Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on wealth and commercial enterprise

"The real question that Islam asks an individual is not whether he is rich but 'If you have the resources, what are you doing with them?' And the answer lies not in what one owns but, according to the ethics of Islam, how one uses it. The Begum Om Habibeh Aga Khan (who died in July 2000) provided a worthy example. Having lived with great restraint throughout her life, my grandfather's widow, who was French by birth, left all her assets to the Aga Khan Foundation when she died. She bequeathed to the organisation very considerable sums to be used in areas of most critical need, for example to support the most underprivileged populations."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Paris Match Interview (4th) with Caroline Pigozzi (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7190/

"It's part of the ethic of Islam. It's not philanthropy. It's that you have a duty to share what you do not need yourself. If Allah has given you the wherewithal to share, you share. And you don't share on the basis of handouts. The best of giving is what enables people to become independent. That is, you don't give philanthropy on an ongoing basis, if you can give philanthropy, it is to make people capable of managing their own destiny."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Kuala Lumpur interview featured in AKDN's 'Let the Beauty We Love Be What We Do: A Profile of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture' (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)
“Islam doesn’t say that a proper practice of the faith means you have to ignore the world. What it says is: Bring to the world the ethics of your faith. If you have wealth, use it properly. But the actual ownership of wealth is not in any way criticisable unless you have acquired it through improper means or you are using it for improper purposes. It is seen as a blessing of God. So this whole notion of conflict between faith and world is totally in contradiction to the ethics of Islam.”

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

“I was brought up from my youngest days as a Muslim. I observed my family practising Islam. I was educated from a very early age in the faith and studied the faith as a university student. Any my interpretation is that any man who is in a position of authority, has a duty to use that authority and whatever wealth he has, for the benefit of the Ummah and of humanity. That is part of the essence of Islam. It is the way in which the faith defines the role of the wealthy and of the powerful in relation to society. And that is a profound part of my belief.”

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

“I was born with Islamic ethics, in a Muslim family. There is nothing wrong with being well off as long as money has a social and ethical value and is not the object of one’s own greed. That is why I wanted
His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 AFP Interview (Aleppo, Syria)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9009/

Aftab Ahmad Khan: How would you assess the progress of Ismaili Community under your leadership and what would you consider as your major contribution?

Aga Khan: It is a very difficult question for me to answer. I can tell you what my objectives have been. Whether those objectives have actually been fulfilled is something which, I think, the Ismailis and the people who know and observe the community are better qualified to say.

One of my objectives 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....

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.
"[Man] must be enterprising, contributing of his best to his family and the society in which he lives, so long as the content of his endeavour is within the terms of our social and moral conscience and so long as the objectives of the enterprise are equally acceptable. In simple terms, the question is less one of whether a man is successful in business or in his profession than of the way in which he is achieving success and the purposes for which his achievements are utilised."

"Islam, therefore, guides man not only in his spiritual relationship with God, it also guides man in his relationship with his fellow men and his relationship with the material world around him. It encourages enterprise, but warns that enterprise, without a social conscience, is not acceptable. It is in this respect, where Islam’s message applies to all aspects of man’s life, that he will be judged not just on what he does but the manner in which he does it."

"We have no notion of the accumulation of wealth being evil ... It’s how you use it. The Islamic ethic is that if God has given you the
capacity or good fortune to be a privileged individual in society, you have a moral responsibility to society."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2013 Vanity Fair interview with James Reginato, 'The Aga Khan's Earthly Kingdom' (USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10388/

"Many parts of the Islamic world, and in this, the Ismailis certainly agree, perceive an American imbalance involving excessive emphasis on material comfort. I should go further than comfort, I think perhaps the concern of wealth and the way wealth is used rather than comfort. In Islam there is nothing wrong in the search for comfort, but the accumulation of wealth for the specific purpose of accumulating wealth or personal power is something which Islam does not like to see. If you are fortunate enough to go past what you personally need then share what you have."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Life Magazine Interview with Margot Dougherty and Richard B. Stolley (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2997/

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