Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part 1/4: "Islam is for all places and all time"

"In Islam right from the time of Prophet Muhammad, there has been a compatibility between the faith and the world in which the faith is practised at any given time. And I am not willing to make any compromise on that compatibility ... I would never accept that the concept of Islam, the practice of Islam, cannot be fulfilled in the modern world or in the world of tomorrow."

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*Aftab Ahmad Khan*: How would you comment on the notion popularised by Western critics that scientific and technological progress is incompatible with the practice of Islam?

*Aga Khan*: I think that's one of the most offensive things that can be said about Islam and I take issue with it in every way. In the first place, to say that science in the modern age is incompatible is the same as saying that Islam is the faith of the past and that is totally unacceptable. In the second place, Islam's message contains a central theme which is the total power of Allah and therefore my conviction is that the discoveries which the human mind can make are really simply a minute perception of Allah's creation and I know no scientist in any domain who has been able to answer the ultimate question. So, from my point of view, Islam is a faith which cannot be
relegated to the past.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

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"My concept of Islam is [that it is] a faith for all time, not backward looking."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 L'Express Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8106/

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"I apprehend that in certain educational institutions respect for tradition has restricted academic study to the accomplishment of the past. However, our faith has never been restricted to one place or time. Ever since its revelation the fundamental concepts of Islam have been its universality and the fact that this is the last revelation, constantly valid, and not petrified into one period of man's history or confined to one area of the world. Islam is for all places and all time."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/

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"[I]nsofar as people's knowledge today is significantly different from what it was thirteen hundred years ago, we have to live in our time. And indeed I would vigorously oppose anybody who would claim that the faith of Islam cannot be of the twentieth or the twenty-first or the twenty-third, twenty-fifth century."
"I think that one has to be very careful in the interpretation of Islam, not anchoring that interpretation at one time in history. If you make Islam a faith of the past, you in a sense make it impossible for the Muslim to practise his faith today and in the future. And as a Muslim I totally reject the concept that the message of Islam is tied to any given time after the revelation of the faith. And Islam must be practised by people today and in hundred years, two hundred years. And if Islam is a faith forever, then [the] leadership must be very careful not to harness it to concepts of a given time."

"Those who wish to introduce the concept that you can only practise your faith as it was practised hundreds of years ago are introducing a time dimension which is not part of our faith today. It is a very delicate issue, whether it is in science, in medicine, in economics."

*Times of India*: What is our most precious asset as human beings?

*Aga Khan*: A value system that is both time-resistant and time-adaptable.
"[In terms of] the philosophical environment in which an individual lives, there is no doubt that the faith of Islam places the individual in society in the world in which he lives, in a position where he is not in conflict with his time and he is not in conflict with science and technology of his time. The eternal values of Islam are such that whether the man lived a hundred years ago or lives a hundred years from now, he is always in his correct position. There is no conflict. So in terms of the humanistic, permanent values of a faith, I would say that obviously Islam puts an individual in a very privileged position.

"... I believe in the eternity of the faith and I believe it is the faith for man. And in that sense, Muslims will find within their faith all the dimensions they need to live satisfactorily in the future. The question is not one of the faith; it is a question of what man does. The faith gives him the environment in which to function today and tomorrow. It is what we do as individuals in our lives."

"As Imam of the Ismaili sect, I am in a position to adapt the teachings of the Qur'an to the modern condition. On the question of modernity the issue is essentially whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society or whether one is affecting the fundamentals of religious practice. As long as these two aspects are safeguarded the rest can be subject to adjustment."
"[It] is not a simple matter for any human society with a concern and appreciation of its history to relate its heritage to its contemporary conditions. Traditions evolve in a context, and the context always changes, thus demanding a new understanding of essential principles. For us Muslims, this is one of the pressing challenges we face."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

"Many today across the Muslim world know their history and deeply value their heritage, but are also keenly sensitive to the radically altered conditions of the modern world. They also realise how erroneous and unreasonable it is to believe that there is an unbridgeable divide between their heritage and the modern world."

His Highness the Aga Khan's Preface to the 2008 book 'The Aga Khan Museum' by Philip Jodidio (Aiglemont)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8373/

See also: TH, Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 2/4: Towards 'new understandings of essential principles'

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on tradition and modernity -- Part
3/4: ‘Progress does not mean occidentalisation’


See also: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on tradition and modernity -- Part 4/4: Innovate; ‘Discover new knowledge’


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