Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on reconciling the conflict when faith clashes with economics

"The second question to ask about tourism as a growth area for the Pakistani economy is whether, air transport considerations apart, tourism trends in countries close to, or similar to Pakistan, indicate that the world’s leisure industry does hold potential for this country. So what is happening in Asia, and the Third World generally? Recently it was reported that:

"Tourism earned poor countries 22 billion U.S. dollars in 1988, which was their second largest earner of foreign exchange. The first being oil. In 1988 Turkey earned 2 billion 400 million dollars from tourism. The countries of South-East Asia, which 10 years ago commanded approximately 10% of the world tourism market, today command a staggering 39% of it.

"What this means, is that tourism is growing rapidly throughout the developing world and specifically to the west of Pakistan, in Turkey, and to the East, in South-East Asia. What this also means, unfortunately, is that most of this growth is either stopping on the west of Pakistan or over-flying this country to travel to South-East Asia.

"If this is true, why is it happening? Is it because alcohol is not sold freely and is available to foreigners only, or because only traditional dancing is permitted or are there other much more significant reasons? Surely if Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries with large majorities of Muslim populations have been able to find an acceptable balance between their legitimate concerns for the respect of their faith, culture and traditions, while at the same time meeting the demands of international tourism, Pakistan is capable of doing likewise. Indeed, these Serena Hotels themselves are endeavours at demonstrating
the cultural adaptability of tourism infrastructure, by respecting and enhancing local architecture and tradition, as well as the local handicrafts in textiles, metals and wood. Perhaps, however, there are more fundamental reasons for the slow growth of tourism in Pakistan."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 Serena Hotel Opening Ceremony address (Quetta, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4344/

"Sometimes we are faced with the choice of either accepting habits and customs which have proved economically successful in the West, but go against what our Faith tells us to do, or continuing in our old ways, thus jeopardising our economic development.

"I will give you a simple example. One of our factories making jute, for instance, in East Pakistan. In a Western society a factory like that is working 24 hours a day, six days a week all year round. But in an Islamic society that factory can work 24 hours a day, yes, but with five breaks for prayers and a complete break in the month of Ramadan, when the working force is reduced to less than half by fasting.

"This is a terrible practical problem. Even among Muslim States they do not agree whether or not to work full time during Ramadan....

"But the real question is, where does one stop? If we are always importing from the West techniques to develop our economics, how can we stop importing alien ideas? You can imagine the problem." 

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/

"Concepts such as meritocracy, free-world economics, or multi-party democracy, honed and tested in the West may generally have proven their worth. But valid though they may be, responsible leadership in the Islamic
world must ask if they can be adapted to their cultures which may not have the traditions or infra-structure to assimilate them.... There is a real risk that market place economics could lead to ruthless competition, and increased concentration of wealth, further marginalising the existing poor. There is a real risk that meritocracy could exacerbate, for example, the existing problem of equitable access to quality education and sophisticated health care. Although the modern page of human history was written in the West, you should not expect or desire for that page to be photocopied by the Muslim world.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Brown University Commencement Ceremony address (Providence, Rhode Island, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5089/

Aga Khan: I think there are sometimes some moral issues vis-a-vis the West where there are attitudes in the West where some of our people, and I’m talking now about youth in the Muslim world, not just the Islamic community, ask themselves is there a dividing line between freedom and licence? And if there is a dividing line between freedom and licence, which is a highly important ethical question to every person, where is it? Is it where the West has situated that divide, or is it where we would like to see it? So I think there’s a multiplicity of questions which the Islamic people are asking -- I think they ask themselves about the freedom of their countries when they find that their economies are constrained because somebody says you are going to go into a period of recession because your government’s been spending too much, that creates frustration. So I think there’s a number of forces that play on news that we have to accept.

John Stackhouse/Patrick Martin: Do you think the masses that you’re speaking of understand the West? We spoke earlier about the misconception of Islam.

Aga Khan: Yes I think they understand the West; whether they’re empathetic with all Western values is a question I would have to say no to. They are not empathetic to all Western values.

JS/PM: Which values?
AK: I would think that things like economic independence they would find it very difficult to find their countries in some way dependent on international financial institutions that make or break the cost of the kilo of rice. I mean, we’re talking about very basic issues. Think of the food, the food rebellions that you had when the IMF amongst others said you’ve got to correct your economy. People couldn’t buy their food. You know, how can you expect young people not to react? That is so basic to human rights. So those are things that I think are felt, that people feel very bitter about.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2002 Globe and Mail Interview (3rd) with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6120/

"[I]n many areas people defend the principle of freedom to a point where freedom tends to become depravity, permissiveness and disrespect. At that point, Islam says 'no.' And that doesn’t only apply to the problem of the relationship between men and women. Take the economic crisis that is affecting us all. The root of the problem is that certain financial institutions have been allowed too much freedom, which they have abused in a way verging on the immoral."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Politique Internationale Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye, ‘The Power of Wisdom’ (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/

"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....

"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."
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/  

"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)  
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10077/  

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