His Highness the Aga Khan on poverty, pluralism, peace, progress and the role of knowledge

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE

"It is a privilege to be associated with a university which has remained true for so many centuries to the principle that the fruits of learning are to be at the service of all humanity. In Islam, this is a core principle of belief. In that tradition, my forefathers, the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs of Egypt, who founded al-Azhar University and the Academy of Knowledge in Cairo a thousand years ago, viewed the acquisition of knowledge as a means to understanding, so as to serve better, God’s creation. For them the true purpose of scholarship, and the gift of reason was to help build society and guide human aspirations. Lest it be forgotten, the society of their times was richly pluralistic when the Qur’anic notion of the Ahl al-Kitab -- the People of the Book -- and of one humanity were the driving force for tolerance and respect for difference.

"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 for the University of Evora's Honorary Doctorate (Evora, Portugal)

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