Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on having 'humility before the Divine'

"The superiority of man-made structures over natural environment is a concept alien to Islamic belief."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 Address to the Asia Society (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2010/

"The famous verse of 'light' in the Qur'an, the Ayat al-Nur, whose first line is rendered here in the mural behind me, inspires among Muslims a reflection on the sacred, the transcendent. It hints at a cosmos full of signs and symbols that evoke the perfection of Allah's creation and mercy....

"Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour are all seen as the response of the faithful to the recurring call of the Qur'an to ponder the Creation as a way to understand Allah's benevolent majesty. As Sura al-Baqara proclaims: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.'...

"The Qur'an’s is an inclusive vision of society that gives primacy to nobility of conduct. It speaks of differences of language and colour as a Divine sign of mercy and a portent for people of knowledge to reflect upon."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom)
"[The challenges of design for the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat] call for translating concepts that have a context in our faith and our history, yet stride boldly and confidently ahead, into modernity; for expressing both the exoteric and the esoteric, and our awe and humility towards the mysteries of Nature, Time and beyond.... In Islam the Divine is reflected in Nature's creation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7314/

"A central element in a truly religious outlook, it seems to me, is the quality of personal humility -- a recognition that strive as we might, we will still fall short of our ideals, that climb as we might, there will still be unexplored and mysterious peaks above us. It means recognising our own creaturehood, and thus our human limitations. In that recognition, it seems to me, lies our best protection against false prophecies and divisive dogmatism."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Address to the Evora University Symposium (Evora, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/

"The spirit of the Knowledge Society is the spirit of Pluralism -- a readiness to accept the Other, indeed to learn from him, to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat. Such a spirit must be rooted, I believe, in a sense of humility before the Divine, realising that none of us have all the answers, and respecting the broad variety of God’s creation and the diversity of the Human Family."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/
In acknowledging the immensity of the Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding. In that light, the amazing diversity of Creation itself can be seen as a great gift to us -- not a cause for anxiety but a source of delight. Even the diversity of our religious interpretations can be greeted as something to share with one another -- rather than something to fear. In this spirit of humility and hospitality the stranger will be welcomed and respected, rather than subdued or ignored.

Diversity itself is a gift of the Divine, and that embracing diversity is a way to learn and to grow -- not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge.

One of the great stumbling blocks to the advance of pluralism, in my view, is simple human arrogance. All of the world’s great religions warn against self-righteousness -- yet too many are still tempted to play God themselves -- rather than recognising their humility before the Divine.
"The spiritual roots of tolerance include, it seems to me, a respect for individual conscience -- seen as a Gift of God -- as well as a posture of religious humility before the Divine. It is by accepting our human limits that we can come to see The Other as a fellow seeker of truth and to find common ground in our common quest. Let me emphasise again, however, that spirituality should not become a way of escaping from the world but rather a way of more actively engaging in it."

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