Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on Pope Benedict XVI's controversial quote of Emperor Manuel about Prophet Muhammad

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS

Stefan Aust / Erich Follath: Your Highness, in a lecture Pope Benedict XVI quoted Emperor Manuel as saying: “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as a command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” This quotation from the 14th century has caused great uproar in the Muslim world. Why? And what was your reaction?

His Highness the Aga Khan: From my point of view, I would start by saying that I was concerned about this statement because this has caused great unhappiness in the Islamic world. There appears to be momentum towards more and more misunderstandings between religions, a degradation of relations. I think we all should try not to add anything to worsen the situation.

SA/EF: Benedict XVI did explicitly dissociate himself from the emperor’s quoted statement. The pope’s own position with regard to his lecture is that he wanted it to promote a dialogue; and since then, several times, he has expressed his respect for the world religion that is Islam. Was it just an unfortunate choice of words? Or was he deliberately misunderstood?

AK: I do not wish to pass judgement on that, nor can I. And it might also be unreasonable for me to presume that I know what he meant. But that (medieval) period in history, to my knowledge, was one of the periods of extraordinary theological exchanges and debates between the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim world. A fascinating time. The emperor’s statement does not reflect that, so I think it is somewhat out of context.

SA/EF: The theme of Pope Benedict’s lecture was different, it was one of his favourites: the link between faith and reason which, he said, implies a rejection of any link between religion and
violence. Is that something you could agree on?

**AK:** If you interpret his speech as one about faith and reason then I think that the debate is very exciting and could be enormously constructive between the Muslim world and the non-Muslim world. So I have two reactions to the Pope’s lecture: There is my concern about the degradation of relations and, at the same time, I see an opportunity. A chance to talk about a serious, important issue: the relationship between faith and logic....

**SA/EF:** Does Islam have a problem with reason?

**AK:** Not at all. Indeed, I would say the contrary. Of the Abrahamic faiths, Islam is probably the one that places the greatest emphasis on knowledge. The purpose is to understand God’s creation, and therefore it is a faith which is eminently logical. Islam is a faith of reason.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Spiegel Online Interview (2nd), Stefan Aust and Erich Follath, ‘Islam Is a Faith of Reason’ (Berlin, Germany)

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