do you see your responsibility as the living Imam?

Aga Khan: The Imam is first of all obviously responsible for the interpretation and practise of the faith and that is a role which my grandfather fulfilled which I fulfil today. Secondly, the Imam’s decisions with regards to matters of faith are binding obviously on members of the community.

Roy Bonisteel: Is this a kind of divine authority?

Aga Khan: You have to be very careful not to confuse the concept of religious authority with divinity. The prophet himself never claimed any miracle of any sort. The only miracle which you have in Islam is the Qur'an.

ITV: One of the myths surrounding you is that some people in the West think of you as a living God. Not only is that not true, it is also blasphemous.

Aga Khan: Absolutely. I mean as you know the faith of Islam was revealed at a time when the Arabian continent was idolatrous and idolatry, all forms of idolatry, are totally prohibited by Islam. It is certainly true to say that the Western World doesn’t necessarily understand the theology of Shi‘ism nor indeed the theology of many mystical sects whether they are Shia or Sunni or Christian. Mysticism, in its, in its essence is difficult.
His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (London, United Kingdom)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

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**Geoffrey Barker:** You make no claim to be divine. But do you believe you are divinely guided?

**Aga Khan:** Divinity is a very difficult thing to define in verbal terminology. Therefore I would object to anything which uses the term divine in my context. I have inherited an office and I seek to fulfil that office to the best of my judgement. To tell you what inspires that judgement ... I don’t think any individual can answer that question. You seek within yourself that which tells you what is the right thing to do.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 The Age interview with Geoffry Barker, (Melbourne, Australia)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

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**Rajiv Mehrotra:** What future role do you see for the Imams in the changing world and in the generations to come? Do you see that changing in anyway?

**Aga Khan:** Well, as you would have known, I have tried to continue the work that my grandfather did. He had a clear vision of his role in his time. I hope I have a clear vision of my role in my time and that vision will have to be defined by the Imam. That is in fact the premise of Imamat, in our interpretation. That is, that it is the Imam who interprets, in accordance with his time and that is his absolute prerogative, his right, his duty. So I wouldn't go further than that.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on interpreting the Qur’an

See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam’s and the Qur’an’s assent of freedom of individual interpretation

See also: TH Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time

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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Ismailism's inviolability yet simultaneous flexibility

**Geoffry Barker:** Do you see yourself as a reforming or conservative Imam?

**Aga Khan:** I think that is terminology which just does not apply in the sense that the essentials are the essentials and have remained the essentials for centuries. So I think reform as such doesn’t exist. Conservatism could exist in secular terms, not in religious terms.

*His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffry Barker (Melbourne, Australia)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/  

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*His Highness the Aga Khan's 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
ITV: Are you a democrat?

Aga Khan: Insofar as a [sic] institution can be democratic, yes. There are areas where in the interpretation of faith, democracy cannot, cannot play. But in the choice of leadership, in consultation on decisions, I do seek to consult as widely as possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

"What has been my own policy with my followers? Our religion is our religion, you either believe in it or you do not. You can leave a faith but you cannot, if you do not accept its tenets, remain within it and claim to 'reform' it.... There has never been any question of changing the Ismaili faith; that faith has remained the same and must remain the same. Those who have not believed in it have rightly left it; we bear them no ill-will and respect them for their sincerity."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"If one's faith is to be part of one's life then it has to come under questioning. The essential is that it should be understood, that's what would justify questioning."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
Interviewer: Does the fact that you have been to Harvard mean that you have ideas for modernising?

Aga Khan: Secular institutions yes. Definitely so.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1958 interview by four members of the UK Press (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1095/

“As Imam of the Ismaili sect, I am in a position to adapt the teachings of the Qur’an to the modern condition. On the question of modernity the issue is essentially whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society or whether one is affecting the fundamentals of religious practice. As long as these two aspects are safeguarded the rest can be subject to adjustment.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 India Today Interview (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4315/

“Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules; even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.”

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/
Rajiv Mehrotra: The other philosophical dimension that in Islamic world view must come up for you in some measure is in the development models that you might be seeking to encourage. I think so that Islam decrees a societal framework which may seem somewhat strained relationship to modern technology modern practices, structures, financial institutions. How would you reconcile those?

Aga Khan: Well I say this with deference that I am not entirely convinced that the faith itself has decreed any particular form rather that the people have interpreted it. And if my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue which is, well, anything that we are doing is in conflict with the ethic of Islam. If it is not in conflict with the ethic of Islam then I must interpret it as being possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

"[O]ne cannot change religion overnight. This evolution is a slow thing, and it is, therefore, an everlasting job with its own rhythm, usually a lot slower than the political and economic upheavals of the present time."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1975 L’Expansion Interview with Roger Priouret (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imam’s authority and discretion in interpreting the Qur’an
Excerpt: Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III on Ismailis and his guidance to them

"What has been my own policy with my followers? Our religion is our religion, you either believe in it or you do not. You can leave a faith but you cannot, if you do not accept its tenets, remain within it and claim to 'reform' it. You can abandon those tenets, but you cannot try to change them and still protest that you belong to the particular sect that holds them. Many people have left the Ismaili faith, just as others have joined it throughout the ages. About a score of people out of many millions -- a small group in Karachi and in India -- pretended to be Ismailis but called themselves 'reformers'. The true Ismailis immediately excommunicated them. There has never been any question of changing the Ismaili faith; that faith has remained the same and must remain the same. Those who have not believed in it have rightly left it; we bear them no ill-will and respect them for their sincerity.

"What about political guidance? It has been the practice of my ancestors, to which I have strictly adhered, always to advise Ismailis to be absolutely loyal and devoted subjects of the State -- whatever its constitution, monarchical or republican -- of which they are citizens. Neither my ancestors nor I have ever tried to influence our followers one way or another, but we have told them that the constituted legal authority of any country in which they abide must have their full and absolute loyalty. Similarly if any government approaches me and asks me for my help and my advice to its subjects, this advice is invariably -- as was my father's and my grandfather's -- that they must be loyal and law-abiding, and if they have any political grievances they must approach their government as legally constituted, and in loyalty and fidelity to it. All my
teaching and my guidance for my followers has been in fulfilment of this principle: render unto God the things which are God's and to Caesar those which are Caesar's.

"In matters of social reform I have tried to exert my influence and authority sensibly, and progressively. I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women. In my grandfather's and my father's time the Ismailis were far ahead of any other Muslim sect in the matter of the abolition of the strict veil, even in extremely conservative countries. I have absolutely abolished it; nowadays you will never find an Ismaili woman wearing the veil. Everywhere I have always encouraged girls' schools, even in regions where otherwise they were completely unknown. I say with pride that my Ismaili followers are, in this matter of social welfare, far in advance of any other Muslim sect. No doubt it is possible to find individuals equally advanced, but I am convinced that our social conditions as a body -- education for both boys and girls, marriage and domestic outlook and customs, the control over divorce, the provision for children in the event of divorce, and so forth -- are far ahead. We were pioneers in the introduction of midwifery, and long before any other Muslim community in the Middle East, we had trained nurses for childbirth. With the support and help of Lady Dufferin's nursing association in India, I was able -- at a time when normal conditions in these matters were terribly unsanitary -- to introduce a modern outlook on childbirth, with trained midwives, not only in India and Burma but in Africa and (so far as general conditions permitted) in Syria and Iraq.

"In Africa, where I have been able to give active help as well as advice, we have put the finances of individuals and of the various communities on a thoroughly safe basis. We established an insurance company -- the Jubilee Insurance -- whose shares have greatly increased in value. We also set up what we called an investment trust, which is really a vast association for receiving money and then putting it out on loan, at a low rate of interest, to Ismaili traders and to people who want to buy or build their own houses."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the role of Imams in Islam, whether Shia or Sunni

Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee: Are we looking at powerful businessman or a religious Muslim leader?

Aga Khan: No, I have nothing to do with entrepreneurship; in Islam, an Imam, whether Shia or Sunni, has responsibilities, firstly for the safety of the community; secondly, he is responsible for the quality of material life, for the daily lives. The nature of Imamat is, therefore, of becoming involved in activities, which will have a direct impact on the quality of people’s lives.

If this work is undertaken under the name of Aga Khan, it is undertaken in the name of the Imamat and not under the Aga Khan’s personal name. I have undertaken some personal initiatives is several companies, but do not hold anything which may have resulted from them, because I have other issues which I am concerned with.

Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee: Don’t you really have anything?

Aga Khan: The only thing, which is still private, is a long tradition in the organisation of horse racing and horse breeding, which my children have given continuity to. But I am not, or ever will be, an entrepreneur.

I am the sole shareholder of the Aga Khan Development Network, but I never withdraw dividends, because the objective is to serve from the resources, and not to make them personal. The notion that an institution carrying the name Aga Khan is personal is incorrect,
whether it is a university, a school or a project in the field of microfinance.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation] http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/

Jean-Jacques Lafaye: You are the embodiment of the Imamat. Your co-religionists see you as their 'lord and master.' What form does your leadership take?

Aga Khan: In both Sunni and Shia Islam, the Imam is responsible for the quality of life of those who look to him for guidance and for overseeing the practice of the faith. There is no division as there is, for example, in the Christian interpretation, between the material and the spiritual. The Imam's responsibility covers both domains. Hence, his first concern is for the security of his followers; his second is for their freedom to practice their religion; his third is for their quality of life, as I have just mentioned. I repeat, the Imamat is an institution whose two-fold mission is to guarantee quality of life and to interpret the faith.

"In all interpretations of Islam, Imams are required to lead not only in interpreting the faith but also in improving the quality of life for the people who refer to them. This ethical premise is the foundation of the Aga Khan Development Network, which has long been serving the developing world without regard to ethnicity, gender or race."


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His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 address to the International Press Institute, 54th General Assembly (Nairobi, Kenya) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7292/
"In Islam, imams whether they are Shia or Sunni, they have a duty to serve people. That is the nature of imamat and, therefore, in countries where the Ismaili Imamat can bring support and help, it is our duty to do so and we’re very happy to do so in Central Asia, like we are doing so in the Indian sub-continent, we’re doing so in East Africa, in West Africa. So it’s part of the mandate of any Imam. But it’s a big mistake to think that you can do development only for Muslim communities. Many countries have mixed communities and therefore you have to do development for all the people within a given area whether they are Muslim or Christian or Jewish or Hindu or Sikh. You have what I would call a civil responsibility."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 remarks to the press (Central Asia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10365/
Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: In Islam, as in Christianity, the role of the female has been debated. There are people who say that they would like to see your daughter, Princess Zahra, as the next Imam. However, tradition claims it has to be the eldest son ...

Aga Khan: As far as I know, there is no Muslim community in history that has had a woman as Imam.

Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: In that case, we can never see a woman as Imam?

Aga Khan: Absolutely not. However, women in our society are capable of developing a leadership role. Zahra studied at Harvard, has worked in the sense of helping to create capacities in various parts of the world. She is the first woman in my family with a university education, and I would hope that the future generations will refer both to men and women. I do not want you to perceive that women are not valued. Women are very, very valued. If you look at the history of Islam, Khadija, the Prophet’s first wife, had an extremely important role, both in his spiritual life, as in his worldly life.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwbio/8861/
**John Tidmarsh:** Ultimately, your turn will come to choose a successor, you have a daughter and two sons, could it be a daughter?

**Aga Khan:** You know traditionally, historically it’s been a man, the Imam keeps that choice to himself.

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**Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley:** You have two sons. One of them will succeed you, the other one will not. Yet, as a father, you obviously want to treat these two sons as equally as possible. What do you do?

**Aga Khan:** Well, during my lifetime, I will treat them absolutely identically. They must have the same education, some exposure, same understanding of their father’s work, I would not want to make any differentiation between them, any more than my grandfather made any differentiation between my brother and myself.

**Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley:** And your daughter?

**Aga Khan:** Obviously, though my daughter cannot be Imam, there’s no reason that she should not be intimately involved with and contribute to Imamat programs, particularly women’s activities.

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**Mansoor Ladha:** What was your reaction when you were told that Begum Salima had delivered a baby girl?
**Aga Khan:** You know, I have been brought up as a believing Muslim. And if that is the way you have been brought up and that is what you practise, you accept that there are certain things in life which are given to you by Allah; it is His decision and no one else's. I wouldn’t want you to think however, that I am unaware of my hereditary responsibilities. I would be absolutely thrilled to have a son.

**Mansoor Ladha:** Is it possible for your daughter Princess Zahra to succeed you if you don’t have a male heir?

**Aga Khan:** No. It is not.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1970 Standard Tanzania Interview with Mansoor Ladha (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)*

*http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1700/

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"**PARAGRAPH 8: APPOINTMENT OF SUCCESSOR**

"EVER since the time of my ancestor ALI, the first IMAM, that is to say over a period of thirteen hundred years, it has always been the tradition of our family that each Imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants whether they be sons or remoter issue ...

Will of Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, 1957

*http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10233/

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"**Succession to Imamat is by way of Nass, it being the absolute prerogative of the Imam of the time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants whether they be sons or remoter issue.**"

Preamble, Clause C

*Ismaili Constitution, Ordained by His Highness the Aga Khan IV on 11 July*
"Just as it was the prerogative of the Prophet to designate his successor, so it is the absolute prerogative of each Imam of the time to designate his successor from among his male progeny. Hence, according to Shia doctrine, the Imamat continues by heredity in the Prophet’s progeny through Ali and Fatima."

Institute of Ismaili Studies
http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=110993

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Margot Dougherty/Richard B. Stolley: The subject of money inevitably comes up when your name and your foundation are mentioned. Could you put to rest some of the myths?

Aga Khan: A lot of stories have been told. My grandfather’s jubilees were events which the Western media thought were very spectacular. The impression was given that very substantial amounts of money went straight into his personal wealth. These funds are offered to the Imam because he is the Imam, and he uses these funds for the benefit of the community. My grandfather left me some wealth which I use for my own living. I have some institutional expenses. If I didn’t occupy the office of Imam, I wouldn’t fly on a private aircraft, I wouldn’t have a secretariat of some 100 people. You really should apply to the Imam the same criteria you would apply to any public office. But that’s never been done, because there has been a sort of inheritance of gloss. Maybe I should have addressed that issue more quickly. I have felt that the area of the world I work in has not had the misperception; that’s much more a Western misperception.
assets -- for the development initiatives that you have supported?

Aga Khan: Well, we have probably 4 types of resources: There are the institutional resources of the community which the community makes available to the Imam. There are the secular resources which the community institutions develop. There are external resources from grants which institutions give us, governments, development agencies etc. And then there are my own personal resources which I have from my family and which I use as I see appropriate; and so long as the principles of propriety are respected, those resources are all used.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

ITV: You have immense wealth, both private and institutional. Where does all that wealth spring from?

Aga Khan: Well, the institutional wealth is that which comes from people who practise the faith. It comes from the institutions themselves which, if they are successful develop their own wealth in the economic field. Personal wealth I inherited from my father and my grandfather. And the institutional wealth is used exclusively for institutional development. And this I think has been demonstrated by a lot of what has been done in the recent years.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (2nd) (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

Question: Now could I ask a rather important question here because reading the circumstances of your grandfather’s death, it seemed that his fortune was not left to you. It was left partly to your step-grandmother and partly to your father in the customary way.
Does this mean that you are not able to control the funds of the Imamat yourself?

Aga Khan: No, because my grandfather left, according to the Shia law, his secular property to the heirs but the Imamat property stays with the actual position of Imam.

Question: So that you are not obliged to ask either your father or your step-grandmother before you can take a financial step in the Imamat?

Aga Khan: No, because the Imamat property is something which the Imam controls.

Question: You control that yourself?

Aga Khan: Yes. The Imam controls it himself.

Question: It is very difficult to assess the actual value of all that property isn’t it?

Aga Khan: Practically impossible.

Question: Apart from the sort of wild dreams that have been made about it, are there any sort of ways one could reach any estimate of it?

Aga Khan: No, because the properties are changing the whole time. The schools are being built and sold, hospitals are being built and sold, the community is moving the whole time.

Question: Well let us put it this way. Your grandfather was often called one of the richest man in the world. Was that true?

Aga Khan: I don’t think so.

Question: Is it true of you?

Aga Khan: No, I don’t think so either.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1958 interview by four members of the UK Press (London, United Kingdom)
"There is a great difference between wealth which comes from the faith and is used for the faith and personal wealth used for the individual. The Imam has responsibility for significant resources but they in no way cover the needs we have, and never will."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Financial Times Interview with Rachel Morarjee (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9028/

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**Roy Bonisteel**: That your leadership wasn’t just spiritual it was also financial support there too -- tell me, does the community still tithe to you?

**Aga Khan**: There is, like in all faiths, a form of religious due which is voluntary, which is institutional income. It is given within the context of the link between the Imam of the Time and the individual, or the family, and I think that it is been a source of strength both to the community and to the institution so long as those resources are used in a manner which is appropriate to the role of the Imam as an institution and is understood as such.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1986 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Man Alive Interview with Roy Bonisteel (Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/

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**Michael Charlton**: How is your institution organised, the Imamat of the Ismaili sect? For example, is your own property inseparable from the property of the Imamat itself?

**Aga Khan**: The Imamat revenue is given by the community to the
Imam. He has a responsibility to manage the Imamat revenue. Now, in Shia Islam, and this is true of the Twelvers and of the Seveners, the Imams or the Ayatollahs, as it would be in Twelver Shi’ism, are allowed or authorised to retain certain percentage of the Imamat revenue.

**Michael Charlton:** Can you tell me how much that is?

**Aga Khan:** In Ismaili tradition, because there is nothing which I have seen in writing, it is 10% at the present time, but the interesting thing is that, in effect, I would say easily 98% of those funds, and in fact at times much more than 98%, in fact probably of the order of 150%, goes back to the community. The reason for this is that ...

**Michael Charlton:** And just tell me ...

**Aga Khan:** I just want to finish this ... is that, it is extremely difficult for the Imamat to programme development the way it should be programmed. I will give you an example: the situation like the war between India and Pakistan, and the creation of Bangladesh, Uganda. Situations like that are extremely difficult to handle.

**Michael Charlton:** What do, what do these people as individuals contribute? How much of their income? Is it, is it ...

**Aga Khan:** I would not really be in a position to discuss that because what they contribute is entirely at their discretion, in effect you know.

**Michael Charlton:** And what are the obligations placed upon you when it does come to redistribution? How do you interpret it, because as you realise too, in the contemporary world, you must seem to many people discreditably rich.

**Aga Khan:** I think that if representing an institution which has an income and which manages that income in the interest of the people which it represents is discreditable, then I think practically every institution in the modern world is discredited, because there is no institution in the modern world which does not have its income. The question is, is that income used appropriately? I think the Ismailis
today would say that, if you look at the last twenty years of
development, there has been more development than ever before. At
the present time and in recent years, we have made an enormous
effort in health, education, housing. There is a $300 million teaching
hospital coming up in Karachi; there is a 5-6 million pound Ismaili
Centre in London; there is a teaching college which we are
envisaging in India, and in fact, as I said, the Imamat is spending
on many occasions more than it actually has, and as I mentioned,
the difficulty we have is actually planning the use of the funds
because we are working in the developing world with its ups and
downs and political problems, etc. Education is nationalised one
year, and new government comes and it's free; banks are
nationalised one year, then the new government comes in and they
also are free.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael
Charlton (London, United Kingdom)

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António Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee: You are invited by
Governments, you have a diplomatic statute, and you are known for
your personal wealth ...

Aga Khan: From what people say about my personal wealth. I
can assure you that they do not have access to my accounts. I can
also say that, if at any given time, the banks would lend me money
based on what the news reports say, I would be very rich! (Laughs)
However, I could not compete with Mr. [Bill] Gates in this area, I
can assure you.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Paroquias de Portugal Interview with
António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/

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Caroline Pigozzi/Jean-Claude Deutsch: Where do you obtain
the resources necessary to finance the development programs of your institutions?

**Aga Khan:** There are multiple sources for funding. Among of the most important are the direct contributions in the work of the Imamat, the partnership with the big national and international development agencies, the local state subsidies, and naturally our own revenues from our enterprises and endowment funds. The money is divided among the diverse types of programs which are subject to rigorous audits for the donors....

**Caroline Pigozzi/Jean-Claude Deutsch:** Why does it displease you so much when you see your name ranked among the names of the richest men in the world?

**Aga Khan:** Because that immediately creates the image of an inconceivably large mass of money wasted in any which way. The Western world has enough trouble defeating the simplistic and unoriginal image of the prince of the Thousand-and-One Nights. I carry the responsibility of certain institutional activities of the community -- in the matters of social, cultural and economic development -- which certainly requires the use of many institutional resources. I also have separate, private family investments, and some members of the media cannot stop themselves from considering the whole collection of funds that I manage as one figure, from which they make estimates that are way out of proportion.

"In the Western world not in the Eastern world. Let me add, however, that the Aga Khan Fund is an institution I created but not for my personal benefit. The purpose of that institution is to sustain the economic performance of the countries in which my community lives. The reason is very simple: If the economies of these countries don't develop, the quality of life can't change. There wouldn't be the
resources necessary to improve education, to improve health care, for all the things that people expect.

"So the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development is not a personal asset, it's an institutional asset and its goal is to increase its capacities and to reinvest those capacities in the countries in which it works or in new countries. Secondly, it looks for areas where normal, capitalistic entrepreneurs would not go. Because our goal is not exclusively profit, we invest in high-risk areas where nobody else is going."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2011 The East African Interview with Peter Mwaura (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9958/

Nicholas Tomalin: You’ve said you consider making investments of two or three million pounds in individual African countries of which you approve. You must be very popular there when you do that.

Aga Khan: Obviously if the Community decides to move in one direction or another this will affect the politics and the economy of different countries. If the contacts we have made make the situation look favourable to the type of investment I have in mind, then I would put money in if I also felt it would help the Community that’s living there. But this would be my own investment, a personal thing.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview, Part II, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10176/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on his private aircraft
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the tithes (dasond) given to him by Ismailis


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Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the tithes (dasond) given to him by Ismailis

Roy Bonisteel: That your leadership wasn’t just spiritual it was also financial support there too -- tell me, does the community still tithe to you?

Aga Khan: There is, like in I think all faiths, a form of religious due which is voluntary, which is institutional income. It is given within the context of the link between the Imam of the Time and the individual, or the family, and I think that it is been a source of strength both to the community and to the institution so long as those resources are used in a manner which is appropriate to the role of the Imam as an institution and is understood as such.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1986 CBC interview with Roy Bonisteel (Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/

Michael Charlton: How is your institution organised, the Imamat of the Ismaili sect? For example, is your own property inseparable from the property of the Imamat itself?

Aga Khan: The Imamat revenue is given by the community to the Imam. He has a responsibility to manage the Imamat revenue. Now, in Shia Islam, and this is true of the Twelvers and of the Seveners, the Imams or the Ayatollahs, as it would be in Twelver Shi’ism, are allowed or authorised to retain certain percentage of the Imamat revenue.
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Michael Charlton: What do, what do these people as individuals contribute? How much of their income? Is it, is it...

Aga Khan: I would not really be in a position to discuss that because what they contribute is entirely at their discretion, in effect you know....

Michael Charlton: But is the general willingness to contribute to the Imamat in the form of religious dues, however you describe them, falling off being affected by the turmoil in various parts of the world or not?

Aga Khan: Well, I think that is bound to happen according to what is happening in the world. You know if people are fleeing for their lives, you can't really expect them to participate in any form of activity other than to save, save their lives.
Interviewer: Tell us how this money is collected? I mean is it a system of taxation or is it really entirely voluntary?

Aga Khan: No -- it is entirely voluntary and the Imam uses the money either to grant scholarships to students, to grant capital to a school or a hospital. We have got on hospital in Nairobi at the moment which will have cost about 400,000 pounds and my grandfather gave a very large sum to that hospital.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1958 interview by four members of the UK Press (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1095/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on Imamat finances

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Excerpts: The Imamat on the Qur'an

"[We Muslims] have the knowledge that Islam is Allah's final message, the Qur'an His final book and Muhammad His last Prophet."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1976 Presidential Address, International Seerat Conference, 'Life of the Prophet (sas)' (Karachi, Pakistan) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1804/

"Of course, we hold fast by the Qur'an, for it is from the Qur'an that we get the texts which buttress our faith in the ever-watchful eye and sustaining hand of God."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's Daily Sketch Interview answer to the question 'Is Religion Something Special?' (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/

"The only miracle which you have in Islam is the Qur'an."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1986 CBC Interview (1st) with Roy Bonisteel (Canada) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/
"Verily, God, the Glorious, the Elevated, has revealed the quintessence of everything in the Noble Qur’an and by God! He has not omitted anything which His servants may need to the extent that no one can say: Would that it had been revealed in the Noble Qur’an, because that has already been revealed."

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (p)
Usul al-Kafi, Book 2, Chapter 20, Tradition 1

"In the Qur’an is report of the past, information on the future, and wisdom for the meanwhile."

Hazrat Ali
Living and Dying with Grace, Counsels of Hadrat Ali, Thomas Cleary, pp 97

"Certainly the Qur’an is wonderful in its outward form, and its inner meanings are profound."

Hazrat Ali
Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 18

"Speak only about what you know. Regarding what you do not know say 'God knows best'. Verily, a person may single out any verse from the Noble Qur’an (and interpret it wrongly) and may fall down deeper than the distance between the Heaven and the Earth."

Imam al-Baqir
Usul al Kafi, Book 2, Chapter 11, Tradition 4

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"Nine eleven has scarred America, but not just America. It has scarred the Islamic world, and hundreds of millions of devout and practising Muslims for whom the word of the Qur’an is the word of God."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 Ismaili Center Opening Ceremony address (Houston, Texas, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6245/
"[A]s regards the idea of the divinity of God: a great deal of the Qur'an is taken up with God's creation, with God's intimate presence in the world, with the importance of each human being's relations with the Creator; but only in one chapter -- the chapter on Light -- is the nature of the divinity referred to in a very clear form. Although of course we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light, as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator. This was as far as Islamic theological thought went in the early years after the Prophet's death."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's undated article 'Reincarnation or Companionship On High?'
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1520/

"[T]he Qur'an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Qur'an confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere attempts to understand His word. Happily, as a result, the Holy Book continues to guide and illuminate the thought and conduct of Muslims belonging to different communities of interpretation and spiritual affiliation, from century to century, in diverse cultural environments....

"In this context, would it not also be relevant to consider how, above all, it has been the Qur'anic notion of the universe, as an expression of Allah's will and creation, that has inspired in diverse Muslim communities, generations of artists, scientists and philosophers? Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour are all seen as the response of the faithful to the recurring call of the Qur'an to ponder the creation as a way to understand Allah's benevolent majesty. As Sura al-Baqara proclaims: 'Wherever you turn, there is
the face of Allah."

"Does not the Qur'an challenge the artist, as much as the mystic, to go beyond the physical -- the outward -- so as to seek to unveil that which lies at the centre but gives life to the periphery? Is not a great work of art, like the ecstasy of the mystic, a gesture of the spirit, a stirring of the soul that comes from the attempt to experience a glimpse of, and an intimacy with, that which is ineffable and beyond being? ..."

"It is my sincere hope that this colloquium will bring additional insights to an understanding of the Holy Qur'an as a message that encompasses the entirety of human existence and effort. It is concerned with the salvation of the soul, but commensurately also with the ethical imperatives which sustain an equitable social order. The Qur'an's is an inclusive vision of society that gives primacy to nobility of conduct."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

[A]t the end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th, the European Renaissance rapidly advanced in knowledge of nature, namely all those very Ayats of God to which the Qur'an refers when Muslims forgot the Ayats, namely natural phenomenon, its law and order which are the proofs of Divine guidance used in the Qur'an, but we stuck to our rites and ceremonies, to our prayers and fast alone, forgetting the other half of our faith. Thus during those 200/300 years, Europe and the West got an advance out of all proportion to the Muslim world and we found everywhere in Islam (inspite of our humble prayer, our moral standard, our kindliness and gentleness towards the poor) constant deterioration of one form or another and the Muslim world went down. Why? Because we forgot the law and order of nature to which the Qur'an refers as proof of God's existence and we went against God's natural laws.
This and this alone has led to the disastrous consequences we have seen."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1952 letter to H.E. Dr. Zahid Husain, President of Arabiyyah Jamiyyat, ‘What have we forgotten in Islam?’ (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1253/

"The Holy Qu’ran’s encouragement to study nature and the physical world around us gave the original impetus to scientific enquiry among Muslims. Exchanges of knowledge between institutions and nations and the widening of man’s intellectual horizons are essentially Islamic concepts. The faith urges freedom of intellectual enquiry and this freedom does not mean that knowledge will lose its spiritual dimension. That dimension is indeed itself a field for intellectual enquiry. I can not illustrate this interdependence of spiritual inspiration and learning better than by recounting a dialogue between Ibn Sina, the philosopher, and Abu said Abu-Khyar, the Sufi mystic. Ibn Sina remarked, 'Whatever I know, he sees.' To which Abu Said replied, 'Whatever I see, he knows.'"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/

'I would also like to quote an infinitely more powerful statement about the unity of mankind, because it comes directly from the Holy Qur’an, and which I would ask you to think about. The Holy Qur’an addresses itself not only to Muslims, but to the entirety of the human race, when it says:

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from one single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women.'
"These words reflect a deeply spiritual insight -- a Divine imperative if you will -- which, in my view, should undergird our educational commitments. It is because we see humankind, despite our differences, as children of God and born from one soul, that we insist on reaching beyond traditional boundaries as we deliberate, communicate, and educate internationally."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 'The Peterson Lecture' at the Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate (Atlanta, Georgia, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8435/

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**Aga Khan:** ... the Ismaili movement did not begin as a political movement. What may have begun, as a partial issue -- and it's extremely difficult to establish, because nothing was written at the time, the Qur'an itself was memorised -- but at the time of the death of the Prophet, what was the ingredients of the division between the Shia and the Sunni is not really entirely clear, because all we have today is literature which is based on repetition of what was said, the Hadith in a sense....

**Michael Charlton:** But in this conflict between the orthodox, who say that the Qur’anic teaching, like Khomeini appears to be saying in Iran, are immutable and even if the majority wishes them to be changed -- they can not be changed because the teaching itself is unchanging and must not be changed -- in that context, between those who think like that and those who think that Islam can not survive unless it adapts, where do you stand yourself?

**Aga Khan:** I think the question is where you start from. Are you starting from the Qur’an? Are you starting from the Sharia? Are you starting from secular Christian law? Where are you starting from? The Qur’an is not a body of law, and that, I think, is a statement that every Muslim will make. What is referred to today as Islamic law is a compilation of views expressed by law makers who lived well after the revelation of the Qur’an, well after the time of the Prophet. The interesting thing is that in the Qu’ran, for example, a lot of the things which I would refer to as punishment, are punishment as deterrent.
The punishment itself is not the issue at stake. The question is you have got to stop certain things from happening for the good of society. Now if that's the starting point, then I would say a lot of things do not have to be done, which maybe being done today in the Muslim world. That is my position, because I will start from the Qur'an. I will not start from an interpretation made five or six generations after the life of the Prophet. If we're talking about fundamentalism, let's start at the revelation of Islam.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton (London, United Kingdom)

Aga Khan: ... If you read the Qur'an you will find that a very substantial part of Islam and Islam's teaching has to do with the individual's behaviour in society in totally secular matters -- how you behave in your relations with other people in society, in your business transaction, in your family, in your friends....

Geoffry Barker: Westerners are often appalled by the literal implementation of savage Qur'anic laws which permit, for example, public beheading of adulterers, the chopping off of hands and flogging for breach of alcohol prohibition. How would you as Imam defend these laws? Do you insist on their implementation among the Ismailis Muslims?

Aga Khan: You must be careful not to refer to Islamic law. There is no such thing as 'Islamic law'. There are four basic schools of Islamic law in the Sunni Muslim world, there are several schools of Islamic law in the Shia Muslim world. Our attitude is simply that codes change and that what is important is the purpose behind the code.

I must say that in certain areas of the Muslim world there is a very rigid application ... I am not at all saying that today the Ismaili world would encourage mutilation or flagellation or things like that ... Flagellation, beheading, mutilation, these sort of things, may be a totally temporary aspect which is put forward as maybe a
justification at a time of crisis.

I think you will find that generally speaking the Muslim world will not be going in that direction.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffry Barker (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Ayat al-Nur and the Sura of Light of the Qur'an

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on interpreting the Qur’an
https://www.facebook.com/notes/nanowisdoms-archive/excerpt/363830926968431

See also: Imams Jafar al-Sadiq and Muhammad al-Baqir on interpreting the Qur’an

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imam's authority and discretion in interpreting the Qur’an
See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam’s and the Qur'an’s assent of freedom of individual interpretation


See also: TH Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time


Click here for this post in PDF format.
Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Ayat al-Nur and the Sura of Light of the Qur'an

"For Muslims there has been a similar personal influence, and in many ways it resembles the position that St. Thomas Aquinas took in the Catholic Church. First of all as regards the idea of the divinity of God: a great deal of the Qur'an is taken up with God's creation, with God's intimate presence in the world, with the importance of each human being's relations with the Creator; but only in one chapter -- the chapter on Light -- is the nature of the divinity referred to in a very clear form. Although of course we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light, as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's undated article 'Reincarnation or Companionship On High?'
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1520/

"To a certain extent I have found that the following verse of the Qur'an, so long as it is understood in a purely non-physical sense, has given assistance and understanding to myself and other Muslims. However, I must warn all who read it not to allow their material critical outlook to break in with literal, verbal explanations of something that is symbolic and allegorical. I appeal to every reader, whether Muslim or not, to accept the spirit of this verse in
its entirety:

"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; His light is as a
niche in which is a lamp, and the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as
though it were a glittering star; it is lit from a blessed tree, an Olive
neither of east nor of the west, the oil of which would well-nigh give
light though no fire touched it, light upon light; Allah guides to His
light whom He pleases; and Allah strikes out parables for men; and
Allah all things doth know.' (Qur'an 26:35)"

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's autobiography: 'The Memoirs of
Aga Khan III -- World Enough and Time', Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of
My Ancestors, 1954
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

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"[The Sura of Light from the Qur'an] tells us that the oil of the
blessed olive tree lights the lamp of understanding, a light that
belongs neither to the East nor West. We are to give this light to all.
In that spirit, all that we learn will belong to the world -- and that
too is part of the vision I share with you."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 Address to the Asia Society (New York,
USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2010/

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"Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion.
Throughout the Qur'an God's signs (Ayats) are referred to as the
natural phenomenon, the law and order of the universe, the
exactitudes and consequences of the relations between natural
phenomenon in cause and effect. Over and over, the stars, sun,
moon, earthquakes, fruits of the earth and trees are mentioned as
the signs of Divine power, Divine law and Divine order. Even in the
Ayah of Nur, [the] Divine is referred to as the natural phenomenon
of light and even references are made to the fruit of the earth.
During the great period of Islam, Muslims did not forget these
principles of their religion."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1952 letter to H.E. Dr. Zahid Husain, President of Arabiya Jamiyyat, 'What have we forgotten in Islam?' (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1253/

"The famous verse of 'light' in the Qur’an, the Ayat al-Nur, whose first line is rendered here in the mural behind me, inspires among Muslims a reflection on the sacred, the transcendent. It hints at a cosmos full of signs and symbols that evoke the perfection of Allah’s creation and mercy."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

"For the Aga Khan Museum, I thought that 'light' might be a concept around which you could design an outstanding museum. The notion of light has transversed nearly all of human history, and has been an inspiration for numerous faiths, going as far back of course to the Zoroastrians and their reverence for the Sun, to the Sura in the Holy Qur’an titled al-Nur. Decades of Western history are referred to as the 'enlightenment' for good reason."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 letter to architect Fumihiko Maki setting out notions of Light as the design theme for the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (Aiglemont)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7636/

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Excerpt - Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, on a Muslim's first duty: offer time to help his nation and not just to prayers

"Many of the most intimate friends of the Prophet and the most pious and distinguished of the 'companions' doubted which side they should take in the civil wars, and how they should act so as not to be responsible for any harm that might come, and so were led to adopt the most dangerous principle of all. They retired each into his private home and did not use their influence one way or the other, but passed the rest of their lives in prayer and pilgrimage.

"This example has ever since been unconsciously followed by some of the best and purest in every Muslim society. The most genuine and the most moral of Muslim often tell you, as they have a thousand times told me almost in identical terms at Constantinople or Cairo, at Bombay or Zanzibar, that as long as they spent their energies in prayer and pilgrimage they are certain that though they do not do the best, yet they do no harm, and thus they give up to prayer and pilgrimage the lives which should have been devoted to the well-being of their people.

"It is to this class in India that I appeal and desire most earnestly to impress upon them my conviction that, if they continue in their present attitude of aloofness, it means the certain extinction of Islam, at least, as a world-wide religion. We of this Conference appeal to the pious for their co-operation and assistance, and we warn them solemnly and in all earnestness that, if they give all their time to prayer and their money to pilgrimages, the time will come when that piety, which they so highly prize, will pass away from our society, and (for want of timely assistance at this most critical period) not
one of our descendants will know how to pray or put any store upon the merit of pilgrimage. It is to this genuine class of pious men that we appeal here; let them come forward and take their legitimate place in the advancement of their co-religionists and in the moral and religious education of their brethren and children. In the strenuous life of modern times, a people that does not get help from its most pious and most moral sections has as little chance of success as a man who tries to swim with his arms tied behind his back.

"A great, but silent, crisis has come in the fortunes of Islam and unless this class wake up to the altered conditions of life and to the necessity of superintending and educating the rising generation, the very existence of Islam is at stake. This class of pious Muslims must understand that what Islam now demands of them is that they should surrender to the training of the young a portion of the time hitherto given to prayer and a portion of the money hitherto spent in pilgrimages or celebrations of martyrdoms, long since past, which only help to keep alive those terrible sectarian differences which are one of the misfortunes of Islam. The example of the Prophet and of Abu Bakr and Omar and Ali should convince these pious people that the first duty of a Muslim is to give his time to the service of his nation and not merely to silent prayers."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1902 All India Muhammadan Educational Conference Presidential address, 'Muslim Education in India' (Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1311/

See also: TH, Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 2/4: Towards 'new understandings of essential principles'

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islamic Law and the Sharia

Geoffry Barker: Westerners see an incongruity in your dual roles as a religious leader and international businessman. Do you think you are an incongruous religious leader?

Aga Khan: The incongruity exists through your tradition, through your experience, the Augustinian interpretation, if one can call it that, of Christianity.... In Islam there is no reason why a dichotomy should exist. Every Muslim no matter what sect he comes from, will tell you Islam is a way of life. If you read the Qur'an you will find that a very substantial part of Islam and Islam's teaching has to do with the individual's behaviour in society in totally secular matters -- how you behave in your relations with other people in society, in your business transaction, in your family, in your friends....

Geoffry Barker: Westerners are often appalled by the literal implementation of savage Qur'anic laws which permit, for example, public beheading of adulterers, the chopping off of hands and flogging for breach of alcohol prohibition. How would you as Imam defend these laws? Do you insist on their implementation among the Ismailis Muslims?

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His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffrey Barker (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

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Michael Charlton: But in this conflict between the orthodox, who say that the Qur'anic teaching, like Khomeini appears to be saying in Iran, are immutable and even if the majority wishes them to be changed -- they can not be changed because the teaching itself is unchanging and must not be changed -- in that context, between those who think like that and those who think that Islam can not survive unless it adapts, where do you stand yourself?

Aga Khan: I think the question is where you start from. Are you starting from the Qur'an? Are you starting from the Sharia? Are you starting from secular Christian law? Where are you starting from? The Qur'an is not a body of law, and that, I think, is a statement that every Muslim will make. What is referred to today as Islamic law is a compilation of views expressed by law makers who lived well after the revelation of the Qur'an, well after the time of the Prophet. The interesting thing is that in the Qu'ran, for example, a lot of the things which I would refer to as punishment, are punishment as deterrent. The punishment itself is not the issue at stake. The question is you have got to stop certain things from happening for the good of society. Now if that's the starting point, then I would say a lot of things do not have to be done, which maybe being done today in the Muslim world. That is my position, because I will start from the Qur'an. I will not start from an interpretation made five or six generations after the life of the Prophet. If we're talking about fundamentalism, lets start at the revelation of Islam.
"It must not be forgotten that, according to the principle of Ijma already mentioned, the interpretation of the precepts and laws which regulate the lives of the Faithful, as laid down in the Qur'an and in the Traditions of the Prophet, can be done at any time and for any generation. Such an interpretation, by means of the Ijtihad which is a personal and living research, can be made, within the general limits of the Qur'an and Traditions. The suppleness of Muslim Law enhances its value, and its broad lines leave room for vigorous growth and adaptation to the changing and unforeseeable circumstances of international life. Muslim Law must, therefore, be freed of the rigid character, given to it by ancient codifications. It would be erroneous to assume that the door to interpretation has been shut, because the four leading juridical schools of Muslim orthodoxy had already decided, for all time, as to the prescriptions of Muslim Law.

"Even with regard to these four schools (Hanafite, Shafi'ite, Malikite and Hanbalite), an individual Muslim is free to choose among them the rules to follow on different points; and to do that, he may not be obliged to strictly adhere to a single school. The practical result of this universally admitted freedom is quite obvious; it simplifies the carrying on of law and more easily meets modern conditions of life.

"As regards the Qur'an, we stress the fact, that to be better understood -- without being blindly attached to the exegesis of ancient authorities -- it would inspire Muslims to a revival of religious thought and action. The Traditions and Sayings of the Prophet are to be seriously and critically studied with a view to freeing them from posterior deviations and infiltrations. As regards the four juridical schools, we may point out that their divergences are of little importance, and there are no antagonisms between them."
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10456/

"The second factor which stood in the way of pan-Islamism was one of the ideas which I mentioned as a possible source for the new flame. This was the internal movement within the religion itself. The close contacts between the Muslims and the West which were brought about by the war made many people think, and analyse their faith. The more progressive Muslims asked for changes in their civil and criminal law; they asked for Western type laws of succession and Western codes, and they also found that many of their traditions could not be kept up, were they to move as rapidly as Europe. One of these traditions was the wearing of the veil and the sore question of giving secular education to women.

"These problems may have been solved had there not been at least ten different forms of Islamic law already in use. I sometimes doubt whether the solution would have been found even if there had only been one practised code. But there were the four Sunni schools and there were the Shia schools; and there were the Muslim schools that had been influenced by Greek and Byzantine tradition.

"The Muslims were unable, simply because of the background in which they had lived, to reach a common agreement."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1957 address to the Dar es Salaam Cultural Society, ‘Harvard University and Studies of the Middle East’ (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/908/

See also: Their Highnesses Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time

https://www.facebook.com/notes/nanowisdoms-archive-of-imamat-speeches-
See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam's and the Qur'an's assent of freedom of individual interpretation


See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on the veil, headscarf, hijab and purdah


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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on fasting and Ramadan

"Let us then study the duties of man, as the great majority interpret them, according to the verses of the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet.... The healthy human body is the temple in which the flame of the Holy Spirit burns, and thus it deserves the respect of scrupulous cleanliness and personal hygiene. Prayer is a daily necessity, a direct communication of the spark with the universal flame. Reasonable fasting for a month in every year, provided a man's health is not impaired thereby, is an essential part of the body's discipline through which the body learns to renounce all impure desires.... Thus far I have described those tenets of Islam which are professed and held in common by all Muslims of any and every sect or subsect."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"The enemies of Islam have attacked its outward manifestations and constantly attempted to show that its practice (even such essentially elevating manifestations as prayer, fasting, alms, etc.) is impossible in modern and civilised conditions. Unfortunately, the 'Ulama' -- the savants -- have played into the hands of the enemies. The present practices of Islam took shape and form at the time when the schoolmen reigned supreme in East and West alike.... If Islam is ever to fulfil its mission it must have a universality not only in space,
namely, throughout the earth, but in time, namely, as long as mankind exists on this globe.

"We maintain that the Prophet only ordered prayer, fasting, and gentleness in all human relations, kindliness and consideration for all beasts and animals from the smallest worm to the largest mammal....

"If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting as practised at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain Ibnu 'l-Waqt (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practise and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1934 Foreword to 'Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations' by Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazbhoy (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10546/

Nicholas Tomalin: You've told me the ways in which your faith makes it easier to come to terms with the modern world. Are there any ways in which it is more difficult?

Aga Khan: Islam is a way of life, much more than Christianity. That's an old, boring thing to say, but it's true. Now if we are to modernise our society we have to come into contact with totally different traditions. Basically the Ismaili Muslims have a choice between the Communist East, which would prevent us teaching our children the Faith, and the West, which has a set of materialistic and religious standards which are often at variance with ours. Imagine our difficulties seeing a civilisation which is at least twenty years a head of us in roads, hospitals, and standards of living, but which if
we imitate too closely will obliterate the reality of our Faith. Sometimes we are faced with the choice of either accepting habits and customs which have proved economically successful in the West, but go against what our Faith tells us to do, or continuing in our old ways, thus jeopardising our economic development.

I will give you a simple example. One of our factories making jute, for instance, in East Pakistan. In a Western society a factory like that is working 24 hours a day, six days a week all year round. But in an Islamic society that factory can work 24 hours a day, yes, but with five breaks for prayers and a complete break in the month of Ramadan, when the working force is reduced to less than half by fasting.

This is a terrible practical problem. Even among Muslim States they do not agree whether or not to work full time during Ramadan.

Nicholas Tomalin: How would you advise your communities?

Aga Khan: I think if it was, say, a steel factory in a time of national emergency, of war or something like that, then I would advise them to work during Ramadan. If it were peace, and the production were not so vital, then I would advise them to observe Ramadan.

But the real question is, where does one stop? If we are always importing from the West techniques to develop our economics, how can we stop importing alien ideas? You can imagine the problem. Every time we send our young men to Western Universities seven out of ten of them come back with alien traditions and tendencies of which they may be unconscious.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan's on the meaning of 'jihad'

"We are all familiar that al-Kindi, even in the 9th century, saw no shame in acknowledging and assimilating the truth, whatever its source. He argued that truth never abases, but only ennobles its seeker. Poetising the Prophet's teaching, Nasir Khusraw, the 11th century Iranian poet-philosopher, also extols the virtue of knowledge. For him, true jihad is the war that must be waged against the perpetrators of bigotry, through spreading knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance and nourishes the seed of peace that is innately embedded in the human soul."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: So we will talk of Afghanistan. But first, how do you define jihad?

Aga Khan: But how do you see the jihad, what is the definition that you want to give yourself of jihad?

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: Holy War, what is called holy war since history, and the present interpretation, of course?

Aga Khan: To begin with, I think that there are several interpretations today. I do not think that there is in the Muslim
World only one definition of jihad. The word is used too frequently, and in too many fields. But the jihad is before anything else, a personal discipline. To begin, it is the search for personal improvement, which means that it is a personal effort in life. That's one definition. Another definition is the war against non-believers. Well, another definition. Third definition, it is war against those who attack a Muslim community, those who victimise a Muslim community. Another definition. So if you want, in the notion of jihad, I think we have to be very careful not to give to this word a unique interpretation. Let's say this word is used in various situations in our world, today.

*Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation*: Who are the non-believers for you?

*Aga Khan*: If I go back in time, a long time ago, I think we have to say that the 'People of the Book' are the monotheists. That's the basic definition. Well, today I think in Islam we should admit that in social life, we are obliged, and we have to accept the notion of a larger responsibility. That's the one in my interpretation. And I believe it to be true. I would say even more than that, that in Muslim history, when this type of circumstances has occurred, the Islamic period has often been the most beautiful. This is very strange, it's a phenomenon of history but it is a reality.

*Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation*: Yes, (but) it has been most beautiful for the Muslims, no?

*Aga Khan*: But of course, that's what I said. Because it is the humanism of Islam, which allowed us to build a society, where everyone was happy to live in that society. Isn't this the wish that we should have?

*Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation*: When you say 'non-believers', you talk of the 'People of the Book' or the monotheist. Well, there has been a jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Regime, that is against communism, thus against 'non-believers'. So you interpret that jihad as a good jihad in the interest of Muslims

*Aga Khan*: The jihad in Afghanistan? Listen, certainly I could not
have been in favour of an invasion be it in Afghanistan or elsewhere. You see, the notion of invasion is, for me, an unacceptable notion. In retrospect, if you ask the Russians today, they will tell you 'We should have never done it'. By opposition, when you talk to me of a jihad between Muslims, I have a lot of difficulties accepting that, a lot!

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Interview (Aleppo, Syria and Lebanon) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/

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Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on alcohol

Nicholas Tomalin: Could you explain the Muslim attitude to drink? Isn’t that, perhaps, puritanical?

Aga Khan: Our belief is that the thing which separates man from the animals is his power of thought. Anything that impedes this process is wrong. Therefore alcohol is forbidden. I have never touched alcohol. But this, to me, is not a puritan prohibition. I don’t want to drink. I’ve never wanted to drink. There’s no pressure being placed on me by my religion.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/

“I don’t drink alcoholic beverages for several reasons. For one thing, I am a Muslim. For another, I am an athlete in year-round training. Thirdly, I just don’t like the taste of the stuff....

"([A] cause of embarrassment is the numbered jersey he must wear while racing. It often displays an ad for some alcoholic aperitif -- this being a ski-race sponsor’s right.) I do not like the thought that the Ismailis may see a newsreel film of some competition and think their Imam was drinking, or urging other people to do so."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1964 Sports Illustrated Interview with Paul Evan Ress (United States)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10341/
"The greatest danger to every Muslim citizen -- I have not the least hesitation in saying it -- is alcohol. Time has shown that it is an injury to you; an injury to your person; an injury to your health. It is forbidden because it carries greater evil than good. Believe me, in a community like yours, alcohol is a very grave danger. Once you got into the alcohol habit, I do not know where it would lead you. A handful, here and there, of the weak, or of the unhappy, find their way to this terrible poison. Avoid it at all costs. Avoid it, I say, for in this country you cannot afford to lose one man."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1954 Guidelines for the Muslims of Transvaal (Johannesburg, South Africa)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10699/
Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on the veil, headscarf, hijab and purdah

"[The Aga Khan] is interested in the current debate on whether the hijab, the Muslim headscarf, should be worn in Irish schools and cautions against the issue being used to create division:

"My own sense is that if an individual wishes to associate publicly with a faith, that’s the right of that individual to do that, whether he’s a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim. That is, to me, something which is important.’

"But he says that people should not be forced to wear the hijab:

"To go from there to an imposed process by forces in society, to me is unacceptable. It’s got to be the choice of the individual who wishes to associate with his faith or her faith. I have great respect for any individual who wants in the right way to be associated with his own faith. I accept that totally and I would never challenge it.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Irish Times interview with Alison Healy
(Maynooth, Ireland)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8845/

Caroline Pigozzi/Jean-Claude Deutsch: What does the Aga Khan, a Europeanised Muslim, think about the debate on the wearing of the Islamic scarf in France?

Aga Khan: How do you expect me to forbid someone from openly
associating themselves with their religion? The law today is acting on the form, not the underlying significance of this practice. One should not impose oneself in an aggressive manner, but should live serenely within one's faith. If pressuring someone to change their beliefs is considered offensive, why should someone change their beliefs just because these beliefs consist of a free individual right? The separation of religion and state implies multiculturalism before anything else.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Paris Match Interview (1st) with Caroline Pigozzi and Jean-Claude Deutsch (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/850/

"The veil for women is a tradition which precedes Islam, and was introduced as a sign of respect of women and not of submission, i.e. against the concept that woman is an object of the society of men."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Corriere della Sera interview with Massimo Nava (Italy) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6010/

Nicholas Tomalin: Have you used your power to make any radical changes in the Ismaili religion?

Aga Khan: You don’t change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, my grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. But I hope I am modern in my outlook, and I know that in many ways I am a different sort of person from my grandfather. This will necessarily subtly change the character of the Faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
"The second factor which stood in the way of pan-Islamism was one of the ideas which I mentioned as a possible source for the new flame. This was the internal movement within the religion itself. The close contacts between the Muslims and the West which were brought about by the war made many people think, and analyse their faith. The more progressive Muslims asked for changes in their civil and criminal law; they asked for Western type laws of succession and Western codes, and they also found that many of their traditions could not be kept up, were they to move as rapidly as Europe. One of these traditions was the wearing of the veil and the sore question of giving secular education to women.

"These problems may have been solved had there not been at least ten different forms of Islamic law already in use. I sometimes doubt whether the solution would have been found even if there had only been one practised code. But there were the four Sunni schools and there were the Shia schools; and there were the Muslim schools that had been influenced by Greek and Byzantine tradition.

"The Muslims were unable, simply because of the background in which they had lived, to reach a common agreement."

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His Highness the Aga Khan's 1957 address to the Dar es Salaam Cultural Society, 'Harvard University and Studies of the Middle East' (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/908/

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"A second cause of our present apathy is the terrible position of Muslim women ... There is absolutely nothing in Islam, or the Qur’an, or the example of the first two centuries, to justify this terrible and cancerous growth that has for nearly a thousand, years eaten into the very vitals of Islamic society.... The Prophet ... by a few wise restrictions, such as must be practised by any society that
hopes to exist, made the former constant and unceremonious companionship of men and strange women impossible.

"From these necessary and wholesome rules the jealousy of the Abbassides, borrowing from the practice of the later Persian Sassanian kings, developed the present system ... which means the permanent imprisonment and enslavement of half the nation. How can we expect progress from the children of mothers who have never shared, or even seen, the free social intercourse of modern mankind? This terrible cancer that has grown since the 3rd and 4th century [sic] of the Hijra must either be cut out, or the body of Muslim society will be poisoned to death by the permanent waste of all the women of the nation. But purdah, as now known, itself did not exist till long after the Prophet's death and is no part of Islam. The part played by Muslim women at Kardesiah and Yarmuk the two most momentous battles of Islam next to Badr and Honein, and their splendid nursing of the wounded after those battles, is of itself a proof to any reasonable person that purdah, as now understood, has never been conceived by the companions of the Prophet. That we Muslims should saddle ourselves with this excretion of Persian custom, borrowed by the Abbassides, is due to that ignorance of early Islam which is one of the most extraordinary of modern conditions."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1902 All India Muhammadan Educational Conference Presidential address, 'Muslim Education in India' (Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1311/

"In matters of social reform I have tried to exert my influence and authority sensibly and progressively. I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women. In my grandfather's and my father's time the Ismailis were far ahead of any other Muslim sect in the matter of the abolition of the strict veil, even in extremely conservative countries. I have absolutely abolished it; nowadays you will never find an Ismaili woman wearing the veil."
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

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Daily Sketch Interview, ‘My Personal Life — What a man needs to be happy’ (London, United Kingdom)

2 November 1931  Categories: Aga Khan III · Editor's Choice · Faith & Religion · Imamat (Personal) · Incomplete · Interviews · K.K. Aziz Collection Vol I & II (book) · Published · Society (Contemporary) · United Kingdom · Values ·

First I would place spiritual happiness. A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people.... That is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are — you are happy.

Next I would place appreciation and enjoyment of the glories of nature. All those sunrises and sunsets — all the intricate miracle of sky colour, from dawn to dusk. All that splendid spend-thrift beauty.... As a very rich man treasures the possession of some unique picture, so a man should treasure and exult in the possession — his individual possession — of the sights of this unique world.

Those glories are his from dawn to dusk, and then — and then comes night — “a night of stars — all eyes.” The fact that Mr. So-and-So has weighed Orion in a scale and mapped beyond a peradventure the path of the Pleiades does not destroy their magic. I look up at night and I know — I know the glory of the stars. It is then that the stars speak to us — and the sense of that mystery is in our blood.
INTERVIEWER: UNKNOWN

INTRODUCTION BY DAILY SKETCH

A large, eager, mobile face. The skin lit up rather than darkened by the glow of the Eastern sun. The eyes like blazing jewels. The body in continual easy movement! The hands active in their eloquence. Every inch of the man, every atom of him, vehemently, joyously alive. A happy man! As the talk turns from point to point of the argument, a flash of the joys he speaks of radiates from his face. A kingly man — so absolute in his kingship that he would talk with the least of his subjects as an equal. Yet for all his ease and charm, you feel that he could be an edged sword when in command.

This is His Highness the Aga Khan Aga [sic] Sultan Mahomed Shah, Indian by birth and attachments, Persian and Arab by immemorial descent, the religious chief of one vast section of the Muslim world — the Ismaili Mohammedans — with countless followers in Central Asia, India and East Africa, and great race horse-owner, who did what no other man could have done in the Great European war — kept it from being the universal Armageddon and final twilight of the world.

At his ease in a London hotel, the happy philosopher told the Daily Sketch, what, to his mind, a man needs to be happy.

First I would place spiritual happiness. A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people. A few may think that they do not believe in God,
and some others that it matters little to the individual in his daily life how he stands with regard to Him.

Ruling out the atheist, with whom a believer can no more argue than he can discuss colour with a blind man, it is surely strange that a believer in an omnipotent and ever-present Deity should fail to realise that how we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the universe.

That is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are — you are happy.

Next I would place appreciation and enjoyment of the glories of nature. All those sunrises and sunsets — all the intricate miracle of sky colour, from dawn to dusk. All that splendid spend-thrift beauty…. As a very rich man treasures the possession of some unique picture, so a man should treasure and exult in the possession — his individual possession — of the sights of this unique world.

Those glories are his from dawn to dusk, and then — and then comes night — “a night of stars — all eyes.” The fact that Mr. So-and-So has weighed Orion in a scale and mapped beyond a peradventure the path of the Pleiades does not destroy their magic. I look up at night and I know — I know the glory of the stars. It is then that the stars speak to us — and the sense of that mystery is in our blood.

There are other more homely delights in an English landscape — twisting lanes with living leafy walls, villages clustered in a nook of the hills, the soft undulation of down or moorland, no more than emphasised by the occasional bold scarp of a rocky peak. But you have grandeur enough in the tall cliffs that look down so proudly on your encircling seas. All that is yours, and mine — ours for the seeing.

With nature I would link painting. Pictures are very useful. If a man cannot get to the countryside, a picture will remind him of it. And the man who has been blind to the beauty of nature may have his imagination quickened by seeing the visions of great artists. He may come to see that dawn and dusk make glorious even the drab pavement of a town.
Then comes literature — above all poetry. Poetry is the voice of God speaking through the lips of man. If great painting puts you in touch with nature, great poetry puts you in direct touch with God. It is not a soft indulgence, you need to be wide awake, with all your wits about you, to share the poet’s joys. And, indeed, happiness is never a negative affair; it is to be won by men who are fully alive, full of the joy of living.

Next I would place the joys of rapid movement such as you get from games like golf, tennis, football, and, they tell me, cricket. As with literature the mind, so with games the body feels itself vividly, happily alive.

Of all sports of rapid movement the riding of a horse is the best.

The legend of the centaur — half man, half horse — was no idle dream; for you and the splendid creature are one. As its limbs gather and stretch out in perfect rhythm, electricity passes from the animal to you. It is a joy of the spirit as of the body. Through us speak the souls of our ancestors, who have ridden horses from the beginning of time. Yes, we may well believe that the horse was with man from the beginning.

No doubt we who have ridden horses get a touch of that great happiness when English thoroughbreds, the exiles of Arabia, fly down the course like winged messengers of speed.

Of course you cannot get a comparable feeling from the utmost Horse-Power (save the mark!) of a machine. No! No!

These are the independent means of happiness. Any man may worship God, wonder at the miracles of nature, exult when he hears (in literature) the sons of God shouting for joy, and give praise for the perfection of his body in rapid movement. But there is a dependent means of the first importance.

When I speak of marriage, I need not emphasise the joys of a happy marriage and fortunate parentage. They are inextricably interwoven — warp and woof of the same pattern, and the pattern is the whole of life in miniature.
He who refuses that venture because of the risk is refusing life. No. I have no liking for hermits and other solitaries who refuse all responsibilities. They may live in a town as likely as in a desert, and their avowed purpose may be to lead holy lives; but, in fact, if they have ecstasies, they are the ecstasies of self-indulgence. My concern is not with them.

Those who accept the normal responsibilities of life, with all the chances of minor annoyance and utter catastrophe, may know many small griefs and much great sorrow — that is why I called their joys dependent — but, if they are at one with God and have lived manfully, behind the mask of sorrow, bitter though it may be, their souls will be at peace.

**His Highness the Aga Khan III**

**NOTES**


**SOURCES**

  [Text verified and/or corrected from this source by NanoWisdoms]
- Daily Sketch, London, 2 November 1931

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I should, first of all, advise my heirs to learn to desire the thing that happens, and not try to mould events to their desires.... I say that you should endeavour to suit your desire to the event, and not the event to your desire....

I would counsel my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves; I would have them resolute, self-controlled, independent, but not rebellious. Let them seek communion with that Eternal Reality which I call Allah and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal.

INCOMPLETE: We regret that from this interview, only limited portions made public by the reporter are available below. We would be very grateful if any of our readers who may have the complete transcript would kindly share it with us. Please click here
INTERVIEWER: W. R. TITTERTON

INTRODUCTION ACCOMPANYING THE PUBLISHED TEXT

“Learn to wish for the thing that happens and not try to mould the event to your desire.” In these words the Aga Khan gave his last Will and Testament in an interview to Mr. W. R. Titterton.

He thinks that war is a ghastly affair and that the last war was almost the death-blow to civilisation.

I should, first of all, advise my heirs to learn to desire the thing that happens, and not try to mould events to their desires. It was silly of the poet Omar to write:

    Ah love, could you and I with Him conspire
    To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
    Would we not shatter it to bits, and then
    Remould it nearer to the heart’s desire?

That way lies unhappiness, destruction. It is not a sorry scheme of things, and the business, the duty of man, is to get himself into harmony with it.

I would counsel my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves; I would have them resolute, self-controlled, independent, but not rebellious. Let them seek communion with that Eternal Reality which I call Allah and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal.
I say that you should endeavour to suit your desire to the event, and not the event to your desire. If a wall tumbles down and crushes my foot, I must say: ‘That is the best thing that could happen to me.’

An uncle of mine had a son who was killed. The father gave thanks to Allah for the event. You think that he did not love his son? You are wrong. He loved him dearly. I confess that I may not yet have risen to such a spiritual height. But I believe that I shall rise to it. I know that this is the way to happiness.

I should have a word to say to those who deem themselves unfortunate from a worldly point of view I should say to them: do not look up and lament that you are not as well off as those above you; look down and congratulate yourself that you are better off than those below you. (1)

To a man who looks with such eyes upon the world it is not a prison but a garden. A marvellous garden — the garden of the Lord. I shall invite my heirs to feast their eyes on the miraculous beauty of the earth — rivers and seas to slake the earth’s eternal thirst, hills like the tents of a great encampment, forests like an army with banners; wide open spaces, dawns and sunsets, the indomitable arch of the sky. (1)

All these great gifts are freely given to the man with open eyes, open hands and open heart. But the eyes must be clear, the hands and heart must be strong. I would impress upon my heirs the absolute need to be healthy. If they neglect their body, they will be at odds with the universe.

Therefore I say: Keep your bodies clean — bathe them frequently — wear clean clothes — eat clean food, drink clean water, breathe clean air. I know that society may make it difficult for some of its citizens to get these things. Instead it should make it easy.

But we are not, as individuals, to put the onus on society. As I have said, it is our business to ‘use’ events, conditions, limitations. If we cannot be as fit as an Achilles champion, we may yet aim at absolute fitness, and be well content with the fitness we achieve.
Never forget this: The society in which we live cannot give a man happiness. If we miss that, you miss my point altogether. Society can give a man space to breathe and freedom to move in it; it can afford him the means of keeping himself healthy and making himself strong. But happiness never depends on one’s surroundings; it depends altogether and exclusively on oneself.

Of course, health is not static, but dynamic. I can only judge a racehorse for example when I have seen it in motion. Therefore I shall speak to my heirs of the vital importance of exercise. And since to take joy in your activities is one of the secrets of health, I should counsel them to play games.

Naturally my heirs will be riders of horses. That is in the blood. The ‘horse and the rider’ have been the sign manual of my race for a thousand years. But I speak of concerted games.

Knowing something of tennis and a little golf, I can advise them to play those games. Knowing very little of cricket except as a spectator, I must be content to regard that great game with benevolent neutrality. But, play games! Play them joyfully, vehemently, with all your heart.

My final word would be to civilised society at large. I have already suggested that society should give a man space and the means to make himself healthy. Now pursue the implication and tell society that it should give the individual peace. That is what a government is for, it is the final test; if a government cannot give us that it is not worth having. I am a pacifist.

I would have the whole world unite to defend itself against aggression. Your nationalist instincts may be opposed to this. But see what those instincts have done for you! You have broken Germany. Yes! but you have broken yourselves. I don’t say that you were at fault. I don’t say that you could have avoided doing what you did. For the pre-war Prussian was — no, not criminal — impossible. But I do say that war is always a ghastly mistake, and that this last war was almost the death-blow to civilisation.
And so in my testament I should say to the rulers of the earth: Prove yourselves: Prove that you are worth having; give the world peace!

His Highness the Aga Khan III

NOTES

2. See also: Daily Sketch Interview, ‘My Personal Life — What a man needs to be happy’ (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10471/

SOURCES

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