Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on the need to revive spiritual traditions as a prerequisite to restoring public integrity

"[A] healthy sense of public integrity, in my view, will be difficult to nurture over time without a strong religious underpinning. In the Islamic tradition, the conduct of one's worldly life is inseparably intertwined with the concerns of one's spiritual life and one cannot talk about integrity without also talking about faith. For Islam, the importance of this intersection is an item of faith, such a profound melding of worldly concerns and spiritual ideals that one cannot imagine one without the other. The two belong together. They constitute 'a way of life.'

"From that perspective, I would put high among our priorities, both within and outside the Islamic world, the need to renew our spiritual traditions. To be sure, religious freedom is a critical value in a pluralistic society. But if freedom of religion deteriorates into freedom from religion then I fear we will soon be lost on a bleak and barren landscape with no compass or roadmap, no sense of ultimate direction.

"I fully understand the West's historic commitment to separating the secular from the religious. But for many non-Westerners, including most Muslims, the realms of faith and of worldly affairs cannot be antithetical. If 'modernism' lacks a spiritual dimension, it will look like materialism. And if the modernising influence of the West is insistently and exclusively a secularising influence, then much of the Islamic world will be somewhat distanced from it.

"A deeply rooted sense of public integrity means more than integrity
in government, important as that must be. Ethical lapses in medicine and education, malfeasance in business and banking, dishonesty among journalists, scientists, engineers, or scholars -- all of these weaknesses can undermine the most promising democracies.

"Let me finally emphasise my strong conviction that public integrity cannot grow out of authoritarian pronouncements. It must be rooted in the human heart and conscience. As the Holy Qur’an says: ‘There is no compulsion in religion.’ The resurgence of spirituality, potentially such a positive force, can become a negative influence when it turns into self-righteousness and imposes itself on others. Like all of the world’s great religions, Islam warns against the danger of comparing oneself with God, and places primary emphasis on the qualities of generosity, mercy and humility. A central element in any religious outlook, it seems to me, is a sense of human limitation, a recognition of our own creature-hood -- a posture of profound humility before the Divine. In that sensibility lies our best protection against divisive dogmatism and our best hope for creative pluralism."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement address (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/

"When I say that religion should permeate life, I am thinking not only of private life but of national and international life."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s Daily Sketch Interview answer to the question ‘Is Religion Something Special?’ (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/

"The message I will always give is that humanity cannot deal with present day problems without a basis of religion."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1959 Press Conference (Kampala, Uganda)