His Highness the Aga Khan on Western society

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE

"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?

"These indeed are relevant, urgent questions. There has been a fundamental challenge to the traditional and in this case, mainly Christian religious values. The younger generation has almost completely forsaken its churches. The pressure of an acquisitive society has made quite frightening demands on family life. Mothers with younger children go out to work in the millions. The juvenile crime rate soars upwards, homes are broken, and the family unit itself is undermined at its source.

"The working family in the West can earn all the money it needs in four or five days a week -- and then with only six hours work a day. Its capacity for leisure is growing every year. But what does the family do with it? Look at television? Perhaps. But what will be seen on television? Are they any nearer the complete and contented man of all our dreams?

"Few would risk an affirmative answer to these questions. What has been called the permissive society where anything goes, nothing matters, nothing is sacred or private any more, is not a promising foundation for a brave and upright new world. This fearful chase after material ease must surely be tempered by peace of mind, by conscience, by moral values, which must be resuscitated. If not, man will simply have converted the animal instinct of feeding himself before others and even at the expense of others, into perhaps a more barbaric instinct of feeding himself and then hoarding all he can at the cost of the poor, the sick and the hungry....
"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)

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