“Many of the most intimate friends of the Prophet and the most pious and distinguished of the 'companions' doubted which side they should take in the civil wars, and how they should act so as not to be responsible for any harm that might come, and so were led to adopt the most dangerous principle of all. They retired each into his private home and did not use their influence one way or the other, but passed the rest of their lives in prayer and pilgrimage.

"This example has ever since been unconsciously followed by some of the best and purest in every Muslim society. The most genuine and the most moral of Muslim often tell you, as they have a thousand times told me almost in identical terms at Constantinople or Cairo, at Bombay or Zanzibar, that as long as they spent their energies in prayer and pilgrimage they are certain that though they do not do the best, yet they do no harm, and thus they give up to prayer and pilgrimage the lives which should have been devoted to the well-being of their people.

"It is to this class in India that I appeal and desire most earnestly to impress upon them my conviction that, if they continue in their present attitude of aloofness, it means the certain extinction of Islam, at least, as a world-wide religion. We of this Conference appeal to the pious for their co-operation and assistance, and we warn them solemnly and in all earnestness that, if they give all their time to prayer and their money to pilgrimages, the time will come when that piety, which they so highly prize, will pass away from our society, and (for want of timely assistance at this most critical period) not
one of our descendants will know how to pray or put any store upon the merit of pilgrimage. It is to this genuine class of pious men that we appeal here; let them come forward and take their legitimate place in the advancement of their co-religionists and in the moral and religious education of their brethren and children. In the strenuous life of modern times, a people that does not get help from its most pious and most moral sections has as little chance of success as a man who tries to swim with his arms tied behind his back.

"A great, but silent, crisis has come in the fortunes of Islam and unless this class wake up to the altered conditions of life and to the necessity of superintending and educating the rising generation, the very existence of Islam is at stake. This class of pious Muslims must understand that what Islam now demands of them is that they should surrender to the training of the young a portion of the time hitherto given to prayer and a portion of the money hitherto spent in pilgrimages or celebrations of martyrdoms, long since past, which only help to keep alive those terrible sectarian differences which are one of the misfortunes of Islam. The example of the Prophet and of Abu Bakr and Omar and Ali should convince these pious people that the first duty of a Muslim is to give his time to the service of his nation and not merely to silent prayers."

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/

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


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