Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on the veil, headscarf, hijab and purdah

"[The Aga Khan] is interested in the current debate on whether the hijab, the Muslim headscarf, should be worn in Irish schools and cautions against the issue being used to create division:

"My own sense is that if an individual wishes to associate publicly with a faith, that's the right of that individual to do that, whether he's a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim. That is, to me, something which is important."

"But he says that people should not be forced to wear the hijab:

"To go from there to an imposed process by forces in society, to me is unacceptable. It's got to be the choice of the individual who wishes to associate with his faith or her faith. I have great respect for any individual who wants in the right way to be associated with his own faith. I accept that totally and I would never challenge it."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Irish Times interview with Alison Healy (Maynooth, Ireland)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8845/

Caroline Pigozzi/Jean-Claude Deutsch: What does the Aga Khan, a Europeanised Muslim, think about the debate on the wearing of the Islamic scarf in France?

Aga Khan: How do you expect me to forbid someone from openly
associating themselves with their religion? The law today is acting on the form, not the underlying significance of this practise. One should not impose oneself in an aggressive manner, but should live serenely within one's faith. If pressuring someone to change their beliefs is considered offensive, why should someone change their beliefs just because these beliefs consist of a free individual right? The separation of religion and state implies multiculturalism before anything else.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Paris Match Interview (1st) with Caroline Pigozzi and Jean-Claude Deutsch (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/850/

"The veil for women is a tradition which precedes Islam, and was introduced as a sign of respect of women and not of submission, i.e. against the concept that woman is an object of the society of men."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Corriere della Sera interview with Massimo Nava (Italy) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6010/

Nicholas Tomalin: Have you used your power to make any radical changes in the Ismaili religion?

Aga Khan: You don’t change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, my grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. But I hope I am modern in my outlook, and I know that in many ways I am a different sort of person from my grandfather. This will necessarily subtly change the character of the Faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
"The second factor which stood in the way of pan-Islamism was one of the ideas which I mentioned as a possible source for the new flame. This was the internal movement within the religion itself. The close contacts between the Muslims and the West which were brought about by the war made many people think, and analyse their faith. The more progressive Muslims asked for changes in their civil and criminal law; they asked for Western type laws of succession and Western codes, and they also found that many of their traditions could not be kept up, were they to move as rapidly as Europe. One of these traditions was the wearing of the veil and the sore question of giving secular education to women.

"These problems may have been solved had there not been at least ten different forms of Islamic law already in use. I sometimes doubt whether the solution would have been found even if there had only been one practised code. But there were the four Sunni schools and there were the Shia schools; and there were the Muslim schools that had been influenced by Greek and Byzantine tradition.

"The Muslims were unable, simply because of the background in which they had lived, to reach a common agreement."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1957 address to the Dar es Salaam Cultural Society, 'Harvard University and Studies of the Middle East' (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/908/

"A second cause of our present apathy is the terrible position of Muslim women ... There is absolutely nothing in Islam, or the Qur'an, or the example of the first two centuries, to justify this terrible and cancerous growth that has for nearly a thousand, years eaten into the very vitals of Islamic society.... The Prophet ... by a few wise restrictions, such as must be practised by any society that
hopes to exist, made the former constant and unceremonious companionship of men and strange women impossible.

"From these necessary and wholesome rules the jealousy of the Abbassides, borrowing from the practice of the later Persian Sassanian kings, developed the present system ... which means the permanent imprisonment and enslavement of half the nation. How can we expect progress from the children of mothers who have never shared, or even seen, the free social intercourse of modern mankind? This terrible cancer that has grown since the 3rd and 4th century [sic] of the Hijra must either be cut out, or the body of Muslim society will be poisoned to death by the permanent waste of all the women of the nation. But purdah, as now known, itself did not exist till long after the Prophet's death and is no part of Islam. The part played by Muslim women at Kardesiah and Yarmuk the two most momentous battles of Islam next to Badr and Honein, and their splendid nursing of the wounded after those battles, is of itself a proof to any reasonable person that purdah, as now understood, has never been conceived by the companions of the Prophet. That we Muslims should saddle ourselves with this excretion of Persian custom, borrowed by the Abbassides, is due to that ignorance of early Islam which is one of the most extraordinary of modern conditions."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1902 All India Muhammadan Educational Conference Presidential address, 'Muslim Education in India' (Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1311/

"In matters of social reform I have tried to exert my influence and authority sensibly and progressively. I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women. In my grandfather's and my father's time the Ismailis were far ahead of any other Muslim sect in the matter of the abolition of the strict veil, even in extremely conservative countries. I have absolutely abolished it; nowadays you will never find an Ismaili woman wearing the veil."
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islamic Law and the Sharia

See also: TH Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time

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