Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Ismailism's inviolability yet simultaneous flexibility

**Geoffry Barker:** Do you see yourself as a reforming or conservative Imam?

**Aga Khan:** I think that is terminology which just does not apply in the sense that the essentials are the essentials and have remained the essentials for centuries. So I think reform as such doesn’t exist. Conservatism could exist in secular terms, not in religious terms.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffry Barker (Melbourne, Australia)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

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**Nicholas Tomalin:** Have you used your power to make any radical changes in the Ismaili religion?

**Aga Khan:** You don’t change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, my grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. But I hope I am modern in my outlook, and I know that in many ways I am a different sort of person from my grandfather. This will necessarily subtly change the character of the Faith.

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
**ITV**: Are you a democrat?

**Aga Khan**: Insofar as a [sic] institution can be democratic, yes. There are areas where in the interpretation of faith, democracy cannot, cannot play. But in the choice of leadership, in consultation on decisions, I do seek to consult as widely as possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/

"What has been my own policy with my followers? Our religion is our religion, you either believe in it or you do not. You can leave a faith but you cannot, if you do not accept its tenets, remain within it and claim to 'reform' it.... There has never been any question of changing the Ismaili faith; that faith has remained the same and must remain the same. Those who have not believed in it have rightly left it; we bear them no ill-will and respect them for their sincerity."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"If one's faith is to be part of one's life then it has to come under questioning. The essential is that it should be understood, that's what would justify questioning."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
Interviewer: Does the fact that you have been to Harvard mean that you have ideas for modernising?

Aga Khan: Secular institutions yes. Definitely so.

"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."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules; even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 India Today Interview (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4315/
Rajiv Mehrotra: The other philosophical dimension that in Islamic world view must come up for you in some measure is in the development models that you might be seeking to encourage. I think so that Islam decrees a societal framework which may seem somewhat strained relationship to modern technology modern practices, structures, financial institutions. How would you reconcile those?

Aga Khan: Well I say this with deference that I am not entirely convinced that the faith itself has decreed any particular form rather that the people have interpreted it. And if my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue which is, well, anything that we are doing is in conflict with the ethic of Islam. If it is not in conflict with the ethic of Islam then I must interpret it as being possible.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

"[O]ne cannot change religion overnight. This evolution is a slow thing, and it is, therefore, an everlasting job with its own rhythm, usually a lot slower than the political and economic upheavals of the present time."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1975 L'Expansion Interview with Roger Priouret (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Imam's authority and discretion in interpreting the Qur'an
