Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on Muslim minorities in Western countries

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS

Aftab Ahmad Khan: How do you assess the future of Muslim minorities in Western secular states?

Aga Khan: I think these communities in the industrialised world will need to deal with their problems with wisdom because they will be in the front line of exposure to industrial and substantially secularised societies. They will have to take a long term view of their position in their society with the deep conviction that they do not and should not forsake their traditional attitudes to their faith and the family. I say that for a very precise reason. The industrialised secular societies themselves are beginning to change and they are seeking to re-establish a better equilibrium. This is quite evident in the Western World. So rather than the short term integration into the secularised society, the contribution of Muslim minorities should be to assist the societies in finding a better equilibrium which strengthens the quality of life. However, I think it is going to take a very mature reflection and a sense of time which is a particular strength of Islam. Islam gives the [sic?] time a completely different meaning than what the industrialised world conceives.

Aftab Ahmad Khan: A number of professional people from the Islamic countries have settled down in Western countries. What should they do to help their own societies?

Aga Khan: I think these are people who are living in what sociologists call a cross-cultural situation. It is an unpleasant word but it says, I suppose, what it tries to say. My concern would be that these people who are exposed to this cross-cultural situation should use that exposure to strengthen their contribution to their own countries and to their own societies by drawing from the culture which is not theirs but which is beneficial and by not accepting without question a whole lot of attitudes and principles which come from a part of the world alien to us.
These people who live in cross-cultural situations have a very important role to play; they can either be the sensors and ambassadors of wisdom, clear thinking and knowledge and can bring with them great strength, or they would be sources of weakness, division, confusion and misrepresentation. I would say that the developing countries can do a great deal to help these people by making them understand that they are sons of the soil and so long as their contribution is positive and constructive the developing countries will come out of their way to support these people and encourage them to contribute to the future of the developing countries. Sometimes that is not the case; the developing countries look upon these people with a lack of understanding and favour. I think this is a sociological phenomenon which [sic] irreversible. It would be foolish to think that people are not going to become increasingly mobile and what we have to do in the Third World is to ask how that mobility could serve to strengthen us, but to reverse it or stop it, you can’t. It is impossible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)

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