"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)

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