

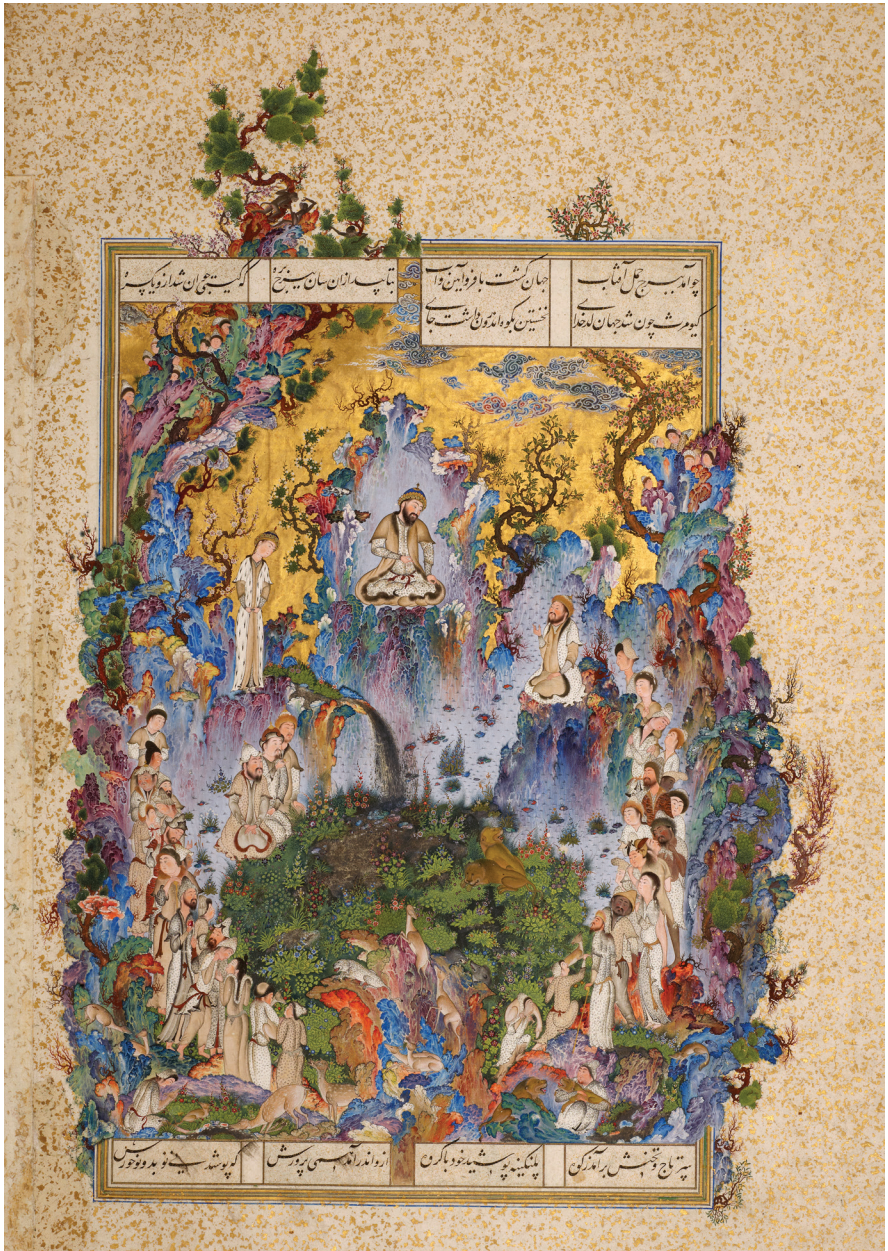
FAITH AND ETHICS

The Vision of the Ismaili Imamat



M. ALI LAKHANI

Faith and Ethics



The Court of Gayumars, fol. 20v from a *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings).
Sultan Muhammad, Iran, c.1522.

Faith and Ethics

The Vision of the Ismaili Imam

M. Ali Lakhani

I.B.Tauris *Publishers*
LONDON • NEW YORK
in association with
The Institute of Ismaili Studies
LONDON

Published in 2018 by
I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
London • New York
www.ibtauris.com

in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies
210 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DA
www.iis.ac.uk

Copyright © Islamic Publications Ltd, 2018

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Every attempt has been made to gain permission for the use of the images in this book. Any omissions will be rectified in future editions.
References to websites were correct at the time of writing.

ISBN: 978 1 78831 248 6
eISBN: 978 1 78672 390 1
ePDF: 978 1 78673 390 0

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute's programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the materials of Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is also given to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute's programmes promote research on those areas which have, to date, received relatively little attention from scholars. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'ism in general, and Ismailism in particular.

In the context of Islamic societies, the Institute's programmes are informed by the full range and diversity of cultures in which Islam is practised today, from the Middle East, South and Central Asia and Africa to the industrialised societies of the West, thus taking into consideration the variety of contexts which shape the ideals, beliefs and practices of the faith.

These objectives are realised through concrete programmes and activities organised and implemented by various departments of the Institute. The Institute also collaborates periodically, on a programme-specific basis, with other institutions of learning in the United Kingdom and abroad.

The Institute's academic publications fall into a number of interrelated categories:

1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
2. Monographs exploring specific aspects of Islamic faith and culture, or the contributions of individual Muslim thinkers or writers.
3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
6. Proceedings of conferences and seminars sponsored by the Institute.
7. Bibliographical works and catalogues which document manuscripts, printed texts and other source materials.

This book falls into category 1 listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

*In loving memory of my parents,
Ibrahim and Kulsam,
who lived the ethics of their faith*

Bani Adam

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other,
Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time affects one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If you have no sympathy for the troubles of others,
You are unworthy to be called by the name of 'a Human'.*

Sa'di of Shiraz

* 'Bani Adam' from *Gulistan* by the Persian poet, Sa'di (d. 1292). The text of this verse is inscribed at the entrance of the United Nations building in New York.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>Note on Illustrations</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<i>Note on Text and Sources</i>	xxiii
1. The Ismaili Imam and the Imamatus	1
2. Ethical Foundations	11
3. Tradition and Modernity	35
4. The Ethos of Modernism	53
5. Pluralism and the Cosmopolitan Ethic	87
6. Cohesion Within the Umma	107
7. Islam and the West	119
8. Cultivating an Enabling Environment	135
9. Living the Ethics of Islam	151
10. Global Convergence	175
<i>Appendix of Quranic Citations</i>	189
<i>Notes</i>	195
<i>Index</i>	237

Illustrations

The Court of Gayumars, fol. 20v from a *Shahnameh*
(Book of Kings). Sultan Muhammad, Iran, c.1522.
Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, AKM165. Frontispiece

Study sessions in the courtyard of al-Azhar mosque,
Fatimid Cairo. *L'art arabe d'après les monument du Kaire*,
Prisse d'Avennes, Paris, France, 1877. Courtesy Institut
français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo. Chapter 1

The 99 names of Allah medallion at The Ismaili Centre,
Toronto, Canada. Designed by Minaz Nanji. Aga Khan
Development Network/Gary Otte (photographer). Chapter 2

Astronomers studying the moon and the stars.
Ottoman miniature, Turkey, 17th century. University
Library Istanbul/Gianni Dagli Orti. Getty Images. Chapter 3

Doha skyline seen through the arches at the Museum
of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar. ID 31531386 © Martin
Molcan, Dreamstime. Chapter 4

- Sultan Mehmet II and the investiture of Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios, c.1454. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Fener, Istanbul, Turkey. Public domain. Chapter 5
- Exterior of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. © Diego Delso, diego.photo; licence CC-BY-SA. Chapter 6
- Akbar the Great receives two Jesuit missionaries in the Ibadat Khana. Illustration to the *Akbarnama*, miniature painting by Nar Singh, c.1605. Public domain. Chapter 7
- Courtyard of the Lions of the Alhambra, Granada, Spain. ID 11147783 © Paco Ayala, 123rf.com. Chapter 8
- Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi. Public domain. Chapter 9
- Interior view of Charles V Palace at Alhambra, Granada, Spain. ID 17025538 © akulamati, 123rf.com. Chapter 10

Note on Illustrations

Cover and Frontispiece

[Sultan Muhammad, The Court of Gayumars, c.1522, 47 × 32 cm, opaque watercolour, ink, gold, silver on paper, folio 20v, 'Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp I' (Safavid), Tabriz, Iran (Aga Khan Museum, Toronto)].

The cover depicts King Gayumars, the legendary first king of Persia. The painting of him is a detail from a scene depicting his Court, shown in the frontispiece. King Gayumars' son, Siyamak, is standing to the right, while his grandson, Hushang, is seated to the left. The royal family is shown as elevated above the terrestrial realm of the lower court, where the subjects gather in an orderly circle. The whole scene symbolises cosmic order.

The King is the prototype of the *imago Dei* or *al-insan al-kamil* ('Perfect Man'). He represents the spiritually centred ruler who is the *khalifa* or vicegerent of God on earth. He is the measure of order, of justice, and he thereby depicts the humane potential of humanity – what the poet Sa'di refers to as being 'a Human' (in the 'Bani Adam' verse that is the epigraph to this book). The King is the microcosm.

The complete Court scene is the macrocosm. The arrangement descends from the celestial to the terrestrial, from the King to the Commons, reflecting the traditional devolution of order from the Sacerdotum (kingdom of spiritual governance, symbolising the Spirit and its faculty of higher intellect) to the Regnum (kingdom of human

governance, symbolising the soul and its faculty of the psyche) and thence to the Commons (the subjects to be governed, symbolising the lower self and its appetites). Order, premised on verticality, and equilibrium, based on complementarity, are both represented in the painting, as is pluralism, which is evident in the diversity of the community of the Court.

The cover depicts the ethical and humane man. The frontispiece represents a vision of the ordered universe, acknowledging the norms of hierarchy and complementarity, which are a fundamental feature of Ismaili ethics.

Preface

At a time when Islam is under great scrutiny, when it is beset by fragmentary forces from within and without, when horrific acts are undertaken in its name – acts which most Muslims consider appalling and defamatory of their faith – and when its very nature is both misrepresented and misunderstood, there is a need to take a fresh look at its ethos. This book does just this, through the prism of the Ismaili branch of Islam, with particular focus on the outlook and example of Prince Karim al-Husseini, the fourth Aga Khan and of the Ismaili Imamat institutions he has established.

The Nizari Ismailis, of whom the Aga Khan is the head, belong to the Shia branch of Islam. The *Shi'at Ali* (party of Ali) believed that the spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet should pass, according to the expressed wishes of the Prophet,¹ to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib and thereafter to his descendants, through a system of hereditary designation (*nass*); others believed that the mantle of authority should devolve by a form of political succession, and so they selected the leader initially among the senior companions of the Prophet, commencing with Abu Bakr, who was followed by Umar, Uthman and Ali, successively. This latter line of authority evolved into the Sunni

branch of Islam, so named for the Sunnis' belief that the Prophet's traditional heritage and way of living (*sunna*) was transmitted in this manner.

Today, as 'Imam', or spiritual leader, of the Shi'i Imami Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan (also referred to herein variously as 'Prince Karim Aga Khan' or 'the Ismaili Imam') has, during the 60 years of his Imamate, worked to promote a view of faith and ethics founded on principles of integrity and dignity, and on values that are central to Islam's message of peace, unity, generosity, compassion and equity, and consistent with its position as one of the major civilisational influences of mankind. He has sought to articulate this core message and spoken of its relevance to the modern world. He has also made efforts to put the message into practice by creating global institutions which promote its ethos. The Aga Khan's beliefs and goals, and the inclusive and compassionate dimensions of the Islamic values that he advocates in our materialistic age, make his voice particularly relevant both to those who want to better understand Islam and to those who seek 'a light in much of the world's conflicting darkness.'²

The aim of this book, which grew out of the author's essay 'Living the Ethics of One's Faith: The Aga Khan's Integral Vision', published in 2014 in *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*,³ is to present an interpretation of Islamic ethics, principally by drawing from public speeches, addresses and interviews of Prince Karim Aga Khan that describe his vision and its ethical applications. The book holds that the Ismaili Imam's aspiration for a common humanity promotes the Islamic ideals of unity (*tawhid*) and social justice (*'adl*). These ideals provide the foundation for the Ismaili Imamate's humanistic work, which coalesces around notions of harmony and community, compassion and empathy, equity and empowerment, pluralistic dialogue and engagement, seeking thereby to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of humankind through tolerance, generosity and spirituality.

In keeping with the Islamic view of an all-encompassing reality, this ethical dimension is presented as a bridge connecting faith (*din*) with worldly life (*dunya*). ‘One of the central elements of the Islamic faith’ the Aga Khan has said, ‘is the inseparable nature of faith and world. The two are so deeply intertwined that one cannot imagine their separation. They constitute a “Way of Life”’⁴ Another direct quotation from the Aga Khan illustrates the book’s approach: ‘A deepening sense of spiritual commitment, and the ethical framework that goes with it, will be a central requirement if we are to find our way through the minefields and the quicksands of modern life.’⁵

Rather than taking a theological approach, the book focuses on ethics and metaphysics, and on the Imam’s approach to issues that he has identified as relevant to living in the modern world, as well as the Imamat’s initiatives in promoting an ethical framework to address these issues. While situating the Ismaili ethos firmly within traditional Islam, this book emphasises the relevance of wide-ranging principles underlying the cosmopolitan ethic of communal harmony and the compassionate ethic of social justice, that are promoted by the Aga Khan.

In adopting this approach, the book does not intend to situate the Aga Khan’s views within any particular school of classical, modern or postmodern thought. It is evident from his own references to traditional sources of interpretive authority, such as the Quran and the prophetic example, that he locates his views firmly within the pluralistic framework of Islam. As the ‘Imam of the Time’, he interprets and applies what Ismailis regard as the unchanging principles of the Islamic faith to the changing conditions of time.⁶ It will be seen that his interpretive approach is principal, one that is focused on identifying foundational principles and on applying them flexibly to changing contexts. As such, being neither formalistic nor time-bound, it does not lend itself to being classified according to the fashions of academic taxonomy.

The structure of the book is as follows.

- Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Ismaili community, the Ismaili Imam and his role, and the Ismaili Imamatus. It also briefly touches on the general themes of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which implements much of the work of the Imamatus.
- Chapter 2 examines the principles governing faith and ethics, focusing on the underlying Quranic principle of *tawhid*, or metaphysical oneness, and its corollaries, which are the basis of Ismaili ethics. It explains how values emerge from principles, and ethics from faith, and how these form an integral foundation through which faith is connected to worldly life.
- The next two chapters look at certain centrifugal influences that are fragmenting society and threatening its moral fabric, and how the Ismaili Imam is responding to these. Chapter 3 reviews challenges posed by the accelerating forces of change in the modern world. It examines the Aga Khan's approach in addressing the resulting tensions between tradition and modernity, focusing, in keeping with the Shi'i tradition, on the key role of the intellect in navigating change. Chapter 4 explores threats posed by the ethos of 'modernism' and the Aga Khan's response to this problem. In particular, this chapter questions the false premises of modernism and contrasts its materialistic foundations with the Muslim imperative of balancing the spiritual and worldly realms of *din* and *dunya*.
- Chapter 5 deals with pluralism as expressed in the cosmopolitan ethic that lies at the heart of the Ismaili Imam's quest for shared values. It highlights his emphasis on humanistic values rooted in a common humanity, values such as tolerance and social justice, the respect for dignity, diversity and inclusivity, and a freedom that is circumscribed by social conscience – values fundamental to the ethics of harmony and equity that lie at the heart of Islam.

- The next four chapters discuss various ways in which the Imamatus is implementing the cosmopolitan ethic in accordance with the goal of global convergence. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the cosmopolitan ethic of communal harmony, reviewing its application internally within the Umma (the Muslim community at large), and externally, as between the Umma and the West. Those chapters assess the cause of certain tensions affecting these relationships and the Aga Khan's approaches to resolving them. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the compassionate ethic of social justice, reviewing the Ismaili Imamatus's emphasis on creating an enabling environment for 'progress' aimed at the common good, understood as the global aspiration for a better quality of life.
- Chapter 10 concludes with reflections on the work of the Imamatus – its architecture of global convergence. Finally, while mindful that the present Aga Khan's work is ongoing, the book offers an assessment of his legacy as Imam.

It is the author's hope that this book will be read by a wide audience – Ismailis and non-Ismailis alike – and that they will find here a clear exposition of the Aga Khan's ethical vision, its foundations and its aspirations, and of how they combine to inform the work of the Ismaili Imamatus. While the book offers a framework for understanding these elements, the intention is neither to constrain views about faith and ethics by presenting them as a fixed system nor to limit the scope for their interpretation. Rather, it is hoped that the text offers a metaphysical understanding of the unity of man and an appreciation of the moral imperatives this entails. Such a holistic viewpoint is consonant with the message of Islam, which promotes a way of conceiving life, religion and society integrally, focusing on spiritual values which emphasise the vital link between faith and ethics, and between integrity and dignity. This essential connection offers a view of virtue as 'positive freedom' and underlines the human responsibility to strive

continually for fresh moral horizons grounded in interpretations of such core notions as identity, purpose, value and meaning, derived from the heritage of Islam and applied within the changing contexts of time, while concurrently respecting the dignity of difference through an openness to dialogue. This conception of a faith-based intellect and ethics, which respects the inherent dignity of humankind, is a profound refutation of those who misunderstand or malign Islam in our age.

This is a work of independent scholarship. As such, it does not purport to represent the views of The Institute of Ismaili Studies or of any other Ismaili or Imamat institution. While the book frequently reflects the ideas and words of Prince Karim Aga Khan, it nevertheless remains the author's own interpretation of them.

The author thanks The Institute of Ismaili Studies for the invitation to undertake this project, and for its assistance in realising this publication, the first extensive survey of the Aga Khan's ideas, during the currency of his Diamond Jubilee year.

M. Ali Lakhani, QC
Vancouver, British Columbia
November 2017

Note on Text and Sources

Unless stated otherwise, all citations of the Aga Khan's words quoted in the book are from speeches and interviews found at the Aga Khan Development Network website (www.akdn.org/speeches), and also at the online archive of NanoWisdoms (www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog). The author has restricted the citations to public statements and has not quoted from the Imam's *farmans*, these being the guidance or teachings given exclusively to his Ismaili followers.

All Quranic translations (except those appearing as quotations within the speeches and addresses of the Aga Khan) are from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (editor-in-chief), Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard and Mohammed Rustom (New York, 2015). An index of Quranic references is included at the end of the publication.

A brief note on language: the term 'man', where used in the text, denotes humankind (*anthropos*), and is not intended to be understood in a genderised sense. In the interests of readability, diacritics have been omitted from transliterated words.



Study sessions in the courtyard of al-Azhar mosque, Fatimid Cairo. *L'art arabe d'après les monument du Kaire*, Prisse d'Avennes, Paris, France, 1877.

The Ismaili Imam and the Imamatus

The Aim of the Book

In traditional religious thought, there is understood to be an integral connection between faith and ethics that lies at the heart of human nature.¹ It is the basis of the humane bond between the self and the diversity it perceives as Other. This core connection between our spiritual nature, its intellectual foundation, and the values derived from the principles of that foundation, is central to the outlook of the Aga Khan – an outlook which informs the work of the Ismaili Imamatus. This book will explore that connection, and its underlying premises and expressions, contrasting what can be seen as their perennial and universal foundations with those of both materialistic modernism and hidebound tradition. It will also illustrate how, through the institutions of the Ismaili Imamatus, with their dual focus on fostering a cosmopolitan ethic of a common humanity and a compassionate ethic of human dignity, the Aga Khan aspires to an architecture of global convergence and, by his example, aims to inspire people to live ethical lives based on principles that respect their own and others' humanity and dignity.

The principles and values promoted by the Aga Khan and represented by the institutions of the Ismaili Imamatus reflect those

that lie at the heart of Muslim faith and ethics, and are a much-needed corrective to the distorted image of Islam today. In our troubled times, when the perception of Islam and its image are tarnished by the misdeeds of some, when questions are raised, particularly in the West, about whether this faith is compatible with ethical and civilised norms, and when it is a matter of public debate (often among influential shapers of opinion) whether Muslims can indeed live peaceably in the globalised world or should be banned from certain countries, the beliefs and achievements of the Ismaili Imam serve as a timely reminder of the essence of the faith of Islam and of its humanitarian values.

The Ismaili Muslims and the Aga Khan

To understand the work of the Aga Khan and the Ismaili Imamate he represents, a brief background is necessary. Prince Shah Karim al-Husseini, known as the fourth Aga Khan – an inherited title first granted to his ancestor Imam Hasan Ali Shah (1804–1881), by the Iranian Qajar ruler Fath Ali Shah (1797–1834) – is considered by the Ismaili community to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (c.570–632). A global citizen, equally at ease in the East and the West, he was born in Geneva in 1936, educated at Harvard, and, in 1957, became the 49th hereditary spiritual leader (or ‘Imam’) of the Shi‘i Imami Ismaili Muslims.² As we have seen, the Shia hold that the Prophet designated his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib (599–661), to be his successor as leader of the Muslim community, whereas the majority Sunni branch holds that the Prophet nominated no successor, and that the spiritual and moral authority belonged instead to those learned in matters of religious law. On the death of Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq, however, in 765, division within the Shia led to the formation of various sub-groups, each claiming different lines of succession from the Prophet Muhammad. The majority group came to be known as

the Ithna'ashari, or Twelver, Shia; this group formally terminated with the disappearance or occultation of their twelfth Imam. Among the Ismailis, the Nizari Ismaili branch headed by the Aga Khan is the only group characterised by having a *living* Imam (or, as the Ismailis refer to him, '*Hazar* Imam').

The Ismailis enjoy a strong intellectual heritage and social ethic based on principles emphasising knowledge as an aspect of faith. This dimension of their heritage is exemplified by the founding, in the 10th century, of al-Azhar University (one of the oldest in the world) and, in the early 11th century, of the Dar al-'Ilm (House of Knowledge) by the Fatimids in Egypt, a Shi'i Ismaili dynasty that established the first Shi'i caliphate in north Africa in the early 10th century. The Ismailis are also known for their strong pluralistic heritage, exemplified by the Fatimid state's historic tolerance of different faiths and cultures, and by the diversity of Ismaili Muslim communities, or *jamats*, today.

The extent of the worldwide Ismaili population is not known with certainty: estimates range widely from a few million to some 15 million. The figures vary in part because the populations are in diaspora, some are culturally in flux, and many are located in troubled regions of the world where it has been difficult for them to practise their faith openly and to 'stand up and be counted'. Ismailis are located in some 35 countries, stretching from the regions of South and Central Asia (notably in India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and western China) through the Middle East (with significant populations in Iran and strife-torn Syria) and Africa (notably the largely mercantile Khoja communities of East and South Africa, whose ancestors emigrated from India) to those of the Western world (in particular, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, where many of the Khojas, driven from their homes in Africa or Asia by political strife, or drawn by economic opportunity, resettled). Ismailis embrace numerous distinctive ethno-geographic and linguistic traditions, namely, Arab, Iranian, Central Asian, Chinese and South Asian,

including, in their recent history, those of European and North American cultures. They are therefore a diverse, transnational community, representing a pluralism of traditions, and are, in the words of their Imam, 'first and foremost, active and loyal citizens of the countries where they live, though in outlook they transcend the divisions of North and South, East and West'.³ This outlook is particularly relevant to their pluralist ethic.

The place of the Ismailis within the theological pluralism of the Muslim community is best summarised by their Imam's statement to the International Islamic Conference held in Amman in July 2005:

Our historic adherence is to the Ja'fari *madhhab* and other *madhahib* of close affinity, and it continues, under the leadership of the hereditary Ismaili Imam of the time. This adherence is in harmony also with our acceptance of Sufi principles of personal search and balance between the *zahir* and the spirit or the intellect which the *zahir* signifies.⁴

The Ja'fari school of jurisprudence followed by many Shi'i communities derives from the Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (702–765), whose intellectual tradition can be traced back to Imam Ali, who was not only the first Shi'i Imam but also, for the Sunnis, one of the four 'Rightly Guided' caliphs.⁵ The teachings of both Imams Ali and Ja'far are central to an esoteric dimension of Islam known as Sufism, and almost all Sufi schools or *tariqas* are derived from the direct spiritual lineage or influence of these two Imams.⁶ The Ja'fari school in particular emphasises metaphysical principles (*usul al-din*) that are rooted in 'the spirit or the intellect' of the inward (*batini*) reality which the outer (*zahiri*) reality signifies. This approach, based on the interweaving of spirit and matter is, as we shall see, foundational to the Ismaili perspective on modernity, which it views not through the time-bound lens of contingent reality but through the timeless prism of a concept of the Absolute (that is, God).

The Role of the Ismaili Imam

As Imam of the Ismailis, the Aga Khan is both their spiritual and temporal leader. His dual role, which is to secure the spiritual and material well-being of the *jamat*, derives from Islam's integrated view of life. As he has often noted, Islam rejects the Augustinian division between the spiritual and the temporal and its misgivings about the material realm, instead maintaining a view that seeks to balance spirit and matter, faith (*din*) and the world (*dunya*). Consequently, Islam holds that one cannot legitimately forsake the one for the other but must strive instead to maintain a proper balance between the two. In the words of the Ismaili Imam, 'man must not shy away from the material endeavour in the name of his faith.'⁷ It is for this reason that Islam is said to be a 'way of life', a way of bringing one's faith into the world by living its ethics.

Reflecting this integrated philosophy, his role is 'to interpret and integrate the faith with worldly life' within the humanistic ethos of Islam.⁸ He has summarised this as follows:

In the Muslim ethical tradition, which links spirit and matter, the Imam not only leads in the interpretation of the faith, but also in the effort to improve the quality of life of his community, and of the wider societies within which it lives; for a guiding principle of the Imamatus's institutions is to replace walls which divide with bridges that unite.⁹

The balancing of faith and life through ethics is a fundamental feature of the Ismaili Imam's effort to improve the quality of life, and it ranges from the quest for equilibrium to improve individual lives to harmonising social relationships among diverse communities.

The Imam's authority over his own followers is expressed by their spiritual allegiance (*ba'ya*) to him; they acknowledge his absolute interpretive authority (an intellectual-moral authority,

or *ta'lim*, and an exegetical–hermeneutical authority, or *ta'wil*) to define the fundamental principles of Islam and to adjust its traditions to conform to those principles according to the changing needs of the times.¹⁰ There is an inherent adaptability built into this arrangement whereby the unchanging essence of this faith, whose doctrinal orthodoxy is protected by the Imam, is reflected in forms of practice modified to suit the changing contexts and needs of the *jamat*. The Quran provides the principal-ethical framework that the Imam of the Time interprets to guide the faithful in the practice of their faith through the changing conditions of the world. This adaptability is vital to the Ismaili communities' survival. In the words of Prince Karim's grandfather, Aga Khan III, 'Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook'.¹¹

The faith-based principles interpreted by the Imam are used to preserve the moral fabric of the *jamat* and to guide them in the modern world according to the following criteria:

[T]he 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.¹²

The criteria for these safeguards are derived from a holistic conception of reality which is central to the Muslim concept of *tawhid* or metaphysical oneness (discussed in Chapter 2). Within the changing contexts of modernity, the Ismaili Imam is the protector of the community's moral standards, permitting change only to the extent that the influences and demands of the modern world are not in conflict with the principles and values expressed by the ethic of Islam. He notes

[I]f my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue which is whether 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.¹³

The bounds of what is permissible – of individual freedom – are, in other words, metaphysically defined, determined by a faith-based ethics in which, as we shall see, the intellect is guided by the principles of its faith. The Ismaili Imam's interpretive authority in respect of these principles is regarded by Ismailis as absolute. He functions, therefore, in the capacity of a modern-day 'philosopher-king',¹⁴ interpreting and guarding the principles and values of Ismailism, and eschewing 'leadership by referendum'.¹⁵ In other words, for Ismailis, fundamental truth (that is, reality seen in terms of metaphysical oneness and its corollaries), is not simply a matter of consensus, and its moral imperatives cannot be reduced to 'a grammar of assent'.

Within this scheme of metaphysically based principles and their ethical imperatives, the Ismaili Imam allows and promotes the role of personal search, both intellectual and contemplative, to enhance spiritual growth. As he has noted, echoing his Amman statement about 'Sufi principles of personal search', 'Every individual is expected to use his intellect, his knowledge, to help him understand his faith.'¹⁶ This expectation is an aspect of the individual's responsible use of freedom, a theme we will discuss later. It also underlines the importance of the intellect, which is to be used in the service of faith, emphasising that knowledge has an ethical dimension.

At the same time, the Aga Khan is careful not to undermine 'the secular freedom of the community'.¹⁷ He notes, 'I have been careful not to let the practice of the faith in any way affect or impede the secular rights of the community.'¹⁸ In temporal matters, therefore, he consults widely with his *jamat*, while guiding them to improve the quality of life, always within the principles and ethics of faith. This ethical premise is reflected in the work of the Ismaili Imamatus and its network of agencies,

known as the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which serves not only the *jamat* but the wider communities in which they live, as the Aga Khan has often noted, for example in the following statement:

In all interpretations of Islam, Imams are required to lead not only in interpreting the faith but also in improving the quality of life for the people who refer to them. This ethical premise is the foundation of the Aga Khan Development Network, which has long been serving the developing world without regard to ethnicity, gender or race.¹⁹

The Ismaili Imam

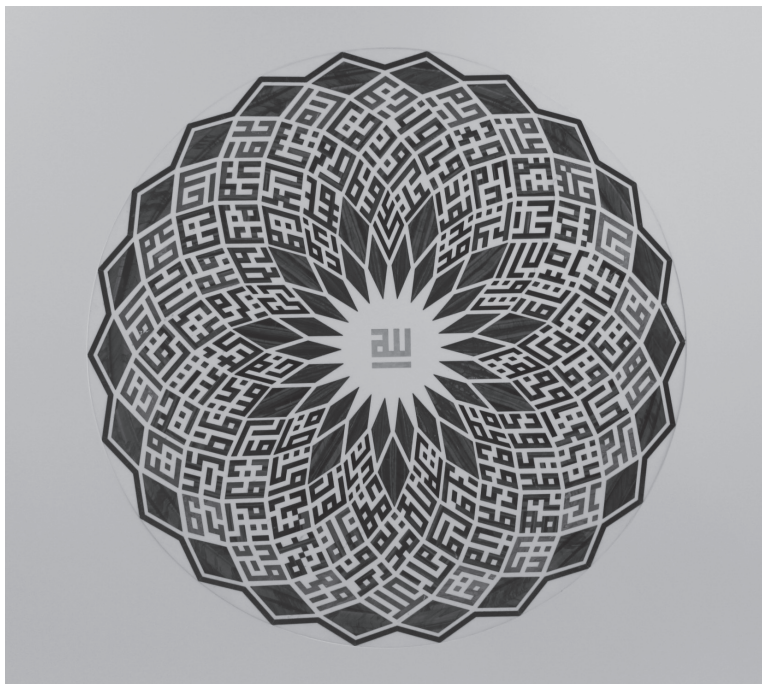
The term ‘Ismaili Imam’ historically refers to the spiritual and temporal leadership of the succession of Ismaili Imams considered by Ismailis to be directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad. More recently, the term has also come to designate the supranational legal entity representing the Ismaili Imam of the time. The Imam has a legal status and function that is recognised by several sovereign states under international law, notably by Portugal, where the Imam established its seat in 2015 by a treaty which acknowledged its provenance of over 1,400 years, and its continuity ‘since the time of the Prophet’,²⁰ and by Canada, where it has established a formal ambassadorial presence, known as the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam.

The Imam, operating through its institutional arm, the AKDN (whose work we discuss in greater detail later, particularly in Chapter 9), plays a vital role in bridging divisions through initiatives aimed at promoting cultural harmony and improving the quality of human life. In general, it tries to bridge North–South divisions of poverty and inequity through programmes that focus on socio-economic development, primarily in the fields of housing, health and education, and to bridge East–West divisions

through programmes of cultural education and the promotion of pluralism aimed at fostering harmony between and among the Muslim world and the West. In bridging these divisions, particularly those between the developing and developed worlds, the Imamatus addresses both components of the ethics of Islam, namely, social justice and communal harmony, dignity and integrity, which are interrelated, and thereby actively promotes global convergence. The Aga Khan has acknowledged this particular role of the Imamatus:

Through the work of its various institutions, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has always attempted to act as a connector between 'East' and 'West' in terms of its cultural initiatives, and between 'North' and 'South', as far as social and economic development projects are involved.²¹

The work of the Imamatus institutions, and the ethos of the Ismaili community, springs from a position articulated by the Ismaili Imam that is based on a metaphysical world view, which, as we shall see, is central to Islam. As ethics make up an integral part of Islam, it follows that for Muslims ethics are a corollary to the metaphysical perspective which defines all religious faith. We will now examine in more detail the ethical foundations and principles which govern the Aga Khan's thoughts and activities.



The 99 names of Allah medallion at The Ismaili Centre, Toronto, Canada.
Designed by Minaz Nanji.

Ethical Foundations

Tawhid: The Oneness Underlying Reality

‘Islam does not deal in dichotomies but is an all-encompassing unity.’¹ This conception of reality that links spirit to matter is fundamental to Islam. It is the basis of the Ismaili Imam’s holistic understanding of a humanity bound by values rooted in a common spiritual patrimony. The oneness of reality, its intrinsic harmony and interconnectedness, is, in his view, the criterion of the ethical bond and moral fabric of society. Explaining this, the Aga Khan has stated:

Islam is all-encompassing in the direction which it gives to man’s life ... Islam, therefore, guides man not only in his spiritual relationship with God, it also guides man in his relationship with his fellow men and his relationship with the material world around him.²

These two relationships – the vertical relationship of human beings with the Absolute, or God, and their horizontal relationship with each other and all creation – are, he argues, interlinked. Human beings have responsibilities towards all creatures by virtue of their responsibilities to God. Because Muslims believe in ‘an all-encompassing unity of man and nature’, they see ‘the

whole world, whether it be the earth, sea or air, or the living creatures that inhabit them, [as] an expression of God's creation',³ entailing human responsibility to the natural world. Ethical conduct is therefore regarded as an expression of one's integrity, of being true to the common spiritual patrimony. It affirms two fundamental aspects of Muslim faith, as noted by the Ismaili Imam: 'the limitlessness of God's power and the brotherhood of man'.⁴ The former, expressing the principle of metaphysical oneness, informs the latter, expressing the ethos of communal oneness.

The metaphysical foundation for the Aga Khan's world view, then, is the Muslim belief in the principle of the intrinsic oneness (*tawhid*) of reality. It is a principle common to all faith traditions and is attested to by Muslims in their creed, known as the *shahada*, which affirms that, in essence, reality is one. The first part of the *shahada*, the Muslim confession of faith (*la 'ilaha 'illa Allah*: 'There is no god [or reality] but God [the Absolute Reality]') acknowledges that there is an absolute, all-encompassing ground of reality, which can be neither limited to the conditions of existence nor excluded from it. Its essence is therefore mysterious and transcendent – in Quranic terms, *naught is like unto Him* (Q 42:11). Yet its manifestation is also intimate and immanent – it is both *nearer* [to us] ... *than* [our] *jugular vein* (Q 50:16) and omnipresent as *the Face of God* (Q 2:115). This principle of integral oneness – which the Ismaili Imam has described as 'the overwhelming unity of Islamic life which sees no division between body and spirit, between this world and the next'⁵ – is the basis of the Ismaili ethos. The Aga Khan has repeatedly affirmed this principle of unity, stating that 'a wide, all-embracing, vision of the brotherhood of man and the unity of God is among the most fundamental of the faith's teaching'.⁶ There are several corollaries or implications of this principle, of which we will mention five.

Corollaries of Metaphysical Oneness

(1) *Revelation and Intellection*

The first corollary relates to the concepts of revelation and intellection. Because reality transcends various levels of existence, it must be revealed. Simply stated, the greater must reveal itself to the lesser.⁷ By the same token, because reality is immanent, it must be capable of being apprehended. Revelation therefore has a counterpart in intellection, the former being, as it were, a transmitter of 'signs', and the latter being, as it were, a receptor.

In Islam, these two aspects – revelation and intellection – are scripturally affirmed. God, in His all-encompassing Mercy (Q 6:12, 7:156), reveals himself to humanity through a plurality of revelations: firstly, through the scriptural messages of diverse messengers sent to humanity throughout history (Q 10:47), culminating in the confirmatory revelation of the Quran; secondly, through the ever-renewing theophany in the utmost horizons of existence (Q 41:53); and, thirdly, in our innermost self (Q 41:53), the eternal soul or spirit which, in its primordial nature, or *fitra* (Q 30:30), is, as it were, a fragment of the Absolute. The principle of revelation is affirmed within the second half of the *shahada* (*Muhammad al-rasul Allah*; 'Muhammad is God's messenger'), which not only indicates the particular divine revelation for Muslims through their Prophet, but acknowledges the metaphysical principle of revelation, as such, for humankind.

In Ismaili belief, the revealed scriptures and ever-renewing theophany are the *ayat*, or outward 'signs', of reality. Thus the Quran describes itself as both *a proof* and *a clear light* (Q 4:174), and the fact that its verses are described as 'signs' implies the human potential of literacy – both spiritual and ethical literacy. In accord with the adage 'Truth is within

ourselves,'⁸ Islam recognises that, through intellection, the spirit can apprehend reality, can reflect on its signs within the scripture and theophany, and also within the soul, and thereby can apprehend the effulgence that reflects its source – just as the eye, while not itself luminous, can intuit its own existence through the reflexive presence of light in the organ of sight and, by opening an eyelid, can become 'enlightened' by the very grace of seeing. Such awareness of intellectual receptivity – and therefore of the participatory sense of awareness that is necessary for empathy – has ethical consequences, as we shall see below.

(2) Faith and Intellect

The second corollary relates to faith and intellect as modes of knowledge, which are implied by revelation and intellection. For Islam, as well as other religions, faith is regarded as the intelligence that intuits the intimate presence of mystery; it is an intrinsic intellectual and aristocratic virtue because it opens the faculty of knowing, the intellect, receptively to its transcendent source, and thereby enables it to govern the lower faculties of the psyche and the senses.⁹ Transcendence implies and entails faith, both in the transcendent source, the all-encompassing and foundational reality that is greater than us, and in the mediating authority of the messenger-guide by whom that reality is affirmed and through whom revelation is interpreted. For the Ismailis, the latter is, outwardly, the Prophet Muhammad – and his succeeding Imams as guardians of the prophetic legacy – and, inwardly, the supra-rational intellect; both are to be understood as aspects of the same mediating Light, and with the proviso that the intellect must be tethered to the guidance and authority of the logos or spirit (represented by the Imams) lest it stray through its egoic propensities. Humility and the balancing of human effort and receptivity to grace in acquiring knowledge

are therefore prerequisites of intellection. Thus, the Aga Khan has stated:

In Islamic belief, knowledge is twofold. There is that revealed through the Holy Prophet and that which man discovers by virtue of his own intellect. Nor do these two involve any contradiction, provided man remembers that his own mind is itself the creation of God. Without this humility, no balance is possible. With it, there are no barriers.¹⁰

The intellect is seen as the cognitive faculty of the heart or spirit, which the English poet Robert Browning has described as 'an inmost centre in us all/Where truth abides in fullness'.¹¹ Truth – the transcendent vision of the heart or the wisdom of love – is believed to be accessible by grace, spiritual discipline and guidance. The Ismaili Imam's role in this regard is that of a spiritual guide. As the possessor of intellectual and moral authority for Ismailis, he is regarded as the interpreter of the scriptural principles, the traditions they embody and of their application to the contingent circumstances of the time. As guardian of the faith, 'it is the Imam who interprets, in accordance with his time, and that is his absolute prerogative'.¹²

The Aga Khan's guidance finds its counterpart in the receptivity of the higher intellect that his *murids*, or followers, possess, which is therefore understood to be a facet of their faith. Thus, for the Ismailis – as indeed for the wider Muslim world or other faith communities – the intellect does not legitimately operate independently of the imperatives of faith or outside its protective bounds. For Muslims, the ultimate aim of knowledge is to better understand the reality of the Creator and His creation, and concomitantly to better serve Him through reverencing the sacred and by caring for all creatures.¹³ Underlining these aspects of the relationship between faith and the higher intellect (which, according to Ismaili philosophy, has access to the Truth through

grace, innate within the logos and expressed through the Imam's guidance), Prince Karim has stated:

The relationship between the intellect of man and faith has always been of fundamental importance to Muslims ... The Divine Intellect *'aql-i kul*, both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dedicated by the faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given and that he should know himself. It is the light of intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal and developing that intellect requires free enquiry. The man of faith who fails to pursue intellectual search is likely to have only a limited comprehension of Allah's creation. Indeed, it is man's intellect that enables him to expand his vision of that creation.¹⁴

Thus, while 'Islam is a faith of reason',¹⁵ in the Shi'i interpretation 'the intellect is seen as a facet of faith, in the service of faith.'¹⁶ Often likened to light, the intellect is both a radiating and embracing presence, sanctifying what it illumines through the very act of perceiving it – for what it perceives is the spirit, the ground of being. This light-filled mode of perceiving is a way of knowing that connects 'knowing' to 'being', melding object and subject participatively, so that to know is also to love. Speaking of the role of the intellect's visionary knowledge and of the equation of truth and divine presence, the Aga Khan has recounted a dialogue between the great Persian philosopher Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna (d. 1037), and the Persian Sufi mystic Abu Said Abu'l-Khayr (d. 1049): 'Ibn Sina remarked, "Whatever I know, he sees." To which Abu Said replied, "Whatever I see, he knows"'.¹⁷

The Imam was emphasising here that the intellect possesses a visionary faculty, connecting 'knowing' to 'seeing' – and ultimately to the ground of reality in which, in biblical terms, 'we

live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). This is a crucial feature that distinguishes 'visionary knowing' from 'discursive knowing' because, unlike the latter, the former perceives wholeness – a feature that is vital to a participatory discernment of the binding plenitude and amplitude of reality, to the 'principle of inclusiveness' and to the role of empathy in pluralism, matters which we discuss later.

(3) *Common Spiritual Patrimony*

The third corollary is the concept of a common spiritual patrimony. Echoing the prophetic tradition that 'Mankind is the family of God',¹⁸ the Aga Khan has cited the following verse from the Quran about the intrinsic unity of the entire human race:

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from the twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. (Q 4:1)

Referring to this as a verse which has been central to his life, and which he included in his Golden Jubilee emblem, the Imam has stated:

This remarkable verse speaks both of the inherent diversity of mankind – the 'multitude' – and of the unity of mankind, the 'single soul created by a single Creator' – a spiritual legacy which distinguishes the human race from all other forms of life.¹⁹

This 'beautiful expression about the unity of our human race, born indeed from a single soul' invites human beings to use their intellects to envision reality in its totality – to perceive its wholeness.²⁰ The notion of the inner search for wholeness, associated with the quest for the transcendent soul, is central to the esotericism that is emphasised in Ismaili theosophy and in its

Sufi leanings. An illustration is found in the following quatrain by the 13th-century Sufi Jalaluddin Rumi, who writes:

There is a soul within your soul. Seek that soul.
 There is a gem within the mountain of your body. Seek that mine.
 O sufi traveller! If that is what you seek,
 Don't seek outside. Seek it from yourself!²¹

Our intrinsic unity or wholeness is the basis of the universal view expressed in the Delphic maxim, 'Know thyself' (*gnothi seauton*) or the Sufi adage, 'Whosoever knows himself, knows his Lord' (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbahu*). The idea of wholeness is, in this sense, related to that of 'holiness', of sacredness, with its implications of underlying oneness, participatory interrelatedness and, in ethical terms, of inclusivity and compassionate equity. It also contains the notion of a common origination, an affirmation of God as humanity's origin and (implicitly) its locus of return – and therefore the one to whom humanity is accountable.²²

The Quranic verse's acknowledgement that transcendent unity embraces diversity is central to the humanistic and pluralistic ethos of the Ismaili Imam. It expresses the idea that all souls are intrinsically connected, that they are translations of each other's lives, and that they share a common responsibility to care for each other as members of a single family²³ and to account for their conduct. The depiction of the many as aspects of the one reality expresses the related principle of inclusiveness, which is the foundation of Prince Karim's cosmopolitan ethic, in which (as we shall see) universality expresses unity, not uniformity.

(4) *Integral Nature*

A fourth corollary, and a related facet of the spiritual unity of humanity, is the idea of the integral nature of man. As reality

is metaphysically one, so humankind partakes of its nature through the eternal soul – the ‘single soul’ or spirit which constitutes humanity’s primordial norm, its criterion of objectivity, and whose qualitative substance is the human being’s intrinsic nature, or *fitra*. This God-given nature is also the basis of man’s inherent dignity or self-worth. The *fitra* establishes the nature of humanity as ‘humane’ and also of the human intellect as capable of ‘objectivity’, that is, capable of accessing a normative spiritual centre, being the unifying vantage of the ‘single soul’ that intellectually perceives wholeness and order. At its core, therefore, humanity is seen to share a spiritual nature and the same foundational intellect, rooted in transcendent norms.

The notion of a primordial or intrinsic human nature is associated with the idea of the ‘inner man’ (which is implicit in the concept of the esoteric nature of reality that is an important feature of the Shi’i Ismaili faith).²⁴ To understand its ethical implications, the ‘outer man’ (governed by the lower faculties and appetites) must submit to the ‘inner man’ (governed by the higher intellect and its compliant will). In other words, Ismailis believe that human beings must discover what is inherent in their inner nature in order to govern their outer behaviour. Man must be in balance with nature and with the divine order. Mere outer change is not true reform; only inner reformation is. It is only through such reformation, and the participatory and empathetic sensibility which is encoded within human nature, that human beings can align themselves with the transcendent order that binds them to one another.

(5) Ethics as the Expression of Faith

The fifth corollary of all-encompassing unity is the concept of ethics as the expression of faith. From a religious perspective, ethics can be seen as expressing the human capability for

self-transcendence, the ability of the 'outer man' to integrate with the 'inner man'. In the Muslim ethical tradition, which bridges faith and the world (*din wa dunya*), humans are expected to live integrated lives, that is to say, to integrate outer conduct with inner being. One is expected to conform to the divine order that one's intellect can perceive. This means that human beings must live ethically, in accordance with principles that promote integrity and human dignity, and with a conscience which reflects the ethics of harmony, equity, generosity and responsible stewardship according to God's entrustment of creation to humanity (this refers to the Quranic concept of *amana*, Q 33:72).²⁵ In other words, ethics entail subordinating human self-interest (though not individuality, as we will see) to the *fitra* or God-given nature of human beings.

The idea of a profound connection between creation and its moral expression as 'good character' is also expressed in the sacred language of the Quran. The Arabic noun for the creative process is *khalq*, which in Islam is a term properly attributed to God alone as the author of creation. The verb *khalaqa* contains the meaning of the continual act of harmonious fashioning – an activity whose product is creation itself. According to Islamic theology, as *imago dei* (the divine image), man is expected to shape his conduct in a way that conforms to God's harmonious fashioning of his true nature. 'Virtue' is perfection of the *vir* (Latin for 'man'). Thus, in Sufi theosophy, the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*)²⁶ is the prototypical creation (*al-khalq*) of the Creator (*al-khaliq*), and the essence of his moral character is denoted by the cognate term, *akhlaq*, or creative virtues. In religious terms therefore, the essence of humane conduct is creative virtue or the continual conforming of man to his primordial nature. Such virtue is not moralism or moralistic righteousness. Creative virtue lies beyond 'a moral algebra' and beyond formalistic codes. This is of significance in understanding the concept of *shari'a*, which, as we will observe, is for

the Aga Khan better understood as informing spiritual principles than as the strictures of a code.²⁷ As the very foundation of Muslim ethics, creative virtue entails (in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s definition of Sufism) ‘assuming the character traits of God’ through the continual process of harmonious fashioning of conduct.²⁸ This is one way of understanding the Quranic exhortation to mankind to *vie with one another in good deeds* (Q 2:148). Good deeds are seen as incumbent upon humans as the outer expression of inner being – so that our endowed qualities and attributes are deployed in conformity with our primordial nature, recognising our common spiritual patrimony and accountability to God.

Essential to this view is that ethical behaviour and integrity are corollaries of faith. Faith precedes ethics precisely because it is required to ground the ‘outer man’ in the ‘inner man’ – in the spirit – and to render ethical norms beyond the contingencies of relativism (fashions, preferences, expediencies or the variable dictates of secular moralism). For Muslims, Islam is said to be a ‘way of life’ because integrity necessitates that one must live the ethics of one’s faith. Thus, as the Aga Khan has noted, ‘the ethic of whatever we do, see and hear, and the quality of our social interactions, resonate on our faith and bear on our spiritual lives.’²⁹ Accordingly, he avers, ‘Faith should deepen our concern for improving the quality of human life in all of its dimensions’,³⁰ so that ‘spirituality should not become a way of escaping from the world but rather a way of more actively engaging in it.’³¹

The Ethical Imperatives

Following this way of thinking, these principles give rise to two ethical imperatives: harmony and equity – or, stated differently, integrity and dignity – which the Ismaili Imam has referred to as ‘the Quranic ethic of a common humanity and the dignity

of all mankind.³² Moral integrity and moral dignity are, in the argument of this book, conjoint aspects of a view of human nature that is central to the Quran and to the ethos advocated by the Aga Khan.

The first of these imperatives, 'the ethic of a common humanity', expresses the requirement to live an integrated life, respectful of the unity underlying life's diversity, and is represented by Prince Karim's focus on communal unity, aimed at bridging cultural and ideological differences through pluralistic dialogue and engagement. It derives from his integrated philosophy which stresses the values of harmony (unity and equilibrium) and integrity (truth and a sense of the sacred). The second of these imperatives, 'the ethic of human dignity', expresses the requirement to live with compassion, generosity and empathy, caring for the world entrusted to us and improving the quality of life for all, and is represented by the Imam's focus on developmental work, aimed at social justice and at improving the quality of life for all. It is driven by a strong sense of social conscience and responsible stewardship, reflecting the underlying value of human dignity, and thereby of one's responsibility to the Other. These are not mere ideological precepts but are practical corollaries of metaphysical oneness, and, together, they constitute an integral living principle, an ethos. As we will explore in this book, this ethos is reflected in the work of the Ismaili Imam, particularly through the AKDN.

When viewed from a religious standpoint, these two ethical imperatives cohere as aspects of the 'divine order'. Collectively and individually, they express the quality of embracing compassion – rendered in Arabic by the term *Rahman*, a scriptural term which Muslims regard as being on par with the name 'Allah'. Thus the Quran enjoins the Prophet to '*Call upon God ("Allah"), or call upon the Compassionate ("Rahman")*'. *Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names'*

(Q 17:110). This preeminent divine quality expresses the quintessence of being 'human'. Man, as *imago dei*, is truly human insofar as he lives up to his divine potential of perfectibility through realising his spiritual nature. Therefore, compassion is associated with the innermost centre, the 'core' or 'heart' (Fr. 'coeur'), of man, and it is also the impelling force of the two ethical imperatives.

The notion of intrinsic oneness (harmony) impels the sense of the proper order of things (equity). The two imperatives are therefore interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They respond to the two central questions of human existence: the question of identity (Who am I? What is the world? What is real?) and the question of purpose (Why am I here? How should I live?). Founded on compassionate oneness, they are drivers of hope, an especially important factor in an increasingly globalised world that mandates human coexistence and yet is riven by conflict. They also reflect the twin aims of the first Shi'i Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, whose entire mission was founded on promoting truth (expressed as harmony and integrity) and justice (expressed as equity and dignity).³³ Truth and justice lie at the heart of Muslim ethics, originating from the time of the Prophet and continuing in the Ismaili tradition, notably through the teachings of Imams Ali and Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Fatimid jurist Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 974), the group of epistolary philosophers known as the Ikhwan al-Safa' ('Brethren of Purity', who flourished between the eighth and tenth centuries), and of several other Ismaili philosophers, *pirs* (saintly guides) and *da'is* (missionaries acting on the authority of the Ismaili Imams) of the Ismaili mission (*da'wa*). In all of their teachings, the humanistic ethics of harmony and equity, and of integrity and dignity, reflect the underlying notion of a common humanity as an aspect of intrinsic oneness.

Specific Ethical Norms

With this backdrop of the relationship between principles and values, we will cite a few examples of specific ethical norms promoted by the Ismaili Imam, which incorporate the two ethical imperatives.

The Ethic of Connectivity

In Islam as in many other faiths, communal bonding is a functional aspect of the ethic of a common humanity. It is built on the capacity of human beings to empathise with the Other, to see life in participatory terms, relationally and dialogically, so that a particular life is not viewed in isolation but becomes a translation of life in general, of a shared human condition. One discovers who one is by transcending oneself, through a relationship with the Other. Selfhood, in its highest lived dimension, is participatory and expresses itself not in individualism but in the realisation of community as an amplification of the self. We ennoble ourselves by our commitment to serve one another. It is only by intuiting that the space one inhabits is an aspect of a transcendent wholeness and is therefore sacred, that it is filled with an abiding and embracing presence that permeates and surrounds the individual and to which he or she is mysteriously connected, that the individual can intimately share that space with another, for the Other too is believed to rest in that very same presence – the matrix of all relationships.

According to Islam, human connectivity is rooted in the humility of recognising that each is bound to the Other by a common spiritual patrimony and by the shared human condition – features that transcend outer differences. It is through understanding one's limitations and through valuing the gift of diversity as an aspect of theophany that

each human being can discover universal connections. In the words of the Aga Khan:

This ethic of connectivity with others has deep spiritual roots – in Islam as for other faiths. It stems ultimately from humankind's sense of humility in the presence of the Divine. In this light, human diversity itself is seen as a gift of Allah, cultural differences are embraced as a blessing, and different interpretations of faith are seen as a mercy, one that nourishes the Ummah's vast identity and its constructive interface with society at large.³⁴

This ethic is common to all faiths, and is expressed, for instance, in the Christian ethic of love of one's neighbour, which is a corollary of the love of God.³⁵ Referring to the scriptural foundation for this ethic in Islam – *God created male and female and made you into communities and tribes, so that you may know one another* (Q 49:13) – the Imam has stated: 'It is our differences that both define us and connect us.'³⁶ The nature of this connective bond is, in this view, integral to being human. Affirming that unity underlies diversity; it constitutes the very foundation of community, forming the link between faith and the pluralistic fellowship that is vital to community.

The Ethic of Exploration and Interconnectedness

Related to the ethic of connectivity, the ethic of exploration and interconnectedness exhorts humanity to expand its knowledge in order to converge communally and for the common good, in recognition of the fact that community and communal values are the most ennobling expressions of self-knowledge. Thus, Prince Karim has stated

This ethic of exploration and interconnectedness is one that is deeply shared by the Ismaili community. It is an ethic, in fact, that is firmly rooted in our faith – a value system which grows from deeply

spiritual roots ... It sees the desire to explore and connect as a way to learn and grow, not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge. This ethic emanates ultimately from a relationship to the Divine which inspires a deep sense of personal humility and a relationship to humankind which is infused with a spirit of generous service and mutual respect.³⁷

The ethical imperative of connectivity requires a foundation in spiritual literacy, a sense of the sacred. Significantly, the first words believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad included the command to 'read' or 'recite' (*iqra* is a cognate of the term *Qur'an*). In other words, man was exhorted to be spiritually literate and to perceive the sacredness of creation through its signs. The Quran repeatedly cautions man against *shirk*, or the 'covering up' of underlying reality,³⁸ and of *ghafla*, or heedlessness of God. Its message – exemplified in the first command to the Prophet to 'read' the signs of God – stresses the need for spiritual awareness as an antidote to materialistic preoccupations.

The Quran repeatedly invites humanity to read and reflect on the signs of God (Q 45:1–6; 45:13; and especially in 55:1–30, with its beautiful refrain) and to embrace the diversity of theophany within creation *that you may come to know one another* (Q 49:13). In the Light verse (Q 24:35), God is likened to *the light [nur] of the heavens and the earth*. One reading of this passage intimates that spiritual knowledge (*'ilm*) can itself be likened to light. Furthermore, in religious terms, such a light can illuminate and soften the heart, enlivening the intelligence with love, a participatory sense of intimacy and interconnectedness. Faith is seen here as a progression of spiritual knowledge, proceeding from apprehension to realisation through various stages described in the Quran: from mental understanding (*'ilm al-yaqin*; Q 102:5) to witnessing (*'ayn al-yaqin*; Q 102:7) to spiritual realisation

(*haqq al-yaqin*; Q 56:95). What is ultimately realised is the certainty of the ground of one's being, reflected in the community of creation, *al-umma wahida*. This integral realisation of the sacred foundations of life, and the ethical responsibilities it entails, is central to the ethos of Islam. Significantly, the Arabic term for 'community', *umma*, derives from the root *umm*, denoting 'mother'. Humankind, as the etymology of *al-umma* suggests, is the offspring of a single mother – the divine substance. In Islam, humans, it is thus believed, share not only the same 'Adamic patrimony' (Adam being the prototypical man, mirroring the *fitra* or primordial norm) but also the same matrix (being also offspring from the same womb). Their kinship is further confirmed by the scriptural affirmation that their creation was from a 'single soul', and that mankind was originally one community (Q 2:213).

To think in terms of religious ethics, this interconnectedness can be seen as rooted in the integrity that connects faith and knowledge. As such, it implies a spiritual responsibility to care for the Other as one cares for oneself. By caring for and serving creation, one is using the individually endowed gifts of God in the service of God's creatures and all that is sacred in life. This is the basis of both individual and social obligations. The individual exists in relationship with the Other and is an aspect of the communal, reflecting the divine order, thereby linking faith to the world and to the knowledge and responsibility that are intrinsic to human nature. As the Imam has observed:

World and faith are inseparable in Islam. Faith and learning are also profoundly interconnected. The Holy Quran sees the discovery of knowledge as a spiritual responsibility, enabling us to better understand and more ably serve God's creation. Our traditional teachings remind us of our individual obligation to

seek knowledge unto the ends of the Earth – and of our social obligation to honour and nurture the full potential of every human life.³⁹

The stress on nurturing the full human potential, emphasising the importance of human individuality in Islam, is a point that will be important to bear in mind when we discuss the Aga Khan's critique of transgressive individualism. The 'social obligation' referred to here is therefore clearly rooted in a respect for human dignity and the social conscience this implies, thereby envisioning the individual within a larger context, of a social bonding that includes individuality without eradicating it – mirroring the metaphysical picture of reality as microcosm and macrocosm, one self or spirit present in all.⁴⁰

The Ethic of Respect for Human Dignity

'The ethics that uphold the dignity of man as the noblest of creation' is a key feature of Islam's appreciation of human value.⁴¹ It is precisely this view that is also manifested in the Ismaili Imam's focus on programmes that reflect the ethics of harmony and of equity. Respect for human dignity is an articulated goal of the Imam. This is shown, for example, in its treaty with Portugal, which promotes the 'defence of human dignity'.⁴² It is also a central theme promoted in the work of the AKDN. The Imam has noted, in the context of the ethical foundations of the AKDN, 'Enabling individuals to recover and maintain their dignity as befitting their status as Allah's greatest creation is one of the main reasons for charitable action'.⁴³ He underlines this message in his statement to the International Islamic Conference in Amman: 'ours is the heritage which premiates human dignity, transcending bounds of creed, ethnicity, language, gender or nationality'.⁴⁴

The term *karama* in Arabic is used to denote dignity, and it etymologically conveys the notion of being graced by

divine favour, linking it with the gift of life, of the primordial nature conferred on each human soul. Dignity therefore connotes self-worth, meaningfulness, having a purpose to one's existence. According to the Quran, each human being is owed respect because each is born of 'a single soul', is created in the fairest rectitude and best stature (Q 95:4), and possesses a noble nature (*fitra*) and intelligence that enable it to know God and the virtues that flow from this knowledge. As such, each human being is also endowed with a share of qualities and attributes, apportioned by their Creator in differing measures, which are a mark of their individual worth and purpose. This is the basis for according each person a respect and a 'dignity befitting their status as Allah's greatest creation.'⁴⁵ To be dignified requires one to be morally upright, to have the moral integrity that befits dignity, to use one's God-given potential for the greater good, and therefore to be honest, generous, kind and fair.

The Ethic of Service, Generosity and Cooperation

The social ethic of generous cooperation is related to the ethic of human dignity, of compassion and social conscience. Service expresses both compassion and social conscience, and this in turn is an aspect of the spiritual awareness of the soul's primordial nature (*fitra*).

Human beings are, according to Islam, endowed with a sense of God-consciousness (*taqwa*).⁴⁶ The soul's capacity to 'know its Maker' is implicit in its witnessing of the theophany, expressed in the divine Covenant of Alast⁴⁷ by which humanity, before it appeared in the world, undertook to witness the reality of the Lordship and Oneness of God, and which is the basis of the *shahada* (see Q 7:172). In Islamic thought, the soul's capacity for spiritual awareness is also implicit in its possession of a moral conscience, an innate sense of

right and wrong (Q 91:7–10). Both spiritual awareness and moral conscience are seen as attributes of the soul's primordial nature. God-consciousness is the foundation of moral consciousness, of which one aspect is social consciousness, with its corresponding social responsibilities – of service, generosity, cooperation, equity – which are all part of the fiduciary obligations of human life.

According to traditional religious thought, the social conscience which impels the social ethic in humanity is hard-wired in human nature. On this view, it is to be chosen or rejected, recalled or forgotten, activated or suppressed, as an exercise of human free will. This can be noted, for instance, in the etymology of the Arabic word for man, *insan*, which is a cognate of the words *uns* ('intimate communal fellowship') and *nisyan* ('forgetfulness'). According to the Latin maxim, 'duo sunt in homine' ('there are two [contending forces] in man'), the two contending elements within man are as follows: the first is his higher or primordial nature, or *fitra*, which is the basis of his God-consciousness (according to Alast and its implicit obligations of *shahada*) and of his moral consciousness (implicit in the principle of our common humanity and natural fellowship); and the second is his lower nature, or *nafs*, which is forgetful of the soul's higher calling and is drawn by its base appetites to the material world. Moral action requires human beings to engage in a conscious choice, to choose the summons of the higher soul over that of the lower soul. This does not involve a simplistic rejection of the material world in favour of the spiritual, but a balancing of *din* and *dunya*.⁴⁸ For the philosopher Miskawayh (d. 1030), the correlation of *insan* with *uns* – of humanity with intimacy, fellowship and community – was the very basis of his Muslim ethics. Similarly, the Aga Khan recently observed that 'Islam is a social faith',⁴⁹ stressing its communal foundations and attendant obligations. Fellowship is thus intrinsic to selfhood.

This relational self-awareness, with its concomitant ethical sensibility and social conscience, lies at the heart of the Islamic ethos. It is the motive force of the Ismaili mission of communal harmony and social justice.

The Imam has often remarked on the importance of a social conscience as ‘the ethical underpinning of the work of the Aga Khan Development Network’,⁵⁰ and of the Ismaili community itself.⁵¹ Accordingly, he has stressed the importance of cultivating individual knowledge, talents and prosperity in ways that benefit society as a whole, as, for instance, in the following remarks: ‘Our duty is to try to free people from poverty’,⁵² and ‘Wealth and power are not objectives in themselves, but are to be used in the service of others. Those whom life has marginalised are to be helped ... to free themselves from their constraints ...’⁵³ It is this expression of social conscience – fundamental to the Islamic faith, as the Quran repeatedly emphasises – that explains the Imamat’s focus on improving the quality of life for all human beings.⁵⁴

The Ethic of Responsible Stewardship

Trusteeship (*amana*) is one of the key themes in Islam and is reflected in the ethics of responsible stewardship, social equity and sustainable progress, all aspects of human dignity. These concepts inform the work of several institutions of the AKDN, notably of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. The Imam has frequently stressed the Quranic injunction ‘that mankind holds Allah’s creation of the world in trust, with the duty to leave the physical environment better than they found it’.⁵⁵ Thus he has spoken of ecological responsibility – for example, the need to ‘head off climate change’.⁵⁶ The ethic of stewardship is reflected in much of the Imamat’s work – such as the restoration of the al-Azhar Park

in Cairo (discussed later). As this book shows, the foundation for this ethic is the sense of the sacred and the responsibility of *amana* (Q 33:72), the obligation of humankind to care for creation. It emphasises the need for humanity to act in a way that reverences the sacred, and to honour its obligation to be a good steward of God's creation.



These precepts illustrate the Aga Khan's commitment to ethics as an integral aspect of the Islamic faith. We have seen how his vision and ethos derive from the unitary principle of *tawhid*, which is central to Islam. Societal values must reaffirm mankind's common humanity, and reflect the intrinsic oneness of reality and the interrelationship of faith and the world. Through faith in the integral foundation of reality, the intellect functions as a facet of faith, and knowledge is placed in its service, not as independent of it. Moral and social responsibility then are seen as expressions of faith and social conscience, requiring the ethical imperatives of respecting humanity's and creation's interconnectedness (the ethic of a common humanity), and of using knowledge to benefit the world through acts of service and generosity (the ethic of human dignity). The integral nature of created life is the foundation of these two ethical imperatives. Later in this book we will look at how these ethical imperatives are being practically implemented through the Imamatus institutions and the *jamat*.

Having briefly surveyed how faith and ethics are integrated in the Aga Khan's vision, we will now examine how this vision stands up against the challenges of the modern world. In Chapter 3 we will consider the tensions created by centrifugal forces of change in the interplay between tradition and

modernity, and how the discontinuities it threatens call for an overarching solution rooted in an understanding of the integral nature of reality; and in Chapter 4 we will address the challenges posed by modernism and its deleterious effects, including the fraying of society, and how the Ismaili Imamat is addressing these.



Astronomers studying the moon and the stars. Ottoman miniature, Turkey, 17th century.

Tradition and Modernity

The Limitless Mirror and the Shrinking Cage

We have seen how the Aga Khan's world view, which informs the work of the Ismaili Imam, is predicated on principles and values that are understood to be applicable for all time. The essential principles that govern faith are seen by Ismailis as unchanging, and their interpretation and application in the changing contexts of modernity as governed by the intellect, operating under the protective guidance of the Imam. In this way, the principles of faith transcend the contingencies of existence. According to this perspective, Islam is not frozen in time but remains adaptable through changing times.

Metaphysically speaking, faith looks upon the periphery of the unfolding world from a perspective of eternity. For the religious, faith is, as it were, a means of accessing an immutable centre standing beyond time and space. It provides (like spokes connecting to a hub) a centring vantage point from which total order can be perceived, a radial wholeness connecting each mutable point on the circumference of existence to its immutable centre.¹ From this perspective, the timeless, though standing beyond and above time, nevertheless operates within time. The unchanging principles of faith, deriving from this transcendent

and eternal centre, are therefore adaptable to the contingencies of time, and provide the basis for resolving outward tensions between tradition and modernity.

The traditional view of time as a reflection of the timeless is obscured by the conditions of modernity in which time is accelerating while space is becoming both dispersed and compressed. Ismailis consider that human perceptions are occluded by both the pace and vicissitudes of change in the modern world (the subject of this chapter) and by the resulting fragmentation reflected in the ethos of modernism (the subject of the next). Thus the Imam has cautioned:

[I]t is my profound conviction that Islamic society in the years ahead will find that our traditional concept of time, a limitless mirror in which to reflect on the eternal, will become a shrinking cage, an invisible trap from which fewer and fewer will escape.²

One of the defining features of our age is the rapidity of change. That fact alone is creating dissonances and fissures, particularly within the Muslim community worldwide, and is raising questions about ethical norms:

If you reflect upon the time in which we are living, we are living through a unique time in history where mutation is rapid; where search for direction is omnipresent in all societies; where the Muslim Ummah is seeking its position in the community of nations; where young people are asking themselves, what should we believe in? What are the ethics which should be ours? How should we reflect on our future, and the discipline and the aspirations that will guide us in our lives?³

As the world is drawn increasingly away from the 'limitless mirror' that displays the 'Face of God' and into the 'shrinking cage' of modern life, it experiences a growing tension between tradition and modernity. This tension is a product of rapid change in modern life, of the globalisation that thrusts people together,

and of the vulnerabilities of traditional societies that are shocked into the modern world and its dissonances. As the Aga Khan has observed:

[T]he nature of change today is different from what it ever has been. It is different because it is taking place at an exponentially accelerating pace. It is different also in that, for the first time in history, the change is global in scale and impact, reaching even the most remote areas and populations of our planet. Today's world is a shifting environment in which everybody must adapt much faster in order to learn to manage the external forces of change, and ultimately mould them around specific values and traditions. Paradoxically, it is the most isolated, best preserved and least changed individuals, communities, and places that are most vulnerable to the tendency of so-called progress to erase tradition, local identity and values. For these are the places most surprised by sudden economic liberalisation, commercialisation, industrialisation, by the globalisation of travel, enterprise and service industries, and by growing communication technologies.⁴

One of the pressing concerns of the Imam, therefore, is how to equip his diverse communities, many of which are isolated and therefore particularly vulnerable to change, to cope with the pressures of modernisation.

The 'Divergent Squint'

The Aga Khan has referred to the outwardly opposing tendencies within Islam of progressive modernisation and hidebound tradition as 'a divergent squint':

I believe that today the Islamic world's view of its own future is seriously affected by a divergent squint. It is a world split into two tendencies: on the one hand, modernisers and believers in progressive change, on the other, traditionalists who might even be described as hidebound.⁵

He believes that these oppositions are reconcilable, provided they are approached in an intellectually flexible manner in which the flux of the changing world is harmonised by principles and values rooted in the essence of faith. Acknowledging this, he has observed: 'Muslims believe their faith is not for one time, but for all times and so there cannot be conflict between tradition and modernity.'⁶

Both tradition (in the sense of conserving the handed-down wisdom and heritage of the past) and modernity (in the sense of living progressively within the changing times) can and must be reconciled, but this harmonisation cannot be effected by a rejection of either one. What is needed is a balance founded in spiritual and ethical imagination, an openness to searching for harmonising principles, coupled with a quality of engagement that seeks equilibrium through complementarity. A promoter of both tradition and modernity, the Aga Khan has stressed the importance of maintaining a proper balance between the two and has cautioned about the dangers of not doing so:

The Muslim world's two main tendencies, traditional and modern, will both have a role to play but if one attempts to achieve exclusivity at the expense of the other, the consequences will be predictable and highly damaging.⁷

One can witness the resulting tension in the Muslim world in the form of two reactionary attitudes, between, on the one hand, those who embrace the modern (i.e., much of the Western) world, equating modernisation largely with occidentalisation, and who thereby reject their own traditional (often non-Western) identities and values; and, on the other, those who reject the modern world in favour of traditionalism. The Imam challenges both reactionary attitudes, noting that 'Not everything within traditions is old and outmoded, and not everything within modernity is a vehicle for progress or is highly

effective.⁸ Similarly, as a modern man and moderniser himself, it is evident that the Aga Khan accepts the modern so long as its values do not degrade Islamic spiritual values (a theme we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Prince Karim's approach is founded on an equilibrium, on traditional principles and spiritual values that reflect both integrity and complementarity, balancing the domains of faith and the contemporary world. He has called for the Muslim community to look beyond the dominant values of the largely secular modern West to those principles and values rooted in its own faith and cultural heritage. Accordingly, he suggests that the West should not expect its values to be absorbed uncritically by the Muslim world, stating to a Western audience: '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.'⁹

This should not be read as expressing an anti-Western view. Rather, the statement warns against an uncritical adoption of Western values, particularly in view of the dominant influence of Western cultures in much of the modern world and the danger of their uncritical assimilation by Muslims, especially those living in those parts of the developing world that are eager to modernise. In encouraging Muslims to draw from the best of Western values and to integrate them with Muslim values, he observes:

It is my deepest conviction that if Islamic society is to avoid following blindly the course of Western society without taking the trouble to raise guards against the latter's weaknesses and deficiencies, a thorough rediscovery, revitalisation and reintegration of our traditional values must be achieved.¹⁰

Noting that the only thing that will enable Muslims to recover meaning in 'a time of vacuum'¹¹ is 'the quality and the capability

of the people of the Muslim world;¹² the Aga Khan – like his grandfather, the former Imam Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah (Aga Khan III) – has called for the establishment of an intellectual elite to lead a revival in Muslim thought, to revalorise its faith and civilisational heritage:

It is through the creation of such a new elite, inspired by, and widely read in everything related to our heritage, that there must come about a revival in Muslim thought. Clearly the intellectual development of the Ummah, is, and should remain, a central goal to be pursued with urgency if we wish the Muslim world to regain its rightful place in world civilisation.¹³

Such a revival is held by Ismailis to be all the more urgent in a world where the dominant Western intellectual culture has arguably undergone a betrayal of its traditional humanistic heritage (the thesis, for example of Julien Benda,¹⁴ among others), and where many in the Muslim world are confused by the ‘divergent squint’. Keenly aware of the contributions of Islam to world history, particularly for Western civilisations, Prince Karim is ambitious for the role of Muslims, both for their legitimate aspirations (their ‘rightful place in world civilisation’) and as contributors (through intellectual leadership) to the larger issues of society in today’s conflictual and degraded world. This is evidently one of the main impetuses in the Ismaili Imam’s development of institutions that are designed to foster an intellectual elite:

I am convinced that the way for the Ummah to achieve its aspirations is through the development of first-rate institutions and professionals, steeped in the ethos of the faith, but applying their intellects and resources to help humanity develop solutions to the very real problems facing it today – such as population growth, sustainable resource management, environmental degradation, the

ethics governing new scientific capacities, or the creation of just civil societies without exclusions.¹⁵

For the Aga Khan, a fundamental goal is 'to ensure that the eternal humanistic values of Islam are properly understood in today's world'.¹⁶ How is this ambition to be accomplished? An essential role must be played by education to help people manage the forces of change. This is one of the mandates of the Aga Khan Education Services, and particularly of the Aga Khan Academies of Excellence, which promote an ethic of lifelong and heuristic learning, commencing with early childhood education. The aim is to inculcate basic skills and values in students from an early age, while the human mind is optimally receptive to learning. With the recognition that 'learned human behaviour dies hard',¹⁷ great emphasis is placed on adaptability:

We must rise above the antiquated approaches of earlier days and instead infuse our students with what I would call three 'A's of modern learning – the spirit of anticipation, the spirit of adaptation and the spirit of adventure.¹⁸

But the three 'A's are not limited to the acquisition of *skills* alone, but also *values* to confront rapid social change. The building of skills is a necessary means of equipping individuals to strive successfully for their material wellbeing and to unshackle them from the chains of poverty, but ethical behaviour is equally vital to their spiritual wellbeing, and that of their families and the communities in which they live. Therefore, the Ismaili Imam emphasises that there must be a focus on ethical acculturation – what he has termed 'ethical literacy', 'ethical leadership' and teaching people to 'see the world through the lens of ethics'.¹⁹ The Aga Khan regards education as 'an intensely moral enterprise, which depends upon clear ethical rules',²⁰ and he views a culture

of ethics as an essential ingredient in preserving integrity in the face of a fast-changing society. Stressing the importance of faith and its holistic standpoint ('unity of thought and existence') as an underpinning of ethics and of 'the boundless spiritual dynamics of Islam',²¹ he comments on the importance of cultivating holistic learning with an ethical purpose, implicitly underlining the importance of spiritual literacy:

[T]he power of integration of the classic Islamic culture at one time rested on the recurring spiritual energy which is called faith: faith expressed in ritual behaviour repeated daily but also in ethical rules and laws, the relationship to nature, even with visible and invisible worlds stressed in the Quran, thus creating a unity of thought and existence.²²

Change also requires negotiating complexity; hence, Prince Karim's emphasis on a 'cosmopolitan ethic', one that is premised on embracing diversity through constructive engagement. Recognising that progressive change can threaten traditional social bonds – a challenge frequently encountered in the work of the AKDN – the Imam's approach is that tradition and progress are not incompatible when modernisation is adapted to complement and respect a region's cultural heritage, reflecting its distinctive traditions and values. It is an approach analogous to what the American philosopher Wendell Berry (b. 1934) terms 'particular love':²³ a responsibility arising out of generosity and respect for the unique gifts of diversity grounded in the soil of a particular culture or land or people rather than in the unanchored abstractions of modernisation and progress.

Given this philosophy that seeks to underline the richness of cultural values and to foster indigenous and regional identities, one can better understand why the Imam's work includes a focus on cultural programmes (discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 9). Its cultural initiatives exemplify how Muslim

traditions and values can be adapted to changing modern contexts, and how emerging technologies and new vistas of knowledge can be used to creatively encounter challenges of Muslim self-determination and identity in a world largely dominated by Western values.

But cultures and identities must also be adaptable, as must the forms of thought that inform them. Thus, for example, voicing his grandfather's precept, 'Educate a woman and you educate a family',²⁴ Prince Karim is an uncompromising advocate of female education, even in the face of traditional resistance to such views in parts of the developing world. He is well aware that there are ossifying and homogenising traditions that resist 'what are meant to be fluid, progressive, open-ended, intellectually informed, and spiritually inspired traditions of thought', transforming them 'into hardened, monolithic, absolutist and obscurantist positions'.²⁵ Despite this calcifying influence, he notes

[T]here are many across the length and breadth of the Muslim world today who care for their history and heritage, who are keenly sensitive to the radically altered conditions of the modern world ... They seek for ways in which their societies may benefit from the intellectual and material fruits of modernity, while remaining true to their distinctive moral, spiritual and cultural heritage.²⁶

His views and his emphasis on balancing faith and worldly life have enabled the diverse spectrum of Ismaili communities around the world to benefit from the 'fruits of modernity' while each remaining true to their 'distinctive moral, spiritual and cultural heritage'.

'A World Eternal': Principles and Tradition

Central to the Aga Khan's message is the reminder that, although forms change in time, essential principles and values do not.

He stresses that a person can and must remain true to the essence of his or her faith despite the contingent circumstances of modernity. The Aga Khan has promoted this message consistently throughout the six decades of his Imamate. This is evident in a seminal statement that he made over 40 years ago at the Seerat Conference in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1976:

I have observed in the Western world a deeply changing pattern of human relations. The anchors of moral behaviour appear to have dragged to such depths that they no longer hold firm the ship of life. What was once wrong is now simply unconventional, and for the sake of individual freedom must be tolerated. What is tolerated soon becomes accepted. Contrarily, what was once right is now viewed as out-dated, old-fashioned and is often the target of ridicule.

In the face of this changing world, which was once a universe to us and is now no more than an overcrowded island, confronted with a fundamental challenge to our understanding of time, surrounded by a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships which have broken loose, I ask, 'Do we have a clear, firm and precise understanding of what Muslim Society is to be in times to come?' And if as I believe, the answer is uncertain, where else can we search then in the Holy Quran, and in the example of Allah's last and final Prophet? ...

The Holy Prophet's life gives us every fundamental guideline that we require to resolve the problem as successfully as our human minds and intellects can visualise. His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, correctly understood and sincerely interpreted, must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic Society in the years ahead.²⁷

For such 'a truly modern and dynamic Islamic Society' to exist, it must operate on the basis of principles and values that transcend time, while functioning in the realm of time. 'Islam is a faith which cannot be relegated to the past',²⁸ the Aga Khan says, and so its values must be 'validated by time'.²⁹ Because the principles of faith and the values they embody are *timeless*, so too they are *timely*. It is for this reason that Islam is said to be a faith *for* modernity. Commenting on this, the Imam has said

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.³⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, to find the Aga Khan pronouncing that he is 'suspicious of fashion, of "isms", of dogmas',³¹ because these are not grounded in principles, but are either mutable or calcified. So too, he is 'very cautious about seeking a formalistic approach'³² in matters of interpretation because he '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'.³³

Prince Karim's resistance to formalistic interpretations can be noted, for example, in his principled approach to the *shari'a*, which 'is seen by most Muslims as a changing body of law, subject to what we call the *fiqh*, the capacity for evolving interpretation'.³⁴ Regarding the Ismaili approach to scriptural and legal interpretation (which accords with what Charles Dickens has termed the 'broad spirit' of the text and not 'man's narrow construction of its letter here or there'³⁵), he has said, 'Our attitude is simply that codes change and that what is important is the purpose behind the code'.³⁶

The focus on 'the purpose behind the code' is an emphasis on the primacy of principles, rather than on legalism and spiritual mediocrity.³⁷ This approach rejects both the reductionism and

relativism of the merely temporal, finite and contingent world. Affirming the principal criterion, the Aga Khan cites the following couplet from the Pakistani poet-philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), about his vision of Islam as

A world eternal, with renewing flames and renewing leaves, fruits,
and principles.

With an immovable inside and an outside of changing,
continuous revolutions.³⁸

This concept of an ‘immovable inside’ with an outside adaptable to change is also echoed in the Aga Khan’s comments about the nature of evolving traditions and their relationship to essential principles: ‘Traditions evolve in a context, and the context always changes, thus demanding a new understanding of essential principles.’³⁹ Change, an aspect of the ever-renewing theophany, is the very operative principle of pluralism, and is an expression of God’s benevolence. In Tennyson’s words,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.⁴⁰

Following this way of thinking, traditions, therefore, cannot be permitted to become hidebound, to ossify (‘Lest one good custom should corrupt the world’). Value systems must be ‘both time-resistant and time-adaptable.’⁴¹ They must evolve to help societies develop. Traditions are more than their outer forms, their conventions or cultural practices. They are, first and foremost, principles that have been handed down to guide forms of conduct, while transcending them. It is not forms or patterns of conduct that are universal, only principles. The focus of the Aga Khan is therefore on identifying and preserving fundamental principles, the guiding essence of Islam. A significant patron of,

and keen thinker about, architecture, he has quoted approvingly a statement by the Japanese master architect Kenzo Tange (d. 2005), which is relevant in this context: 'The role of tradition is that of a catalyst, which allows the chemical reaction, but is no longer detectable in the final result.'⁴²

The term 'tradition' can here be understood to signify the embodiment of what the Imam has called the 'essential principles' that catalyse healthy social change. Time is not a catalyst for changing essential principles, but the context for their interpretation. Traditions, which embody unchanging principles, may themselves evolve according to changing contexts and to society's more refined understandings of, and engagement with, what is essential; yet they must do so in an adaptive way that preserves and integrates principles without violating their spirit. Consistent with this adaptive view of tradition, the Imam opposes the introduction of a 'time dimension' in the practice of Islam so as to freeze eternal principles in a particular moment in time. Thus he has stated

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.⁴³

The 'world eternal' of Allama Iqbal calls for a continual appraisal of changing forms in terms of essential meanings, of evolving traditions in terms of changing contexts, and therefore of the intellect in full engagement with faith. According to this view, there cannot be any conflict between faith and intellect. These must be reconciled in ways that transcend the vagaries of time so that Islam continues to have relevance. Prince Karim is emphatic on this point as a feature of his interpretive criteria:

I don't see any conflict in the way I interpret Islam between the intellect and faith. And insofar 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 twenty-first or twenty-third, twenty-fifth century.⁴⁴

Change and the Intellect

The intellect has a vital role to play in negotiating change. In Ismaili thought, it is the means by which the absolute can be distinguished from the contingent, the essential from the peripheral, and the values of the 'world eternal' from their counterfeits frozen in time. Central to this role is the intellect's quest for principles that are perennial and values that are universal – rooted (in keeping with the Platonic adage that 'All knowledge is ultimately self-knowledge') in our primordial nature.

In Chapter 4, we will examine how the ethos of modernism, which rejects principles that straddle the material and spiritual worlds, poses particular challenges for all faith traditions, including Islam. In the present chapter, our focus is on the challenges posed by social change. As new ethical issues arise in the modern world, ranging from bio-ethics (cloning and stem cell research) to medical ethics (abortion and assisted dying) and societal ethics (same-sex marriage and the use of robots to substitute for humans), it is increasingly important to look at emerging ethical issues from the vantage of essential principles and objective moral criteria. To avoid the pitfalls of moral relativism or conflicts between tradition and modernity, solutions to such issues must transcend temporal contingencies through principles and values that respect the link between faith and ethics. As we noted earlier, the Aga Khan's approach to ethical issues generally is to assess 'whether one is affecting the fundamental moral fabric of society' or 'the fundamentals of religious practice' and to permit change to the extent that it is 'not in conflict with the ethic of Islam.' He is signalling here a principles-based approach founded on core values rooted in

the dignity of man and on what it fundamentally means to be 'human' – values such as interconnectedness, empathy, humility, compassion, generosity, tolerance and the respect for civility – that allows the intellect to navigate change without compromising the integrity of faith.

Science has a special function with regard to the intellect's vital role in negotiating change. Because Islam considers the source of the intellect to be transcendent, it holds (in keeping with its unitive world view) that integral knowledge, grounded in wholeness and compassion, is adequate to continuity and is not in opposition to time. Thus, Islam does not place revelation at odds with the unfolding discoveries of modern science. The Aga Khan has often commented on this aspect, stating, for example, that 'to say that science in the modern age is incompatible [with Islam] is the same as saying that Islam is the faith of the past, and that is totally unacceptable'.⁴⁵ Instead, he notes: '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.'⁴⁶

Although science cannot 'answer the ultimate question',⁴⁷ it is nonetheless seen by Muslims and people of other faiths as a way of glimpsing the 'limitless mirror' of the theophany, to better understand the miraculous wonders of God's creation, and to employ its evolving technologies in ways that better serve mankind's changing needs. Like all knowledge, science, while it is increasingly regarded as a modernising tool, is not truly at odds with tradition, but functions optimally in the service of faith rather than in opposition to it. Science must be guided by ethical intelligence. This is vitally important in an age where innovations with genetic technologies and artificial intelligence are raising new questions about what it means to be 'human', and about man's ability to control his new creations. Thus, noting that 'science alone will not give us much guidance on when to prolong human life and whether to intervene in its creation', the

Aga Khan has underlined the importance of looking to faith for ethical answers, stating that

[T]hese questions engage not merely professional ethics and standards; they touch the deeply held convictions of a Judeo-Christian tradition, an idea of humanity that has challenged the prophets and philosophers for thousands of years. Nations cannot assign these issues to a priesthood of scientists; they require the resources of the human spirit as well as the mind.⁴⁸

In line with this way of thinking, the profound ethical questions that confront modern man lie beyond the ken of science alone to answer, and relate to underlying issues about human identity and the purpose of human life. Consistent with the Aga Khan's approach, the answer to these questions demands a return to 'first principles',⁴⁹ to what T.S. Eliot has termed those 'permanent things' of which faith speaks, that provide a touchstone for continuity beyond the vagaries of change, and to a rediscovery of the spiritual meaning of human values. They are informed, in the end, by an intellectual world view – fundamental to Islam – that apprehends life as one, drawn from a single living source, and therefore as sacred and interconnected, and with a purpose that reconnects the outer forms of life with their inner spiritual presence.



In this chapter, we have seen that the Ismaili Imam's approach has been to attempt to address tensions between tradition and modernity by seeking to transcend them through what he regards as the timeless quality inherent in the principles of Islam. We have noted that the intellect has the capacity to rise beyond time's 'shrinking cage' to a vantage which – like the eye of a hurricane – is beyond the vicissitudes of change. We have seen

that the Aga Khan has called for an intellectual revival in the Muslim world to address issues of change through principles and values that embrace complexity and diversity, respecting modernisation while remaining sensitive to traditions that are rooted in the essentials of faith and the distinctive soils of diverse cultures. In Chapter 4, we will examine how these principles and values are challenged by the ethos of modernism, and the Ismaili Imam's response to this.



Doha skyline seen through the arches at the Museum of Islamic Art,
Doha, Qatar.

The Ethos of Modernism

Modernism

While the Aga Khan's attitudes towards change are 'progressive' and 'modern', in that they welcome, generally, the 'progress' associated with contemporary life, they are also openly critical of the modernistic ethos which seeks to operate without regard to the reality of transcendent order. The ethos of modernism has been defined by the Muslim philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) as 'that which is cut off from the Transcendent, from the immutable principles which in reality govern all things and which are made known to man through revelation in its most universal sense'.¹ For our purposes, we can think of 'modernism' (as opposed to 'modernity' which merely designates contemporaneity) as a world view lacking a sense of the sacred, and 'tradition', by contrast, as that which accepts (in Dr Nasr's terminology) 'the Transcendent'. Understanding the sacred as the imprint of the divine order within existence, 'modernism', then, is the ethos that is insensitive to the 'Face of God'.

Particularly in the Western world, modernism reflects the shift that occurred in medieval times from realism to nominalism and from faith-based intellectual knowledge to rationalism. In religious terms, the effects of this shift are seen

as the contemporary schism between man and God, and the corresponding rupture between man and nature. These divisions have eroded the traditional world view of reality as 'an all-encompassing unity'.²

The primary characteristic of modernism is reductionism, a fundamentalist tendency to reduce unity to uniformity. In philosophical terms, reducing the world and the self to their outward elements involves an epistemic closure (a closing of the mind), veiling the mind from any spiritual element – from the *batini* or esoteric dimension emphasised in Ismailism and Sufism. In Islam, this loss of spiritual awareness is the sin of *shirk*, of the failure to perceive theophany, of failing to perceive archetypes within forms, of looking at the pointing finger and not to what it is pointing. This sort of perception, which fails to see the inner dimension of things, cannot perceive an underlying unity in them and seeks instead to impose on them an outward uniformity. It is only through intellectual knowledge (here signifying the transcendent faculty of knowledge and the revelation of divine self-disclosure, and not merely the faculty of discursive reasoning) that the underlying unity can be perceived. In Ismaili Islam, it is the Aga Khan who, being *firmly rooted in knowledge* (Q 3:7) and thereby exteriorising intellectual objectivity as the logos,³ is held to possess *ta'wil*, the ability to relate outward forms to their inward essence, by, in the words of the noted Islamic scholar Henry Corbin (d. 1978), 'tracing a thing back to its source, to its archetype'.⁴ In keeping with his role as spiritual guide for Ismailis, the Imam emphasises the *batini* dimension as a fundamental aspect of intellectual perception, and he therefore draws attention to principles of integration and underlying unity.

A secondary and related characteristic of modernism is relativism, which arises from privileging the peripheral perspective over that of the centre. In so doing, relativism absolutises the relative.⁵ By denying that reality is metaphysically a whole,

it fails to perceive wholeness and sees reality only in terms of its fragments. It thereby lacks the intellectual appreciation of integrated knowledge – the sense of the sacred. As in the old Indian and Sufi tale of the blind men and the elephant, it fails to see the complete picture, knowing only the different parts. This atomising tendency drifts away from objective norms. Lacking objectivity, one is left to define reality based on subjective criteria and discursive reason alone, rather than on the basis of the spirit. In a postmodern age, where human reason presumes to deconstruct everything, including God, faith in a reality that bridges the material and spiritual worlds is easily replaced by relativistic (and ultimately irrational) faith in human reason alone – that is, by the subjective mind whose preoccupations tend inevitably to serve materialistic and individualistic ends.

It is easy to understand, then, why one of the chief attributes of modernism is materialism, and why the Aga Khan advocates a measured view toward the material world, cautioning against the excess of materialism. To accept materialism is to forsake *din* for *dunya*, faith for the world. In this view, materialism represents an intellectual myopia, a loss of wholeness, and also an imbalance, a loss of equilibrium. Reducing the world to its outer, merely material, aspects, cuts it off from the transcendent. This reduction of reality to its horizontal aspects, sundered from verticality, is completely opposed to all spiritual traditions. It results in an unhealthy concentration on merely materialistic and individualistic aspirations, like ‘the accumulation of wealth for the specific purpose of accumulating wealth or personal power’ or the pursuit of knowledge to further selfish aspirations rather than in the service of the common good.⁶ Islam strictly forbids such reductionism and it is therefore not surprising that the Imam has been outspoken about such imbalances within modern life, which he regards as a threat to core Muslim values. Recognising that material aims must be placed within a spiritual

context, he has cautioned about the dangers of conflating essential with materialistic values: 'In a world where quality of life is increasingly measured in material terms there is risk that the essential value system of Islam will be eroded, or even threatened with disappearance.'⁷

The linking of quality of life to essential values underscores the Aga Khan's aim to focus on establishing 'the moral framework within which material endeavour is to be encouraged'.⁸ To better understand his concerns about the dominant moral framework that he shuns – one that he views as not linked to essential values – we can turn to a key question he raised in 2006 at Évora University in Portugal:

How, in an increasingly cynical time, can we inspire people to a new set of aspirations – reaching beyond rampant materialism, the new relativism, self-serving individualism, and resurgent tribalism?⁹

After characterising the modern age as 'cynical' (a synonym for its faithlessness), the Aga Khan associated the phrase 'rampant materialism' with three related symptoms of modernist societies: 'the new relativism' (which, at Columbia University in 2006,¹⁰ he characterised as 'unprincipled relativism'), 'self-serving individualism' (which, at Columbia, he described as 'self-indulgent individualism') and 'resurgent tribalism'. Each of these derives from materialism, the infecting agent. We will address each symptom in turn.

'Rampant Materialism'

As we have seen, according to the Aga Khan, materialism, as an aspect of modernism, represents a loss in awareness of the spiritual dimension of reality. It reduces the world and the self to merely their outward, material, elements. In religious terms,

cut off from the transcendent, modern man no longer has in view his origin and end (the reality designated scripturally as the *First* and the *Last* – Q 57:3) and, cut off from the absolute reality, or God, he no longer perceives his spiritual centre (the presence which is only truly *outward* inasmuch as it is *inward*). Lacking any sense of ultimate purpose, he seeks meaning only in material ends, while trying to satisfy the lower appetites which, so long as they remain unrestrained by his higher intelligence, can never truly be sated. His is a quest for what C.S. Lewis (d. 1963) has termed ‘the sweet poison of the false infinite’.¹¹ Pulled centrifugally, his world becomes compressed and his energies dissipated, and he is drawn to outer things: power, wealth, fame, pleasure. In purely practical terms, the effects of materialism are evident in humankind’s preoccupation with the distractions of the outer world, with its alluring horizontality. These range from an obsession with subjectivising abstractions and *virtual* reality to the addictions of objectifying sensationalism, from consumerism to hedonism – all culminating in the denaturing of the universe and in the dehumanising of man. This is why an increasing emphasis on materialism is also an assault on faith: in Shakespeare’s words, ‘Commodity, the bias of the world ... breaks the pate of faith’.¹² Not surprisingly, the growth of materialism has been accompanied by a ‘malaise of modernity’, a strange and discomfiting sense of dislocation, disorientation, distraction, disconnection, disenchantment and dispiritedness in humanity’s march of ‘progress’.¹³

While the Aga Khan is clearly not opposed to material progress, he is nevertheless opposed to a materialist imbalance in the quest for such progress, as he notes in this early speech upon his accession to the Imamāt:

I do not believe that we should fear material progress nor should we condemn it. The danger is that it should become an obsession in our lives, and that it should dominate our way of thinking. There is no

reason why our traditions and our faith should stop us from moving with our times, nor in fact why we should not lead our fellow men to new spheres of knowledge and learning.¹⁴

In a series of penetrating questions, the Imam poses the following challenge to thinkers to reflect on the effects of a materialistic ethos in modern societies:

Looking at it from a Muslim point of view, the industrialised world has attached a very great premium to materialism. Has there been, as a consequence to that, a dehumanisation of society? Has the individual lost his sense of identity? What has been the impact on ethical standards, generally speaking? Have ethical standards fallen?¹⁵

Implicit in these questions are others: What is the true nature of human identity? How has materialism eroded our humanity and our ethics? We have seen how the Aga Khan has elsewhere linked human identity to its spiritual foundation, which is the basis of his ethical view of society. Clearly, he is rhetorically observing that in his view the erosion of spiritual foundations threatens our very humanity and its communal bonds. From the outset, he has emphasised that 'wealth is not all that matters'; instead he stresses 'a spirit of humility and devotion' and mutual forbearance and respect as foundations for harmony and happiness.¹⁶ His spiritual view of life is in accord with the teachings of Islam – as of all the great faith traditions – that man must both affirm and negate the world: affirm it as theophany (as the living presence or 'Face of God'), and also negate it in its purely material aspects as an end in itself, cultivating instead an appreciation of both the fragile and providential aspects of life, and of grace.

Yet he is clear that our 'cynical' age is contemptuous of values beyond those that speak to the more venal aims of pure self-interest or those of superficially alluring attractions, changing

fashions and modern lifestyles. Evidence of this cynicism can be found not only in the more obvious signs of materialist excess and 'idolatry', and of the loss of trust in corrupt institutions, but also in certain ideologies of secularism, scientism and religion that characterise modernism and symptomise its materialist outlook.

Secularism

It is well recognised in modern times that faith – that is to say, not only formal religion but also the idea of the sacred – is under attack, both externally and from within religion itself. The secularist drift in many parts of the world, particularly in the West, has a strong centrifugal influence in modern lives, drawing people away from both religiosity and, some would argue, spirituality.

Secular fundamentalism goes beyond 'soft secularism' – beyond religious neutrality, the simple defining of separate roles for religion and politics, the equal treatment of religious and non-religious groups, or the provision of neutral space for free expression. What is sometimes termed 'hard secularism' involves an outright opposition to religion and to a spiritual ethos. It takes two principal forms: atheistic opposition to faith, and political opposition to religion. In both these forms, it muzzles religious expression, provoking reactionary opposition, often in the form of religious fundamentalism (discussed later).

Modern atheism usually denies the legitimacy of faith-based religion, and, in some instances, also of the spiritual nature of man. For some influential self-confessed atheists (such as Richard Dawkins), faith is viewed cynically as 'belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence',¹⁷ and therefore, in the words of another popular atheist, Christopher Hitchens, as the 'most overrated' of virtues.¹⁸ For atheists, religious faith is often replaced by a 'secular faith' in other ideas or systems of knowledge and, in particular, in science. In the

absence of faith-based foundations, scientific atheism is forced to construct a purely rationalistic – in fact, materialistic – human morality (as in the example of Sam Harris, discussed later in this chapter).

Secular fundamentalism also expresses itself through politically restricting or even excluding religious expression from civic discourse. In doing so, it ignores the fact of human religiosity which has a legitimate place in the civic arena. The public sphere is not value-neutral because, even though political rules might seek to exclude religious or cultural values, its actors bring their own, religiously or culturally influenced, values to it.

From the point of view of Islam and of other faith traditions, secularism, when understood as the tendency to exclude faith or religious expression from the world, or to relegate human endeavours to purely material aims, is flawed because it denies what, for religious people, are the spiritual foundations of nature. Accordingly, by prioritising the material over the spiritual domain, it creates an imbalance between *din* and *dunya* that is antithetical to Islam, as the Imam has noted: ‘Secular society, by the nature of secularity and the demands of time, provokes in people the need to first place the world and faith after. This is not a part of Islam.’¹⁹

The Imam, though clearly aware of the ‘threats of extreme secularisation’,²⁰ has clarified that he is not an opponent of ‘soft secularism’ but of ‘hard secularism’: ‘I am not opposed to secularism as such. But I am opposed to unilateral secularism where the notions of faith and ethics just disappear from society.’²¹ The kind of ‘extreme secularisation’ which he opposes is directly related to the materialistic ethos which, in his view, threatens to distance Islam from the West. Thus, he has cautioned

[T]he 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.²²

In a key statement made in 1967, early in his Imamate, the Aga Khan highlighted the critical link between faith and ethics – and the moral erosion that could result from severing it – when he contrasted the materialistic ‘profit-seeking’ pursuits of ‘greed for the material good’ with the ethical responsibilities derived from man’s humility before God, exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. He stated

It would be traumatic if those pillars of the Islamic way of life, social justice, equality, humility and generosity, enjoined upon us all, were to lose their force or wide application in our young society. It must never be said generations hence that in our greed for the material good of the rich West we have forsaken our responsibilities to the poor, to the orphans, to the traveller, to the single woman.

The day, we no longer know how, nor have the time, nor the faith to bow in prayer to Allah because the human soul, that He has told us is eternal, is no longer of sufficient importance to us to be worthy of an hour of our daily working, profit-seeking time, will be a sunless day of despair.²³

These words, describing the central role of faith in the Muslim ethos, and the linking of the ethic of ‘the Way’ to its spiritual foundations, are also cautionary. It is not without reason that the Aga Khan, in his Évora University address, refers to modernity as ‘an increasingly cynical time’ – for the spirit of the modern age is increasingly pitted against the Spirit itself. Viewed in these terms, the challenge of the age is to awaken in people who may be cynical about faith and are drawn to the materialistic allure of modernism, a sense of the spiritual world and the values it entails. Equally, the challenge is to promote communal cohesion

within societies that are increasingly individualistic and frayed. Ultimately, the pluralistic ethos that is needed to maintain cohesion with the communal fabric requires a spiritual foundation; it must be able to apprehend wholeness, to see that the diverse threads of humanity combine to form a beautiful tapestry, and to understand that materialistic and individualistic aims alone only serve to unravel its threads. Social cohesion requires the underpinnings of the faith that mandates unity and social justice. Ethics can exist without faith, but are unsustainable without the awareness of the intrinsic bond that holds humanity together.

Although the Aga Khan is well aware of the significance of faith for stability, he often chooses – no doubt given the cynicism of the modern world – to express his views in ways that go beyond the overt language of faith; hence, his emphasis on humanistic values and on the ethic of ‘cosmopolitanism’, which we discuss more fully in the next chapter. Nevertheless, he has from time to time made candid public statements about the necessity of faith-based foundations for social cohesion. For example: ‘The message I will always give is that humanity cannot deal with present day problems without a basis of religion.’²⁴ Or, again: ‘Religion must be a means by which to affirm the ethical significance of existence, irrelevant of one’s faith.’²⁵ He is clearly speaking here of faith in a metaphysical sense that transcends any theological particularism. He is speaking of the intrinsic unity of creation that constitutes the basis of what he profoundly terms the ‘ethical significance of existence’.

Secular fundamentalism, which is cynically opposed to such faith, is something that the Imam therefore views as harmful, and he warns sternly of its consequences:

[I]f freedom of religion deteriorates into freedom from religion then I fear we will soon be lost on a bleak and barren landscape with no compass or roadmap, no sense of ultimate direction.²⁶

Positivism and Scientism

Secular fundamentalism has deep roots in Western philosophy that can be traced back at least as far as René Descartes (d. 1650) and his radical dualism, which divides the thinking subject (*res cogitans*) from the material object (*res extensa*), thereby rejecting the traditional connection between man and the world. The Cartesian schism opened up the path for positivism, the philosophy that required humans to posit truth based purely on demonstrable evidence, instead of affirming transcendent wholeness. By reducing truth to its outwardly verifiable elements as parts of the *res extensa*, positivism reduced it to the quantifiable material realm that it was able to measure, and it correspondingly de-emphasised the validity of the qualitative spiritual realm, which was unverifiable for it. The contemporary American philosopher Marilynne Robinson, in her Terry Lectures delivered at Yale, observed that positivism, which became the basis for modern science, ‘was intended to banish the language of metaphysics as meaningless, and it supplied in its place a systematically reductionist conceptual vocabulary, notably in the diverse interpretations of human nature it seemed to endorse’.²⁷ Robinson labels this reductive science – or ‘scientism’, which denounces as unreal anything that it is unable to reduce to its limited methodologies – ‘a hermeneutics of condescension’,²⁸ exposing the arrogance behind its absurdity – as though by refusing to open an eyelid, the world itself ceases to be real!²⁹

Rejecting this materialistic and fragmented view of philosophy and science, the Muslim perspective underlines the compatibility of faith and intellect, and views science as a window on the wondrous miracles of God’s creation. Rejecting also what it sees as the hubris of scientism, it insists on approaching knowledge with intellectual humility, with an awareness of its spiritual dimension. Insofar as positivistic

science denies transcendence and reduces reality to the material world of its empirical methodologies, it contributes to a loss of the spiritual world view that is central to the integral vision emphasised by the Imam.

The concept of morality requires the metaphysical support which scientism denies. Yet authors such as the neuroscientist and critic of religion Sam Harris have attempted to argue for a strictly scientific basis for morality. Harris's claim for a science-based morality is founded on the proposition that 'human well-being entirely depends on events in the world and on states of the human brain',³⁰ a premise that embeds hidden, qualitative, value-based assumptions about 'well-being'. The *quantitative* aspects of science – which reductively concerns itself with the finite dimensions of reality, of space, time and matter – cannot, according to the Aga Khan's approach, adequately inform the *qualitative* aspects of spiritual perception which open onto the transcendent dimensions of the infinite, the eternal and the substantive – dimensions which, although not visible to the limited methodologies of positivist science, are nonetheless real for those who (in Quranic terminology) 'have eyes to see'.

Religious Fundamentalism

We must also mention here the danger of a materialistic tendency within religion itself, sometimes referred to as 'religious fundamentalism'.³¹ The term 'fundamentalist' was originally associated with an evangelical American Protestant movement of the early twentieth century that arose in reaction to its perceptions of threats posed by liberalist and evolutionist critiques of the Bible. To counter this, the group advocated a literalist reading of scripture. Over time, the term 'fundamentalist' has come to represent a reactionary outlook that seeks to conserve fundamental values through literalist readings of texts and

by exclusivist attitudes that reject contrary and pluralistic viewpoints. The term is now applied to contexts beyond religion (e.g., one might refer to scientific or secular fundamentalists). Nevertheless, particularly since the time of the Iranian revolution of 1979, the term 'fundamentalism' is principally paired with religion. The dominant Western media has frequently used the expression 'Islamic fundamentalism' to refer to those who commit atrocities and violations in the name of Islam, fuelling misperceptions about this faith and the overwhelming majority of its one-and-a-half billion practitioners.³² Religious fundamentalism is in part an ideological reaction to modernism – which is itself a form of fundamentalism – and is in part a politicised reaction to the processes of modernisation, colonisation, socio-economic exploitation and the muzzling of dissent that frequently finds expression through religious outlets.

Prince Karim is wary of the 'fundamentalist' label. He prefers to clarify the underlying causes that have bred the reactionary attitudes labelled as 'fundamentalist' within some Muslim societies. He has been outspoken and critical both of the political injustice and economic inequality that have provoked such reactionary attitudes, and of the reactions themselves, particularly where the reactions have resulted in atrocities and have violated Muslim norms. His views are discussed in later chapters, in particular in Chapter 6 in the context of stress factors within the Muslim community, and in Chapter 7, where we address his views regarding terrorism and the false attribution of religion to political conflicts.

From an Ismaili perspective, religious fundamentalism, whose chief characteristic is the reduction of religion to its purely outward aspects – the spirit reduced to the letter, the essence to the form – violates the pluralistic foundations of human life that are central to Islam, thereby polarising the *zahiri* dimension at the expense of its *batini* aspects. By emphasising

formal uniformity over essential unity, and conformity over community, it strips religion of its inclusivity and interiority. These are all tendencies that the Aga Khan has strongly opposed, as we shall see, advocating instead a balance between essence and form, and a respect for pluralism, to counter materialistic influences in the domain of religion.

We can understand why the Ismaili Imam has identified the materialist ethos as a threat to society, but to appreciate better the implications of its deleterious effects, we will examine briefly three harmful influences that he has associated with materialism: relativism, individualism and tribalism. As we will see below, it is precisely the opacity implicit in materialism – in other words, its loss of the sense of the sacred – that underlines its failings.

‘Unprincipled Relativism’

Relativism is the loss of objectivity. In his seminal work *Ideas Have Consequences*, the American conservative philosopher Richard M. Weaver (d. 1963) identified the central issue underlying the cognitive (and therefore moral) foundations of human thought when he wrote:

The issue ultimately involved is whether there is a source of truth higher than, and independent of, man; and the answer to the question is decisive for one's view of the nature and destiny of man.³³

Implied in the loss of objectivity, and therefore in the resulting relativism, is an opposition to metaphysical-religious ‘orthodoxy’ (understood here in its etymological sense as ‘right thinking’). Man, as *homo religiosus*, is created for self-transcendence (to realise God as the spiritual foundation of existence), and therefore, even for modernists, the innate religious tendencies within

each individual must find objects of veneration to fill the vacuum of the spiritual centre he has abandoned. His substitutes are inevitably the idols of the material world, mentioned earlier, and of the self, discussed in the next section. A catalogue of some of the 'false gods' which dilute and relativise faith to the level of purely subjective preferences includes the idols of changing fashion, ideological utopias, the false 'glory' of politicised martyrdom in the name of faith, diluted 'New Age' syncretisms, and the virtual realities and predatory recesses of cyberspace. None of these substitutes, however, possesses the criterion of *objective* reality, of wholeness. In each instance, we confront opacity, the lack of an integral connection with the absolute, without the complementarity of transcendence and immanence – of object and subject – that characterises wholeness.

In its quest for objectivity, discursive reason is an inadequate tool, for, in the Quranic perspective, truth is not reducible to reason alone. While, in Muslim thought, truth is held to be innate because it is inscribed in our spiritual nature, the *fitra* (our core being and primordial nature) is very different from the Cartesian *cogito* (referring to Descartes' celebrated phrase, '*cogito, ergo sum*', 'I think, therefore I am'). Normative nature is spiritual, and its cognitive faculty, the intellect, is rooted in a ground of being deeper than the reasoning mind alone.³⁴ One's denial of these ontological roots (the deeper 'being' that connects man and nature), and one's severance from them, creates a rift between the knower and the known. Through this central dichotomy of Enlightenment epistemology, truth becomes subjectively polarised, fragmented and relativised.

The Aga Khan's Islamic world view rejects this disjunctive view of reality: 'Islam does not deal in dichotomies but in all-encompassing unity. Spirit and body are one, man and nature are one.'³⁵ This 'all-encompassing unity' is the integral criterion of cognitive and moral certainty. While there is a strong tradition within Islam of building communal cohesion through consultation

(*shura*) and consensus (*ijma*), there is also an understanding, particularly in the Ismaili and Sufi traditions, that consensus alone – or political populism – is not a reliable criterion of truth, nor therefore of sound ethical foundations. Truth is not reducible to fragmented subjectivities, to the malleable and mutable views of individuals or the masses, even though they may constitute a consensus. Truth, and the knowledge of it, is objective and hierarchical, and derived from metaphysical principles. As the Imam has observed, one must have ‘the courage to live by certain objectives, certain standards,’³⁶ and for him, as a Muslim leader, there are certain essential principles and values which inform the Ismaili world view and constitute the criteria of moral conduct. These include:

- Reality is absolute. Its source is the divine principle which, although veiled, is manifest in the theophany of the creation.
- Humanity, an aspect of the theophany, is created from a ‘single soul’ which is its spirit, and each individual soul is an aspect of the self-same spirit.
- Humans are endowed with an innate intellect, sourced from the spirit and capable, through grace, of accessing the divine intellect (as *logos*), thereby enabling them to discern the signs in the theophany, to perceive its intrinsic sacredness and to know right from wrong.
- There is an inherent dignity in being human which derives from humankind’s spiritual origin and from its intellect.
- There are ethical imperatives – of harmony and equity, social conscience, justice and responsible stewardship – implicit in the integral and sacral nature of reality and in the inherent dignity of human beings.

Without these essential principles and moral foundations, the Aga Khan has cautioned, as noted above, that one ‘will soon be lost on a bleak and barren landscape with no compass or roadmap, no sense of ultimate direction.’³⁷ This ‘bleak and barren

landscape' is precisely that of 'unprincipled relativism' which he described (in his Seerat Conference address, quoted more fully earlier) when he referred to 'a deeply changing pattern of human relations' and its relativistic bases.

Objective standards cannot be based on moral relativism, populism, on changing fashions or even on claims of 'rights' not rooted in principles. And yet, in a world that denies or devalues spiritual matters, and that would deconstruct everything except one's own subjectivity, 'unprincipled relativism' is precisely the outcome. Epistemological cynicism leads inevitably to moral cynicism. Knowledge and morality, in such an unprincipled world, are constructed on shifting sands.

Against this unprincipled modernist morality, the Aga Khan points to a more robust foundation of principles on which to base moral behaviour – one that is opposed to the absolutism of the relative. An illustration of this can be noted in his Seerat Conference address, where, after posing the problem of moral relativism, he invited Muslims to seek for principles and values found 'in the Holy Quran, and in the example of Allah's last and final Prophet'. Chief among the 'fundamental concepts of Islam' is the principle of metaphysical oneness (*tawhid*) and its ethical corollaries, discussed earlier.³⁸

What clearly emerges from the Seerat statement is a concern about the corrosive forces of the Western world ('a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships') and their threat to Muslim society. But the statement also points to, and offers, a solution – one not premised on reductive concepts, mutable norms or homogenising forms of behaviour, but on fundamental principles and values implicit within the core of Islam, accessible to the higher intellect. The Seerat statement affirms faith in the essential unity of being, in a common humanity, and in humanity's perfectibility as exemplified in the prophetic norm³⁹ (which is linked to human nature and the idea of the perfectibility of man) as the model for one's way of life.

In this way the Ismaili Imam points to, in Weaver's words, quoted earlier, 'a source of truth higher than, and independent of, man' – to a criterion which, though immanent in the *fitra* and the higher intellect, is rooted in transcendence – and it is for this reason that his principles are of universal application. This universality does not derogate from their objectivity. This is an important factor to bear in mind, especially when examining the Aga Khan's advocacy of pluralism (which we will come to later), which is not a 'big tent' approach that simplistically embraces every value, viewpoint or attitude indiscriminately. In the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, a prominent advocate of cosmopolitanism, 'there are limits to cosmopolitan tolerance ... Toleration requires a concept of the *intolerable*.'⁴⁰ Similarly, the Aga Khan promotes a principled pluralism, one that is not uncritical or latitudinarian. His approach seeks to balance the universal and the particular, without sacrificing universality to diversity, or vice versa. Its objectivity renders it capable of distinguishing 'between fruitful and destructive diversity, between legitimate and illegitimate self-assertion, between personal creativity and mere idiosyncrasy'.⁴¹

In all this we have been emphasising the Aga Khan's principal approach, founded on metaphysical principles that view reality as all-encompassing, and where the material world is therefore but a dimension of a transcendent spiritual reality. It seeks to be grounded in objective realities, not in the subjectivities of mere consensual norms or personal preferences. It understands that the lack of an objective criterion risks polarising the subject, and this is precisely the danger of individualism, the topic we next examine.

'Self-Serving Individualism'

Identity is fundamental to humanity, and in Islam, as for faith traditions generally, identity extends beyond the psycho-physical

realm to a spiritual dimension associated with the created 'single soul' and the transcendent realm that is its origin. True individuality in Islam, therefore, is not self-contained, not cut off from the transcendent or from the obligations inherent in wholeness. Rather, the individual, clothed uniquely with qualities that originate in God, is an aspect of theophany. To paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, we are spirits who have been lent bodies.⁴² In Islam therefore, each individual has intrinsic dignity, which should be respected. Individualism, by contrast, is an ideology that cuts man off from his spiritual roots, thereby severing him from binding wholeness, with the result that the 'persona' denies any higher participative selfhood, conceiving of the 'self' in narrow atomistic terms. This is the transgressive self which, in Shakespearean terminology, is 'disbranched' and 'self-covered', condemning its own origin.⁴³ In contrast to the individualism which lacks a metaphysical foundation (mistaking the psychic persona for the true selfhood of *fitra*), a healthy sense of individuality consciously attaches itself to the spirit, while deriving its selfhood as a unique expression of it.⁴⁴ This unique expression of individuality stems from the Quranic notion that each creature is endowed with certain individual qualities and attributes conferred upon it from the divine treasury '*in a known measure*' (Q 15:21).⁴⁵ This unique conferment of a particular formal identity, as distinct from the innate universal nature (*fitra*) that is common to humanity, lies at the heart of what it means to be an 'individual' in Islam. It is also central to the ethic of pluralism, which celebrates the diversity of individuality as an expression of theophany.

Islam, therefore, is not opposed to individuality. On the contrary, as the Aga Khan has emphasised, 'individuality [is] ... something strongly upheld in the Islamic faith'.⁴⁶ It is part of the inherent dignity of being human. That is the basis upon which, for example, the rights of women are upheld in Islam – an aspect that is much misunderstood, but which is related to

the legitimate bounds of human freedom. The following extract illustrates the Aga Khan's view of the relationship between transgressive freedom and the objectification of women, which results in an unacceptable denial of their individuality:

In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were no more than chattels, sold at the market like cattle. When Islam was in its nascent stages, the followers of Islam decided that this situation was unjust. In Islam, men must respect women and women must respect men. Nevertheless, we are also concerned with avoiding any abuse of freedom that might cause women to be regarded as objects as they are perceived by certain schools of thought in the West. Islam firmly rejects the notion of woman as [an] object. In future, even beyond the Muslim world, I believe it will be the abuse of freedom that fuels debate. Indeed, in 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'.⁴⁷

It is clear from this that the notion of individuality and the freedom it implies has certain bounds. It is subject to what we might term 'the principle of measure' and must be tempered by a posture of humility before the divine. Humility here is an expression of one's submission to the divine order, to the limits of one's primordial nature and to an innate sense of obligation, reflected in the human conscience. Such submission also lies at the heart of Islam's message of peace.⁴⁸ At the same time, within the limits of the divine order, Islam celebrates the multifaceted uniqueness within diversity, and upholds the right of self-expression as an aspect of individuality. This combination of ethical bounds and respect for individuality is at the heart of the Ismaili Imam's communal vision, which, he stresses, is 'to contribute to building a cosmopolitan ethic, a human ethic, without giving up (one's) identity'.⁴⁹

Community

Individuality, a conjunctive notion (and ‘dialogical’, in Charles Taylor’s terminology),⁵⁰ contrasts therefore with individualism, which is disjunctive (and ‘monological’). A healthy respect for individuality is premised on wholeness and is the foundation for a healthy community, whose solidarity is an expression of that wholeness. By contrast, individualism risks dulling the joy of life, for, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, it lacks that ‘harmony and affection without which liberty, and even life itself, are but dreary things’.⁵¹

As modernism reifies the world, so it deifies the self – in the former case through its focus on materialism, and in the latter through its focus on individualism. The modernist ethos, lacking appreciation for a more spiritual or religious way of approaching the world, tends to fragment society.⁵² In Islamic thought, once the individual is cut off from his spiritual roots, his focus becomes ‘self-serving’ and therefore divisive. Self-serving individualism is completely contrary to notions of harmony and community found in all faith traditions. Commenting on the harmful effects of divisive individualism, the Aga Khan has observed:

We often determine ‘who we are’ by determining who we are against. This fragmenting impulse not only separates peoples from one another, it also subdivides communities and then it subdivides the subdivisions. It leads to what some have called the ‘fraying’ of society, in which communities come to resemble a worn-out cloth, as its tight weave separates into individual strands. But the human inclination to divisiveness is accompanied, I deeply believe, by a profound human impulse to bridge divisions. And often the more secure we are in our own identities, the more effective we can be in reaching out to others.⁵³

For the Aga Khan, this ‘profound impulse to bridge divisions’ is born of a deep spiritual intuition – the faith in life as intrinsically

interwoven in the sacred fabric of the spirit, where individual identity is subsumed within the identity of the universal 'single soul' that is its origin. This metaphysical basis of 'community' is the antithesis of 'self-serving individualism'. Embedded in community is a pluralistic acceptance that is essential for it – and for the individuals who comprise it – to exist and function as responsible humans. We will examine this outlook in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In passing, we can also note here the isolating effects of modern technologies such as the Internet and social media, which create the illusion of community because they offer, in Prince Karim's words, 'connectivity' without 'connection'.⁵⁴ This is part of a larger concern about the potentially dehumanising effects of certain aspects of technology, which can draw us away from the real into the virtual, from a full engagement with life into a retreat from it (into a 'cave of virtuality' – a modern-day version of the cave in Plato's Allegory of the Cave), and from a true sense of selfhood and community into its ersatz counterfeits (digital 'avatars' and online 'communities').

According to Islam, true communities, by contrast, both reflect the spirit that is their foundation and perfect the individual that is their expression. The Imam has cited the following line from Muhammad Iqbal on this point: 'For the individual to be bound to society is a blessing: it is in a community that his work is perfected.'⁵⁵ The bond between the individual and the community is fundamental to the Muslim faith. The ethic of community is inherent in Islam and is central to the Ismaili *tariqa*, which blends the ideals of individuality and community so that each individual's God-given gifts are employed within a social ethic that serves the greater good.

A metaphor of community as a spiritual link between individuals is found in Farid al-Din Attar's story, *Mantiq al-Tayr* (Conference of the Birds) in which a group of birds, each representing a privative aspect of individuality, journeys in

search of the legendary Simurgh to be their king. The Simurgh is imagined to be their quintessence. Through the journey's spiritual trials, after traversing valleys that test their endurance, only thirty birds survive to reach the mythical creature's dwelling. These survivors realise at the end of their quest that they are themselves the 'Simurgh'. The word in Persian is a composite of *si* (thirty) and *murgh* (bird). At one level, the tale symbolises that our highest aspiration lies within our own nature, but, at another, it illustrates that it is in the transcending reality of community (the earthly realisation of our spiritual matrix) that a person's individual aspirations are fully achieved.

We have seen how the Aga Khan positions relationships as a way to enhance individuality, 'not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge'.⁵⁶ In the words of the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (d. 2017), 'self-knowledge develops through knowledge of the Other'.⁵⁷ The quintessence of knowledge for 'reflective' man, who is the astrolabe of God, is the light of the heavens contained within the polished mirror of his soul, which radiates in theophany and in the prototype of the enlightened community. The communal nature of an enlightened humanity – of individuals enriched by self-knowledge – is symbolised in the Aga Khan Museum's motif of light, of which the Prince Karim has commented: 'This use of light speaks to us of the Divine Light of the Creator, reflected in the glow of individual human inspiration and vibrant, transparent community'.⁵⁸ Again, he is pointing to the spiritual foundations of his ethical vision, recalling the famous Light verse of the Quran, cited earlier, where the sacred symbol of light reflects, in part, the intrinsic and ethical integrity of individual and community, an equilibrium expressed in the Quranic ideal of the Umma as a *middle community* (Q 2:143),⁵⁹ a just community, of harmony between outer and inner norms, and individual and social needs.

Freedom and Licence

Certain fragmenting pressures today work against this integrated ethical understanding of the world. Chief among them is unbridled freedom, with its individualistic focus on self-interest and self-indulgence that frays the social fabric. In his commencement address at Harvard in June 1978, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn lamented the 'moral poverty' of the 20th century, and singled out for criticism the West's 'destructive and irresponsible freedom' as among the forces that were propelling society into 'the abyss of human decadence' and to 'its present state of spiritual exhaustion'.⁶⁰ As the Aga Khan has observed, 'when freedoms have become license, society tends to disaggregate'.⁶¹ Outer disaggregation reflects inner diffusion. Plato, in the *Republic*, noted that excessive liberty is conducive to both slavery and tyranny.⁶² Similarly, Edmund Burke (d. 1797) emphasised the Confucian virtue of moderation in the exercise of freedom, noting unbridled freedom's potential for the destruction of the moral fabric, and of social and individual well-being: 'The extreme of liberty (which is its abstract perfection, but its real fault) obtains nowhere, nor ought to obtain anywhere; because extremes ... are destructive to both virtue and enjoyment'.⁶³

Tyrannical and licentious behaviour contrasts with the Quranic view of human freedom, which, understood as a divine gift for which man is accountable to God, requires one to have humility before God, and respect for human life and for the norms of dignity and civility implied by one's primordial nature. In this view, freedom is the privilege of expressing one's true nature. In terms of its concomitant responsibility, freedom is bounded by humility and natural self-restraint. In the Islamic tradition, the limits of human freedom derive from the natural bond between man and God (which Tennyson describes as 'golden chains')⁶⁴ and from the concomitant

obligation of humankind to conform to its God-given nature. It is noteworthy that the very term, 'nature', has a cognate – the term 'kind' ('kinde' in Middle English) – which denotes that the true nature of humanity is 'kindness', echoing the Quranic view that God has prescribed Mercy (compassion or kindness) unto Himself as a law (Q 6:12). Just as God's freedom, though it is absolute, does not transgress the divine nature, so too human freedom, though it is potentially transgressive, ought not to transgress the norm of the *fitra*, the limit of the soul's primordial nature.

The scriptural balance between freedom and responsibility is also illustrated in humanity's free acceptance of the divine trust (Q 33:72, cited above) through which all humans became God's vicegerent (*khalifa*), while remaining God's servant (*'abd*). A human being is *khalifa* only by virtue of being *'abd*, and has freedoms only by virtue of having responsibilities. 'Responsibility' is a measure of one's 'ability to respond' to one's innate nature and the fiduciary obligations of the divine trust. Ethics, understood in this way, are based on the principle of *noblesse oblige*. The greater one's authority, the greater one's responsibility, as Imam Ali underlined in a letter to the governor in Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar (d. 658), stating: 'Malik, you must never forget that if you are a ruler over them [the people], then the Caliph is the ruler over you, and God is the supreme Lord over the Caliph.'⁶⁵ Freedom, viewed in terms of its concomitant spiritual responsibility, is not an absolute right, as is often claimed in Western societies which conflate rights and freedoms. It is a reflection of man as the trustee of God, so that freedom operates in harmony with the natural order, and not graspingly in violation of it.

On the abuse of freedom, Prince Karim has commented: 'Freedom, in any area of human activity, does not mean the moral license to abuse that freedom.'⁶⁶ This begs the question, 'What, then, are the legitimate boundaries of freedom?' The

issue is periodically highlighted in his speeches concerning press freedom. The Aga Khan's comments relating to the limits of press freedom provide an insight into his views regarding individual and social freedoms generally. As the founder of the Nation Media Group in East Africa, the Aga Khan has often observed that press freedoms must be exercised responsibly, with a sense of social accountability:

A free press is not simply a press free to criticise as an end in itself. In many developed countries, freedom of the press has often come to mean license to behave irresponsibly ... There is inevitably, of course, a grey area between criticism which is clearly unacceptable or irresponsible and comment which is critical but remains objective, well informed, responsible and constructive.⁶⁷

These comments are especially pertinent in the Internet age of Twitter, Facebook, blogs and social media, and in the climate of our 'post-fact society' of multiple purveyors of news – including 'fake news' – where factional and individualistic interests tend to supplant responsible or objective reporting.⁶⁸ The Aga Khan believes that the press should not be caught up in 'that obsessive individualism which seems so rampant in our world, an expectation that we must make our way in life through a sort of meritocratic free-for-all, ignoring those who are hurt in the process and those who are left behind'.⁶⁹ 'Too often,' he notes, 'the right of an individual or the right of a publication to unfettered self-expression is enshrined as the most sacred of all values – independent of its impact on social or moral standards.'⁷⁰

The Imam laments that 'this so-called freedom of the press has reached a state of such license that virtually anything can be printed'.⁷¹ The absolutisation of freedom is hubristic, and whatever its form, whether personal, social, tribal, ethnic, religious, nationalistic, commercial, or, as in this example, pertaining to the press,

constitutes a violation of norms of decency and accountability – norms that are of immense value in gauging the proper bounds of civil expression. Such normative bounds are a measure by which societies can expose transgressive behaviour and challenge the legitimacy of controversial publications undertaken in the name of ‘free press’, such as the notorious Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (depicting him as a terrorist), or the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in France (depicting him pornographically), which, while tolerable to certain advocates of profane norms of ‘free expression’, understandably outraged Muslim communities globally and were offensive in the extreme to the norms of decency of many others.

A lesson to be learned from these examples of overreaching behaviour is that there is no true freedom without the respect for human dignity. Freedom is normative insofar as it is in harmony with the sacred, when it operates within bounds of decency, with a sense of wholeness and of the humility and responsibilities which it entails, and it is transgressive insofar as it overreaches those limits through ignorance, arrogance or insensitivity.

Ignorance, Arrogance and Insensitivity

In the view of the Ismaili Imam, ignorance, arrogance and insensitivity are attitudes that ‘rank high among the great public enemies of our time.’⁷² These, each in their own way, represent a transgression of propriety and integrity, and are individualistic excesses that undermine the potential for human dignity and communality – in the case of ignorance and arrogance, through a self-encasing lack of humility that creates a barrier to knowledge and spiritual growth; and in the case of insensitivity, by unfeeling self-centredness that bars empathy. These barriers are mutually reinforcing. In Chapter 5, we will look at how ‘knowledge gaps’ can lead to ‘empathy gaps’. And – an important point to bear in mind for educators – the reverse is also true.

On the issue of ignorance, the Aga Khan has spoken of a mutual ‘clash of ignorance’ between Muslims and the Western world, which we will discuss later, but he has also stressed that modern technologies like the Internet and social media can create an illusion of knowledge and often provide unreliable, trivial and superficial information, offering a further example of how excessive freedoms can diminish humanity. For the Aga Khan, by drowning in superficial information, modern man is losing a sense of integrity, of wholeness. To bring home this point, Prince Karim has quoted the following lines from T.S. Eliot (d. 1965), which are hauntingly applicable to our times:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?⁷³

The second ‘public enemy’ that the Aga Khan cites is arrogance, whose corrective is humility. In religious terms, humility is a prototypically ‘Adamic’ virtue. According to the scriptures, Adam was made partly of base ‘clay’, as the Hebrew word *adama* signifies (‘clay’ is also linked to the word for the nurturing yet lowly soil, ‘humus’, from which the terms ‘human’ and ‘humility’ derive). Humility is an aspect of the human acceptance of transcendence or existential limitation. It is a way of opening oneself to what one does not know or feel, and is a prerequisite to overcoming the barriers of ignorance and insensitivity. It is therefore fundamental to the ethic of pluralism, and is one of the reasons why the Aga Khan has focused on cultural sensitivity as an important component of pluralism, as we will discuss below. For now, we simply highlight that the Aga Khan singles out the roots of all three traits – ignorance, arrogance, insensitivity – as being individualism.

As an antidote to these individualistic traits, the Aga Khan has on many occasions cited the following passage from one

of the sermons of Imam Ali: 'No honour is like knowledge, no belief is like modesty and patience, no attainment is like humility, no power is like forbearance, and no support is more reliable than consultation.'⁷⁴ Explaining its significance, he said

The virtues endorsed by Hazrat Ali are qualities which subordinate the self and emphasise others: modesty, patience, humility, forbearance and consultation. What he is telling us is that the best path to knowledge is to admit first what it is we do not know, and to open our minds to what others can teach us.⁷⁵

Imam Ali's emphasis on virtues grounded in humility and moderation constitute a corrective to the unbridled individualism that the Aga Khan has criticised. Echoing his forebear's sense of the believer's place before God, the Aga Khan's attitude regarding human capabilities is captured in the following sentiment, which is also a practical justification for humility: 'I believe that with the human mind we can go only so far and that thereafter we must leave the rest to time and the blessings of the Almighty.'⁷⁶

'Resurgent Tribalism'

We noted earlier the Aga Khan's view of the reductive foundations of modernism. In the context of a globalised world, where societies are increasingly thrust into encounters with the Other, there is an urgent need to look beyond our narrow identities without diluting them. The process of globalisation can either exacerbate divisions or it can intensify the need for inclusivity. It can either widen the gap between the rich and the poor or it can become the impetus for seeking a better life for all. It can either stimulate the tribal instinct or it can compel the quest for a cosmopolitan spirit in humanity.

Muslims view diversity as an act of divine benevolence. They hold that God made humankind into communities and tribes so that they may know one another (Q 49:13). Yet, if our disparate identities cannot be transcended and understood in terms of our common humanity, if they are only viewed in reductive terms, then there is a danger that they will either be homogenised or tribalised, and this will inevitably lead to conflicts. There is, therefore, in the Aga Khan's words, 'the danger that globalization will become homogenization',⁷⁷ or that we will become falsely invested in 'myopic commitments to "identity"'.⁷⁸ Thus, he remarks, 'one of the great questions of our time is whether we can learn to live creatively with both the global and the tribal impulse'.⁷⁹ This question is taking on a sense of urgency in a world where mass migrations, particularly from the Muslim world into parts of Europe, are creating a sense of insecurity in some corners of the Western world, and are raising tribalistic, nationalistic and provincialist impulses of the sort that led, in the 20th century, to major conflicts including two world wars and the mass exterminations of millions of people.

The problem of tribalism in a globalised age cannot be resolved by the simplistic and uncritical embracing of diversity. When does the fostering of diversity itself encourage ghettoisation? At what point do identity politics become divisive? For the Ismaili Imam, these complex questions call for solutions grounded in empathy, cultural sensitivity, openness to dialogue, and a commitment to the practice of pluralism as human creativity. The question underlying the issue of diversity and its perceived threats to identity requires each of us to consider how we can, through 'creative encounters' with the Other, live harmoniously, while respecting diversity.⁸⁰ The answer to this requires us to be intellectually open and flexible to conversing with those who hold contrary views,

while remaining true to essential principles and values, and to be culturally sensitive and empathetic to the Other, while being true to our own identities. As with the Aga Khan's methodologies for confronting change, which we discussed in Chapter 3, so too the qualities he calls for in confronting the challenges of diversity are those that he has characterised as 'fluid, progressive, open-ended, intellectually informed, and spiritually inspired traditions of thought'.⁸¹ He emphasises that societies must forego the urge to eliminate diversity. They must 'resist the temptation to normalise any particular culture, to demonise the Other, and to turn healthy diversity into dangerous discord'.⁸² Stressing 'the importance of resisting both assimilation and homogenisation – the subordination and dilution of minority cultures on the one hand, or an attempt to create some new, transcendent blend of identities, on the other'⁸³ – he asks 'How can human-kind honour what is distinctive about our separate identities and, at the same time, see diversity itself as a source of inspiration and blessing?'⁸⁴

Prince Karim has succinctly encapsulated the challenge in the following statement: 'Diversification without disintegration, this is the greatest challenge of our time'.⁸⁵ His solution to this challenge lies not in promoting the false 'either-or-choice between the global and the tribal, between the concept of universal belonging and the value of particular identities',⁸⁶ but rather in urging upon us a cosmopolitan outlook, 'respecting both what we have in common and what makes us different'.⁸⁷ We will discuss this outlook – founded on notions of 'a common humanity' and of 'openness to diversity' – more fully in Chapter 5.

Responding to his own question, cited earlier in this chapter, about how to inspire people to rise above the cynicism of the times and the deleterious influences of modernism, the Aga Khan has said

One answer is to augment our focus on personal prerogatives and individual rights, with an expanded concern for personal responsibilities and communal goals. A passion for justice, the quest for equality, a respect for tolerance, a dedication to human dignity – these are universal human values which are broadly shared across divisions of class, race, language, faith and geography. They constitute what classical philosophers, in the East and West alike, have described as human ‘Virtue’ – not merely the absence of negative restraints on individual freedom, but also a set of positive responsibilities, moral disciplines which prevent liberty from turning into license.⁸⁸

This response, which was offered during the Aga Khan’s discussion of the importance of integrity in public life, highlights his view of the ethical foundations of integrity generally and his appeal to an outlook that is underscored by values which can be applied universally. It is important to recall here that the term ‘integrity’ offers two interrelated meanings: of wholeness, and of moral rectitude grounded in a respect for human dignity. They relate to his ethical imperatives of harmony and of equity, of tolerance and justice (both mentioned in his above response). These values are not sectarian but have broad appeal. They are not overtly faith-based but underpinned by an inclusive and caring ethic that is implicitly rooted in a spiritual dimension.

In advocating ‘an expanded concern for personal responsibilities and communal goals’ and a conception of human virtue based on a balance between freedom and responsibility, Prince Karim’s approach is founded on spiritual principles and values which underlie his call (mentioned in Chapter 3) for ‘a thorough rediscovery, revitalisation and reintegration’ of Muslim values.⁸⁹ Yet the call is not couched in overtly theological language but in a discourse appealing to people of all faiths and persuasions. It is this universality that makes the

Ismaili Imam's approach unique and particularly attractive to Muslims and non-Muslims alike – even to those who seek to confront the challenges of modernism from a predominantly secular or humanistic perspective. It is a cosmopolitan and pluralistic approach, and it is to an examination of this ethic that we now turn.



Sultan Mehmet II and the investiture of Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios, c.1454. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Fener, Istanbul, Turkey.

Pluralism and the Cosmopolitan Ethic

Pluralism and the Principle of Inclusiveness

As cosmopolitanism is the ethic of harmonious and equitable coexistence, so pluralism is the ethic of the dignified dialogue with diversity in order to attain harmony and equity. Cosmopolitanism is based on the principle of our common humanity. It embraces complexity and opposes both simplistic provincialism¹ and the peripheral perspectives of identity politics. Pluralism, founded on the principle of inclusiveness, is based on a respect for human individuality and, concomitantly, on a respect for the richness of diversity and theophany as an aspect of wholeness.

The principle of inclusiveness can be seen as having ‘metaphysical’ roots: its foundation is the unity that underlies multiplicity, and it is reflected in the Quranic verse, cited above, about the intrinsic oneness of mankind, created from ‘a single soul’ (Q 4:1). Underlining its importance, the Aga Khan has described this verse as a ‘touchstone’, whose message he has ‘long treasured and sought to apply’, one he regards as ‘a spiritual legacy which distinguishes the human race from all other forms of life.’² Any universal ethos requires a universal foundation, and it is on this conception of a unified humanity as an aspect of all-encompassing reality that the Imam has chosen to underpin

the Imamāt's work in constructing a bridge between faith and ethics. This ideal underlies the broad values mentioned in the Ismaili Constitution, 'of unity, brotherhood, justice, tolerance and goodwill',³ and the Imamāt's emphasis on the humanistic value of tolerance – a quality which the Aga Khan has described as 'a sacred religious imperative'⁴ – a quality of 'the human spirit, guided and supported by the Divine Will'.⁵

Pluralism is a vital part of Islam. The Quran's cosmopolitan and inclusive message – which teaches man to have faith in all-encompassing reality and to live in accord with its sacred ethical imperatives – is inherently pluralistic. The Muslim scripture is not exclusivist. On the contrary, it contains a confirmatory and universal message (Q 3:48),⁶ affirming the principles expressed in what are considered the revelations that preceded it (Q 10:37), received not only through those regarded as the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition, but also through the myriad messengers considered to be sent by God throughout history to humanity's many diverse communities (Q 10:47, 16:36, 40:78).⁷ The Quran does not discriminate spiritually among communities based on their race or ethnicity, or even the fact that certain groups are not Muslims in the narrow sectarian sense in which that term is commonly understood. The Quranic term 'Muslim' in fact refers to anyone who possesses the integrating faith that manifests in virtue. For example, the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) is described as a 'Muslim' in Q 3:67,⁸ although he preceded the historical advent of Islam. So also, in considering one's fitness for salvation, the scripture does not rank people as superior or inferior according to affiliation, but considers their souls, intentions and deeds. Thus, the only criteria for salvation in Islam are, firstly, *faith* in the transcendent, originating, underlying and sustaining reality which binds us all, and to which we are ultimately accountable, and secondly, the expression of that faith as conforming *virtue* (Q 2:62, 2:111–12, 4:122, 4:124–5).⁹ These requirements of faith

and virtue correspond to Imam Ali's criteria of truth and justice (discussed in Chapter 4).

In the Ismaili view, just as faith entails virtue, so the principle of inclusiveness mandates 'ethical imperatives', promoting harmony and equity as the ethos necessary for an equitable social order. Pluralism thereby reflects the metaphysics of participation, in which humanity – unique and distinct in its diversity, but intrinsically one – possesses an underlying harmony and a dynamic participatory wholeness that is essential to its ethical life. A healthy sense of community and the dignity of the individual man and woman are essential to its expression.

The Quranic principle of inclusiveness is the basis for its ethical imperatives. Metaphysically, the diversity of creation reflects the non-repetition of theophany, which requires our acceptance of its ever-changing variety, and therefore of the Other. At the same time, it requires us to look beyond the 'representation' of the changing outer world to the abiding and underlying presence that is the inner source and matrix of all change. The Other and the self are both aspects of the one and only reality. This inclusive approach is the foundation of human ethical conduct and social order, entailing a participatory engagement of human intelligence and effort.

The Aga Khan has emphasised 'an understanding of the Holy Quran as a message that encompasses the entirety of human existence and effort', including its ethics:¹⁰

It is concerned with the salvation of the soul, but commensurately also with the ethical imperatives which sustain an equitable social order. The Quran'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.¹¹

In this inclusive scheme, all of humankind is enjoined to vie with one another in good works (Q 5:48) – in other words, to

engage in acts of creative virtue through an ethic of inclusiveness and compassion, harmony and equity, tolerance and generosity, respectful of human dignity. These virtues, universal in their appeal, and founded on an integral vision that sustains their ethical imperatives, inform the cosmopolitan ethic of the Ismaili Imam.

A Cosmopolitan Ethic

Flowing from the idea that humanity is one is the idea that it must be subject to a common set of ethical norms. Because its spiritual foundations are based on a shared understanding of the common human bond, moral behaviour cannot be limited to religious prescriptions. Its sources lie in ontology, not in the confines of exoteric discourse, and therefore what binds humanity together cannot be effectively promoted through narrow theological frameworks or polemically-driven religious ideology. Each religion expresses general norms in particular ways. They each express universal principles through forms which can be narrowly construed, or use theological idioms that are not necessarily understood or accepted outside the contexts of their adherents, and which, due to the proselytism inherent in theological discourse, can promote divisions among groups rather than help to bridge differences. A further problem arises in respect of those who see themselves as largely non-religious. This is especially significant in the modern age where secularist cynicism poses an added threat to religious formulations of morality. For all these reasons, there is a need for prudence in addressing ethical formulations in overtly religious or theological language.

For the Aga Khan, cosmopolitanism is a way of promoting faith-based values outside the narrow – and to some, threatening or divisive – framework of religious discourse. Thus he has remarked: ‘I have serious doubts about the ecumenical discourse,

and about what it can reach, but I do not have any doubts about cosmopolitan ethics.¹² Elsewhere he observed:

In recent decades, inter-faith dialogue has been occurring in numerous countries. Unfortunately, every time the word 'faith' is used in such a context, there is an inherent supposition that lurking at the side is the issue of proselytisation. But faith, after all, is only one aspect of human society. Therefore, we must approach this issue today within the dimension of civilisations learning about each other, and speaking to each other, and not exclusively through the more narrow focus of inter-faith dialectic.¹³

Since 'there will always be limits in inter-religious dialogue', the Aga Khan's approach is to engage groups on the basis of unifying humanistic principles.¹⁴ 'Recognising that 'a cosmopolitan ethic is one that resonates with the world's great ethical and religious traditions', his strategy has been to promote ethical values principally outside the context of theological articulations or inter-faith ecumenism.¹⁵ Instead, he advocates an inclusive approach that respects diversity, through a cosmopolitan ethic 'shared across divisions of class, race, language, faith and geography',¹⁶ that 'accepts our ultimate moral responsibility to the whole of humanity, rather than absolutising a presumably exceptional part'.¹⁷ He views the cosmopolitan ethic as one benefitting 'the whole of humanity', *'where the unity of the human race becomes an ethical purpose for all faiths'*.¹⁸

Cosmopolitanism, while it opposes provincialism, respects the diversity of plural identities, traditions and cultures. Accompanied by 'a readiness to accept the complexity of human society', it places value on the unique gifts of creation, in individual expression or in the particularity of traditions, and it appreciates diverse cultural values as an aspect of the heritage and identity of communities.¹⁹ In practice, therefore, the cosmopolitan ethic implies 'a readiness to participate in a true dialogue

with diversity.²⁰ It is based on a healthy pluralism, ‘respecting both what we have in common and what makes us different.’²¹ Because it ‘regards the distinctive threads of our particular identities as elements that bring beauty to the larger social fabric,’ its focus is on the whole person, on the community of communities, and not merely on outward affiliations or distinct faith identities.²² It extends to the full complex of diverse gifts that make each individual person or particular community unique, viewing them through the prism of their integral harmony. The cosmopolitan outlook entails an ethical engagement with life’s complexity and diversity, thereby acknowledging, on the one hand, that the building of healthy relationships mandates reasonable limitations to individual freedoms by affirming that social conscience has a communal value, while, on the other, also respecting the human dignity of self-expression by recognising the value of cooperative aspects of individual empowerment.

Despite the Aga Khan’s disinclination towards interfaith discourses because of their potential to be divisive, he underscores that the ethical bond between human beings has deep spiritual roots. Ethical integrity derives from faith in an integrated reality, without which – according to the Karamazovian dictum – the danger is that ‘everything is permitted.’²³ The Aga Khan has often articulated this ethical bond, acknowledging that his own ‘commitment to the principle of tolerance is based on spiritual understandings which are rooted in ancient teachings.’²⁴ Note, for instance, the following passage, where he is speaking of the cosmopolitan ethic:

It will not surprise you to have me say that such an ethic can grow with enormous power out of the spiritual dimensions of our lives. In acknowledging the immensity of the Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding.²⁵

Ismailis believe that it is in acknowledging the infinite greatness of God ('the immensity of the Divine') that diverse human groups can recognise their own common humanity and also that each person can recognise his or her own individual limitations. It is in humility and wholeness that one can discover the basis for mutual interdependence, and can recognise the value of the ethic of cooperation, harmony, generosity, fairness and caring for the Other. On this view, each person becomes spiritually committed to the Other in the quest for the common good. Citing as examples the Quranic principle of the unity of humankind, and Imam Ali's integration of knowledge with tolerance, the Aga Khan has stated:

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.²⁶

The 'common quest' – the goal of the cosmopolitan ethic – is for the just society that constitutes the common good. This is the underlying basis for social order, the balancing of freedom and responsibility conducive to respecting human dignity and social justice, and to the attainment of the good life to which all communities aspire.

Social order rests in the end either on oppression or accommodation. But we can never find that balancing point – where the interests of all parties are recognised – unless competing leaders and their diverse followers alike, are committed to finding common ground. That common ground, in my view, is the global aspiration for a better quality of life – from the reduction of poverty to quality longevity – built upon opportunities that will provide genuine hope for the future.²⁷

A just social order is founded on the common good of a better quality of life for all, and filled with opportunity and hope for the

future. The Aga Khan's appeal, in the end, is to promote those shared values that profoundly connect us, and which ultimately enable us to overcome our outer differences.

Building a Culture of Pluralism

As a promoter of pluralism, the Aga Khan has stressed its importance within an increasingly globalised world. As people today are forced to confront their differences, pluralism requires them to ask more profound questions about their competing rights, and to search for a moral foundation for coexistence. Prince Karim proposes precisely such a foundation:

In an increasingly cosmopolitan world, it is essential that we live by a 'cosmopolitan ethic', one that addresses the age-old need to balance the particular and the universal, to honour both human rights and social duties, to advance personal freedom and to accept human responsibility.²⁸

On several occasions, he has lamented that the spirit of cosmopolitanism is not keeping pace with the diversity of globalisation: 'Sadly, the world is becoming more pluralist in fact, but not necessarily in spirit. "Cosmopolitan" social patterns have not yet been matched by "a cosmopolitan ethic"'.²⁹ A culture of pluralism is crucial to promoting the goal of the just society that is vital to cosmopolitanism.

The Imam has underlined the need for a stabilising culture of civil discourse, a pluralistic culture of tolerance, of 'not only accepting, but embracing human difference'.³⁰ Such tolerance mandates balancing the particular and the universal so that societies do not become either homogenised or atomised, and do not allow individual freedoms to become transgressive nor be eclipsed by the needs of the community. This view of tolerance is reflected, for example, in the following passage from Goethe:

A generalised tolerance will be best achieved if we leave undisturbed whatever it is which constitutes the special character of particular individuals and peoples, whilst at the same time we retain the conviction that the distinctive worth of anything with true merit lies in its belonging to all humanity.³¹

Tolerance requires people to embrace their unique gifts and talents. In the words of a native artist from Canada, Roy Henry Vickers, 'We are all created equal with special gifts and if we reach out to each other in sharing these gifts, we all become richer.'³² In Islam, this sharing is combined with a healthy intellectual curiosity regarding the individual gifts of each person which Muslims believe God has given. It is this belief that is the basis of cultural respect and tolerance. An example of this can be found in the writings of the Persian polymath al-Biruni (d. 1050), who, among his many talents, was a historian of religions. His open-mindedness towards other faiths stands as a reminder of the universalism of Islam mentioned earlier and of its pluralistic respect for other traditions. It is displayed, for instance, in his celebrated account of Hinduism, *Tarikh al-Hind*, in which he impartially sought to represent Hindu beliefs, including those that were outwardly opposed to his own faith.

In order to maintain a healthy balance of freedom and responsibility, true tolerance requires understanding and empathy, intellectual curiosity and the willingness to engage with, and relate to, the Other based on a sense of one's shared humanity. This in turn requires a shift from a monological to a dialogical viewpoint that opens into a willingness to seek genuine and humane accommodations to bridge differences. It also calls for, in the Aga Khan's words, 'a vital sense of balance, an abundant capacity for compromise, more than a little sense of patience, an appropriate degree of humility, a good measure of forgiveness, and, of course, a genuine welcoming of human difference.'³³

In addition to promoting tolerant harmony, a pluralistic culture is vital to resolving disputes in an equitable manner, in a way that honours human dignity and promotes justice. An example of such pluralism in action can be found in an episode from the early life of the Prophet Muhammad, preceding his prophetic mission, in which various Meccan clans were vying for the honour of carrying the venerated Black Stone of the Kaaba to the renovated holy mosque and placing it in its slot at the eastern corner. The problem seemed intractable because to favour a particular clan was to disfavour the others and to cause them to lose face. The disputants, unable to resolve the matter themselves, decided to abide by the decision of the next passer-by, who happened to be Muhammad. His solution was to lay the sacred stone on a cloak, which was then held at the edges by a representative of each of the vying clans, and carried in that fashion to the Kaaba, where Muhammad then, with the consent of the disputants, slotted it in. By his Solomonic wisdom and creative virtue, he preserved the honour of all the clans.

Diversification without Disintegration

It is crucially important to cultivate cosmopolitanism and pluralism as cohesive influences in a divisive and disintegrating world. The Aga Khan has observed that 'At the same time that the world (is) becoming more interconnected, it also becomes more fragmented.'³⁴ As our world has globalised, it has experienced a paradoxical disintegration – in the line from William Butler Yeats (d. 1939), 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.'³⁵ Encounters among different peoples have created crowded spaces, and these spaces have frequently become zones of conflict. In an increasingly globalised world, people with insecure identities are threatened by change, by difference, and by a confrontation with the Other.

The solution advocated by the Aga Khan to this disintegration is the nurturing of a pluralistic culture and a healthy

engagement with diversity. This involves neither reducing difference to sameness (reductionism and homogenisation through a form of cultural Esperanto or of a 'McWorld'), nor accommodating it through ghettoisation (relativism and exclusion).³⁶ What is called for instead is an approach of 'balancing the universal and the particular, the global and the local',³⁷ of sharing space generously with the Other so that we can (in the words of President Kennedy) 'help make the world safe for diversity'.³⁸ This is vital to preventing social conflict and disintegration.

One danger of rejecting the richness of diversity – an idea rooted in the paradox of multiple identities coexisting within the unifying space that is the spirit of humanity – is that it inevitably leads to fragmentation and conflict. This outer conflict is the projection of a conflict between the 'outer man' and the 'inner man'. Harmony requires the submission of the former to the latter (such 'submission' being central to the very ethos and etymology of 'Islam', as mentioned above), and an assent to principles and norms of the divine order – bearing in mind that there is no abstract universal that negates difference and diversity. It also requires complementarity to achieve equilibrium between outwardly opposing tendencies. Explaining this, the Aga Khan has used an analogy from music, where harmony is achieved through counterpoint – where 'each voice follows a separate musical line, but always as part of a single work of art, with a sense both of independence and belonging'.³⁹

In this view, such essential harmony cannot be outwardly imposed on people through homogenisation, by legislated uniformity or by other externally sanctioned norms. Rather, its basis is the internalisation of essential values, and a commitment to an inclusive ethos expressed through acts of creative virtue. Stressing that attempts to coerce harmony will always fail, the Aga Khan has noted: 'the rejection of pluralism and the attempt to normalise the human race has always resulted in factionalism, oppressiveness and economic and social regression'.⁴⁰

In all this, it is important not to equate diversity itself with fragmentation. Diversity is a necessary attribute of existence. Of itself, it does not necessitate disharmony. As the Aga Khan says: 'the problem of fragmentation in our world is not a problem of diversity',⁴¹ adding (on a separate occasion) that 'we can address the dysfunctions of fragmentation without obscuring the values of diversity'.⁴²

The capacity to embrace diversity and dialogue are in fact much-needed solutions to the problem of fragmentation. This understanding lies at the heart of the Aga Khan's view of pluralism:

The world we seek is not a world where difference is erased, but where difference can be a powerful force for good, helping us to fashion a new sense of cooperation and coherence ... and to build together a better life for all.⁴³

It is easy to understand why the Imam would place such great emphasis on pluralism in his thinking. It is not just that tolerance benefits diverse minorities (groups like his own Ismaili community), but also it reflects the Aga Khan's personal conviction that pluralism is vital to the very existence of mankind today. He has underlined the importance of pluralism to social, if not human, survival in the following words:

Tolerance, openness and understanding towards other peoples' cultures, social structures, values and faiths are now essential to the very survival of an interdependent world. Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development, it is vital to our existence.⁴⁴

It is for this reason that, in 2006, the Imam and the Canadian government, in partnership, established the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa as an independent, not-for-profit international research and education organisation to cultivate the ethic of pluralism and to promote pluralistic goals worldwide. An honorary Canadian citizen, the Aga Khan has often

commented publicly on his admiration for Canada's commitment to pluralism, which resonates profoundly with Islam's heritage of tolerance and inclusiveness. For example, he has cited with approval the following passage from Lester B. Pearson (d. 1972), as showing Canada's foresight about the need for pluralism in a globalising world:

We are now emerging into an age when different civilisations will have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other's history and ideals, art and culture, mutually enriching each other's lives. The only alternative in this overcrowded little world, is misunderstanding, tension, clash, and catastrophe.⁴⁵

'Convivencia': A Model for Pluralism

An illustration of the ethical heritage of pluralism within Islam can be found in the Charter of Medina issued by the Prophet Muhammad in 622, which envisaged a unified community (*al-umma wahida*) of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, a cosmopolitan vision of a 'community of communities' transcending sectarian and religious differences.

Another such example is in the Prophet's covenants, protecting Christians and other minorities (e.g., those safeguarding the religious freedom of the monks of St Catherine in Mount Sinai, Egypt, evidence of which has been preserved by the monks for over 14 centuries).⁴⁶

The pluralistic ethos also has antecedents in the Prophet's well-known sermon during his final pilgrimage to Mecca, when he declared:

O people! Beware! Your God is one. No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, and no non-Arab any superiority over an Arab, and no white one has any superiority over a black one, and no black one has any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of *taqwa* [God-consciousness].⁴⁷

Yet another example of Islam's pluralistic heritage is the period of history known as *La Convivencia*, about which the Imam has stated:

'*Convivencia*' – the Spanish word for living together harmoniously – is not a simple concept. It is, of course, the term used to describe the co-existence of different faiths in medieval Spain. The code of '*convivencia*' was about tolerance and much more. In Toledo, Córdoba and Granada it implied mutual respect as well as an appreciation of science and scholarship, and of different traditions. The acquisition of knowledge was not an end in itself, but rather a way to understand the beauty of God's creation ... But '*convivencia*' implied norms of behaviour which had to be constantly reaffirmed through education and mutual understanding.⁴⁸

Convivencia in Spain represented 'a way of life based on mutual respect and understanding, which allowed peaceful and productive relations between different communities', and it is this very spirit that that Global Centre for Pluralism seeks to inculcate.⁴⁹

Speaking of this inculcation, on another occasion the Aga Khan emphasised that societies have to become acculturated to pluralism, stating, 'I don't believe that societies are born pluralist. Pluralism has to be omnipresent in civil society ... it's got to be part of the way a society is constituted.'⁵⁰ To accomplish this, he noted, 'will require concerted, deliberate efforts to build social institutions and cultural habits which take account of difference, which see diversity as an opportunity rather than a burden.'⁵¹

Pluralism, in this cultural sense, entails conviviality, connecting it to the notion of civility or urbanity. It is interesting to note that for the medieval North African social historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), urbanity was associated with stable societies. The Arabic term *hadara*, denoting the urban and the urbane, is related to the idea of presence – ultimately of being in the presence of the divine – thereby linking urbanity with the primordial human nature or *fitra*. In this way, pluralism can be understood

as a quest for essential norms rooted in human nature, through a process of dialogue and mutual reminding. Viewed in this sense, it is interesting too that, for Ibn Khaldun, civility involved civil discourse, connecting rhetoric (the art of persuasion) to politics (the art of conviviality and community). The pluralistic ethic therefore means living and thinking inter-culturally, dialogically, empathetically, generously and humanely – that is, in conformity to one's God-given nature, with a nobility of purpose, a reverence for human dignity and a social conscience that expresses itself by serving the common good.

Pluralistic acculturation requires not only an ethic of civic dialogue, of respectful 'conversation', but also a pluralising of space, so that space itself is not understood as a medium of separation but of connection. It is not to be appropriated but to be shared with dignity – as in the example of the spirit of the Medinan model during the advent of Islam. This is of especial relevance in an age of globalisation, where large movements of populations between different nations have forced people into having to share spaces in ways that can often create discomfort and animosity, if not outright hostility and conflict.

Pluralism's diversity, therefore, must be constructed on its ideal of communality. Yet, as with all organically evolving complex societies and their creative tensions, pluralism, in the Imam's view, must be 'a process and not a product', representing 'a mentality, a way of looking at a diverse and changing world', and 'an exercise in constant re-adaptation'.⁵² This is because of what advocates of cosmopolitanism call 'fallibilism' – 'the sense that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, subject to revision in the face of new evidence'.⁵³ Fallibilism is not a synonym for relativism, nor, from the perspective of Ismaili theology, does it derogate from the *ta'wil* of the Ismaili Imam, whose interpretive authority is paramount for his followers. While recognising the provisional nature of knowledge within the human domain, it does not compromise the need for objectivity or principles.

Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the intellectual humility that is required in our human quest for principled truths and for accommodations in evolving contexts. It recognises that the human quest for harmony entails a continual search for integral principles and for integrating connections. As the Aga Khan has recently emphasised, highlighting the process of connection that is involved in the pluralistic enterprise:

Connection does not necessarily mean agreement. It does not mean that we want to eliminate our differences or erase our distinctions. Far from it. What it does mean is that we connect with one another in order to learn from one another, and to build our future together.

Pluralism does not mean the elimination of difference, but the embrace of difference. Genuine pluralism understands that diversity does not weaken a society, it strengthens it. In an ever-shrinking, ever more diverse world, a genuine sense of pluralism is the indispensable foundation for human peace and progress.⁵⁴

This process – an aspect of the practice of creative virtue, addressed earlier – requires both an intellectual quest for fundamental truths and practical accommodations, as well as an empathetic openness to deconstructing alterity so that the Other is no longer alien but is welcomed as of the same family or community as one's own.

Knowledge Gaps and Empathy Gaps

One important component of this process is to fill 'knowledge gaps' in order to prevent 'empathy gaps'. Empathy, or the capacity to place oneself in another's situation, to feel what the Other feels, is a fundamental aspect of being human – as the Persian poet Sa'di highlights in the verse known as 'Bani Adam' (which appears as an epigraph to this book). The capacity to empathise, to engage the Other with a sensibility that combines knowledge with feeling, requires one to have the ability to understand

the situation of the Other in a way that moves beyond mere comprehension to appreciation, to a participatory mode of understanding. It requires, as it were, the ability for one to place their mind in their heart.

Such understanding, however, requires a foundation in knowledge. Without a basic grasp of facts about the Other or of the perspective or context of the Other, empathy can be impeded by 'knowledge gaps'. An example of a 'knowledge gap' is the widespread ignorance in much of the Western world of the faith, history and cultural diversity of the Muslim world. A similar 'knowledge gap' is mirrored among some Muslims about the West. It is a topic we will develop later. Ignorance – which often expresses itself through stereotypes – can breed insensitivity and intolerance, and all three are generators of conflict. Thus, the Imam cautions:

The danger is that knowledge gaps so often run the risk of becoming empathy gaps. The struggle to remain empathetically open to the Other in a diversifying world is a continuing struggle of central importance for all of us.⁵⁵

But, in the view of the Aga Khan, 'empathetic openness' and 'cultural sensitivity' can come only from a 'deep intellectual commitment', one that embraces a spirit of creative encounter:

One simple requirement towers above all others: the ability to respect that which is truly different, to understand that which we do not embrace. It is not as easy as it sounds ... In truth, cultural sensitivity is something ... that requires a deep intellectual commitment. It requires a readiness to study and to learn across cultural barriers, an ability to see others as they see themselves. Cultural sensitivity is hard work.⁵⁶

Such pluralistic empathy seeks, in the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's terminology, to 'converse', not to 'convert'.⁵⁷ Because it seeks to remain engaged with complexity rather than

to abdicate or seek simplistic solutions, and to persuade rather than to coerce, pluralism, as an exercise in cultural sensitivity, is difficult work. In addressing diversity, it must guard against latitudinarian impulses that embrace diversity in unprincipled ways, indiscriminately. A pluralistic society must aim at being more than a relativist expression of multiculturalism or, in the words of American political philosopher Eric Voegelin, the ‘rich diversification of socially entrenched and violently vociferous opinion.’⁵⁸ It must invoke empathy and engagement in rising above the superficial tolerance or the placating of difference that masquerades as pluralism, to find instead a fair and objective basis of accommodation, recognising, as all people of faith believe, the common transcendent origin and destiny of humanity. In the words of former President Obama, it must exhibit ‘the courage to listen to one another and seek common ground and embrace principled compromise.’⁵⁹

The Imamāt’s cultural initiatives are central to this effort to educate diverse cultures about each other. They include, for example, the work of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the Aga Khan Museum. We will review later the role of cultural initiatives in the work of the Ismaili Imamāt. The point we wish to emphasise here is that appreciation of different cultures deepens our humanity and opens us to a diversity of traditions and values that ultimately binds us as human beings. Cultural pluralism – in whatever guise, whether art or language, science or religion, architecture or philosophy, geography or history – celebrates diversity, that is, it celebrates the presence of theophany, of the invisible in the visible, of the infinite in the finite, of transcendence in creation. Our differences, insofar as they express the same spirit that connects us, are a way of uniting, not dividing, us. In the Aga Khan’s words, by striving to attain the ideal of a common humanity, ‘we will recognise that the Other is both “present” and “different”. And we will be able to

appreciate this presence – and this difference – as gifts that can enrich our lives.⁶⁰



In this chapter we have surveyed how the Ismaili Imam's beliefs and the ethos he promotes aim to build upon Quranic-based principles and values discussed in earlier chapters. The cosmopolitan ethic, as embraced by the Aga Khan, is founded on an inclusive spiritual vision and an adaptive pluralistic process of dialogue and of engagement with diversity. It emphasises the elements of spiritual humility and a concomitant respect for the Other, and it advocates values which, while embracing a respect for particular needs in a complex and changing world, are directed to 'the global aspiration for a better quality of life'. In the following chapters, we will examine more closely the work of the Imamatus institutions in implementing this ethos.



Exterior of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.

Cohesion Within the Umma

The Umma Envisioned as a Common Humanity

At the conclusion of his historic address to the joint parliamentary assembly in Canada in 2014, the Aga Khan evoked the following powerful image from the Quran:

Central to my life has been a verse in the Holy Quran which addresses itself to the whole of humanity. It says: *'Oh Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women.'* I know of no more beautiful expression about the unity of our human race, born indeed from a single soul.¹

This image of a common humanity created of 'a single soul' is, as we have previously observed, central to the vision of the Ismaili Imam. It is also the ideal for envisioning a healthy and pluralistic Muslim community, or Umma.

Although 'the Quranic ideal is one of a vibrant humanity, rich in pluralism, and yet constituting a single human community', certain stress factors within the Umma (discussed in this chapter), and tensions between Islam and the Western world (discussed in Chapter 7), potentially impede the realisation of this ideal.²

These stress factors and tensions, which we will briefly review, can be overcome by a spirit of pluralism – through openness, dialogue and engagement, promoting a better understanding of the Other – respectful of the underlying unity of creation and the blessing of its outward diversity.

The Ismaili Imam has observed that ‘the only way the Ummah can work its way out of its present sad state is to harness the intellect’,³ to locate ‘a common denominator which would represent a consensus on the long term objectives, methods and means.’⁴ For him, this ‘common denominator’ begins with the notion of a ‘common humanity’ and the ethical imperatives it entails, but he has lamented that ‘not all Muslim societies take that on board.’⁵ Nonetheless, in keeping with his call for an intellectual revival within Islam, the Imam has stressed that it is fundamentally important for various Muslim *tariqas*, or denominations, to articulate a common ethic built around this integral vision, and for Ismailis to build bridges with other Muslims around a cosmopolitan ethos. Thus he has underlined:

It will be essential that while respecting their individual identities, various *tariqahs* within Islam should collaborate to articulate the common social and moral principles of our Islamic value system ... Islam is a faith of tolerance, generosity and spirituality ... Where we can build bridges with other *tariqahs* around a common Muslim cosmopolitan ethos, we should make this endeavour.⁶

It is on the basis of the Umma’s common values that, in the view of the Aga Khan, it can coalesce. The use of the terms ‘tolerance, generosity and spirituality’ to describe Islam is not arbitrary. The spiritually based world view that recognises the bond of a common humanity will necessarily be tolerant (reflecting its underlying integrity) and generous (reflecting its underlying dignity). The Aga Khan has emphasised that ‘the ethics and ethical premises of civil life are the same in all the schools of Islam.’⁷

As the Quranic image of humanity created from ‘a single soul’ illustrates, the value system of Islam originates in its faith and is reflected in the ‘pillars of the Islamic way of life, social justice, equality, humility and generosity.’⁸ These values are universal, a part of the Abrahamic heritage of the ‘People of the Book’ (*ahl al-kitab*), and therefore a basis on which to build bridges towards other faiths – though, according to Prince Karim’s expressed pragmatic preference, on a cosmopolitan rather than solely religious basis, as we described in Chapter 5.

Bearing in mind the Aga Khan’s emphasis on pluralistic virtues and on the distinction between unity and uniformity, the search for a common foundation cannot be reduced to a quest for homogenising conformity, or sameness, at the cost of not respecting individuality, identity, cultural traditions and human diversity. ‘The unity of the Umma does not imply sameness,’⁹ he has stated. The foundation cannot be constructed on the basis of purely outward norms or merely the outward *forms* of faith, tradition or cultural identity. Rather, the Aga Khan believes it must rest on common inner *principles*, time-adaptable and capable of embracing diversity, as he stressed in his address at the Seerat Conference, quoted earlier. Before we return to his vision for the Umma, let us briefly consider some of the underlying fissures and stresses of the Muslim community.

Stress Factors Within the Umma

Many observers have remarked on the unfortunate divisions within the Muslim world, which are a departure from the spiritual ideal of Muslim brotherhood. This is due to certain tensions and fissures. A few decades ago (in 1986), the Aga Khan observed that ‘the Muslim world and the Arab world are divided, politically, ideologically and economically.’¹⁰ That statement unfortunately remains true today. Assessing the divisions within the Umma, nearly two decades later (in 2003), he observed as follows:

Today, any reasonably well-informed observer would be struck by how deeply this brotherhood of Muslims is divided. On the opposite sides of the fissures are the ultra-rich and the ultra-poor; the Shia and the Sunni; the theocracies and the secular states, the search for normalisation versus the appreciation of pluralism; those who search for and are keen to adopt modern, participatory, forms of government versus those who wish to re-impose supposedly ancient forms of governance. What should have been brotherhood has become rivalry, generosity has been replaced by greed and ambition, the right to think is held to be the enemy of real faith, and anything we might hope to do to expand the frontiers of human knowledge through research is doomed to failure, for in most of the Muslim world, there are neither the structures nor the resources to develop meaningful intellectual leadership.¹¹

More recently (in 2007), as we have already noted, the Aga Khan remarked on the existence of a 'divergent squint' within the Umma, emphasising tensions between traditional and modernising outlooks. At root, those tensions relate to threats to Muslim identity, underscoring the need to conserve essential values threatened by forces of change and modernisation. At one end of the spectrum, hidebound traditionalists were seeking to impose conformity based on non-pluralistic norms opposed to the respect for human dignity and intellectual freedom, while, at the other, modernising progressivists, often hypnotised by Western values, were demanding reforms that failed to respect Muslim cultural values. These tensions have naturally given rise to political disagreements, as the Imam has noted:

In practice, these two tendencies can be seen in the political domain in the differences between theocratic governance and the secular state; between the application of Sharia in all legal fields and the complete absence of Sharia or its application only in the domain of civil law; between economic and financial systems based on Sharia and systems that are essentially liberal and Westernised; between

religious education at every level and a national system with no reference at all to religion throughout the whole educational process, apart from the *madrassa* option for very young children.¹²

There are also historical reasons for many of the stress factors within the Umma. For example, as one commentator, Christopher de Bellaigue, recently noted, 'for the past two centuries Islam has been going through a pained yet exhilarating transformation – a Reformation, an Enlightenment and an Industrial Revolution all at once'.¹³ This painful process has resulted in certain tensions and reactionary oppositions within the Umma. Recognising that the Muslim world as a whole did not experience the long gestatory process of secularisation that brought the West into the modern world, the Aga Khan has commented:

[T]he secularisation that occurred in the West did not take place in Muslim societies. What we are witnessing today, in certain Islamic countries, is exactly the opposite evolution: the theocratisation of the political process.¹⁴

Stressing that 'the Islamic world is far from unanimous on the desirability of this shift',¹⁵ he has remarked, on the problem of establishing theocratic societies, that 'when we're talking about the ethics of Islam, it's easier to have civil society institutions built on the ethics of the faith, than a theocratic state in the full form'.¹⁶ It is not through outwardly imposed theocratic forms but through internalised civic values that social order comports with human dignity. Islam, as we have seen, was founded on the respect for human dignity and therefore should oppose coercion, even in matters of faith, let alone in politics. Yet there have been many aberrant examples throughout its history, and in modern states with predominantly Muslim populations, of departures from this ideal. Civil society – a vital element, and one whose importance

we address below – is essential for sustaining the ethical culture that maintains the right balance between secular and religious influences, and between modernising and traditional outlooks.

Another historically important stress factor has been the process of colonisation that Muslim societies have undergone. Colonisation, in Prince Karim's analysis, led to 'the drive to standardise cultures' and (because the colonisers came from the West, and also because modernising influences were introduced through the West) to Westernisation, threatening diverse indigenous Muslim cultures and traditions and contributing to a loss of their identities.¹⁷ The need to redress this was one of the drivers of the initiatives of the Imamate in promoting Islamic cultural heritage and in reviving its cultural legacies (principally through the AKTC, which we consider later). Prince Karim has highlighted the impact of Westernisation on Muslim identity, noting its connections with secularism and resultant threats:

Loss of identity, anxiety about the risk of being caught up in a process of Westernisation that is essentially Christian and is perceived as becoming less and less religious, are deep and very real concerns.¹⁸

This echoes his earlier-mentioned observation of how secularisation has distanced the West from the Muslim world, and it also relates to his concerns about the Umma's cultural disorientation, expressed in the following comment about its jarring impact:

No reasonable mind could question our fear of occidentalization – the loss of our Muslim identity. Once a self-confident cradle of culture and art, the Muslim world has not forgotten its past. The abyss between this memory and the towering problems of tomorrow would disorient even the most secure society.¹⁹

According to this position, these alienating influences of the West on Islam are compounded by the West's own 'historical

amnesia,²⁰ as will be discussed in Chapter 7. That too represents a historical legacy of Muslim societies being dominated by Western values.

Beyond these historical factors, there is a more profound philosophical tension fragmenting the Umma. This has to do with the extent to which the normatisation of the practice of Islam – or any faith, for that matter – is desirable, and whether such normativity conflicts with the ethic of tolerance. For the Aga Khan, faith in a common humanity is the foundation for tolerance. However, he is acutely aware that not all societies accept that as a premise. The Imam is further aware that certain patterns of thought breed conflict. He is outspokenly critical of attempts to homogenise traditions, but is cautious about labelling the positions as ‘fundamentalist’, noting that fundamentalism is a matter of ‘inherited politics that is not based on theological foundations’.²¹ Nonetheless, he clearly rejects Muslim exclusivist attitudes, characterising them as ‘theological colonialism’,²² and he has taken a hard line in resisting such rigid attempts at normatisation, stating, ‘Groups that seek to standardise, to homogenise or, if you will allow me, to normalise all that and those around them must be actively resisted through countervailing activities.’²³

In the context of groups such as the so-called ‘Islamic State’ – which has sought to impose a modern-day ‘caliphate’, in complete disregard of the etymology and spirit of the term *khalifa*, referred to earlier – which defame Islam by their distortions of its faith and ethics, it is interesting to revisit Prince Karim’s admonition from over three decades ago (in 1983):

Those who seek to impose a political view on the Islamic world or a religious view are, in my opinion, really not working for the benefit of the Islamic world. There is no way that you can impose a single view on nine hundred million people in so many different countries of the world.²⁴

Those words ring even truer today, when the diversity of some one-and-a-half billion Muslims (note the growth in Muslim population since the Aga Khan's cited observation) continues to defy all attempts to impose outward normatisation. Emphasising this, he has more recently commented:

The Islamic world is highly pluralistic, even if radical forces have been at work over the last few years which do not tolerate multiplicity and who want to force others to share their view of Islam.²⁵

For the Aga Khan, faith is a matter of inner conviction and cannot be externally imposed, nor can 'sameness' or uniformity in matters of faith be coerced. Moreover, as he has intimated, it is also un-Islamic:

Let me ... emphasise my strong conviction that public integrity cannot grow out of authoritarian pronouncements. It must be rooted in the human heart and conscience. As the Holy Quran says: *'There is no compulsion in religion.'* The resurgence of spirituality, potentially such a positive force, can become a negative influence when it turns into self-righteousness and imposes itself on others.²⁶

Re-envisioning the Umma: A Pluralistic Ideal

In contrast to the 'theological colonialism' of which he is critical, the Aga Khan has advocated the pluralistic ethos – a civic respect for our differences, all within the ideal of our common humanity and dignity – found in the following verse of the Quran:

For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ. (Q 5:48)

The Quranic ideal is of multiple communities, each with its distinct religious paths and norms of conduct, coexisting under the umbrella of a humane ethos of 'good deeds', secure in the understanding that outer differences are reconcilable inwardly. This verse's pluralism suggests, *inter alia*, that Truth has multiple forms of expression and that God cannot be confined within a single creed. In the words of Ibn 'Arabi, 'Make yourself a vessel for all the forms of belief. Surely Allah is vaster and greater than being contained by one creed rather than another.'²⁷

Referring to this verse, the Aga Khan has observed:

[T]he Quran-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Quran confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere attempts to understand His word ...

The Noble Quran extends its principle of pluralism also to adherents of other faiths. It affirms that each has a direction and path to which they turn so that all should strive for good works, in the belief that, wheresoever they may be, Allah will bring them together.²⁸

Within this pluralistic framework of intrinsic unity and outward diversity, there is scope for a plural interpretations which, as the Imam has emphasised, must be respected. He has stressed that 'each sect within the Umma is free to practise its own interpretation of Islam.'²⁹ Elaborating on this idea, he has said:

Within the Ummah it is a recognised and established historic fact that communities have the right to their own interpretation of the Faith. Whether it is the interpretation of one branch of Islam or of the other, of Sunni or Shia, whether of one tradition within either of those branches, or of another, the right of interpretation belongs to

each individual ... What is not acceptable is any attempt to impose a particular interpretation on an unwilling individual or population. The Holy Quran says that there shall be no compulsion in religion. What is even worse, is when such an imposition causes degradation of all civilised standards of human behaviour.³⁰

The respect for diversity reflected in religious pluralism inheres within the very nature of creation as a perpetually renewing theophany. This creative and infinite expression of diversity cannot be absolutised outwardly. In the same way, religious pluralism also reflects the diversity of humanity, respecting both the essential truth and its plural expression.

Referring to a Quranic sura (Q 109:1–6) about the plurality of interpretations in religion, the Imam notes:³¹

The diversity in interpretation is something that is inherent to human society. The attempt to normalise has a very little chance to succeed and it would be unethical to the essence of Islam. There is a very famous *ayat* in the Quran that says: *To yourself, your faith. To myself, my faith.*³²

The religious pluralism inherent in the Quran (particularly in verse 5:48, cited earlier) should not be understood either as syncretistic or as relativistic, because it is founded in the transcendent unity of *tawhid*.³³ It affirms the principles of hierarchy (things can be known at different levels) and of complementarity (there are various vantage points for knowledge, which complement each other), and that ‘nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower’, which is the basis of the Prophet Muhammad’s exhortation to ‘speak to each according to his level of comprehension’. Its pluralism respects both the inner unity and the outer diversity inherent in the multiple levels of being. The Quranic approach embraces an understanding of the Umma as representing diverse expressions of universal principles. Its inclusivity – expressed through tolerance, generosity and

spirituality – forms the basis of Prince Karim's position towards the unified Umma.

In earlier chapters we had discussed the intellectual principles and cosmopolitan values which the Aga Khan has been promoting as vital components to negotiate change and to confront the ideological challenges of modernism and globalisation. These same components are also all-important tools for easing tensions within the Umma and they are the doctrinal platform for the Muslim intellectual revival that the Ismaili Imam is advocating, being informed by his vision of a pluralistic and tolerant Muslim identity built upon Quranic values of the unity of man and of a just society, exemplified by the Prophetic example and by the Muslim heritage of pluralism.

In Chapter 7, we will turn to the relations between the Muslim world and the West and see how these same unifying principles and cosmopolitan values inform the Imam's approach in addressing misperceptions and tensions that impact the Umma's relations with the West.



Akbar the Great receives two Jesuit missionaries in the Ibadat Khana.
Illustration to the *Akbarnama*, miniature painting by Nar Singh, c.1605.

Islam and the West

A Clash of Ignorance

The Aga Khan's ethic of a common humanity seeks to address not only tensions within the global Muslim community, but also those between the Islamic world and the West. This objective is particularly significant during a time when influential academics, notably Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis, among others, have depicted Muslims as being engaged in a 'clash of civilisations' with the West.¹ The phrase itself is an oxymoron because 'civilisations', being civil, do not clash. In one sense, the term 'civilisation' can fairly be defined as the art of civic discourse and responsible engagement in the face of diversity. Some see it as a state of development that is not marked by the propensity for conflict or by coercion. In this definition, its attributes would include tolerance and inclusiveness, not the imposition of uniformity or of a universally abstract identity on all.

We have noted earlier the Aga Khan's view that an increasingly globalising world requires the civilising influence of the pluralistic ethic to tame its opposing tendencies of homogenising sameness and of alienating exclusion. It requires a respect for what has been termed 'the dignity of difference'.² This entails opening spaces for tolerance: dignified spaces that respect

balancing individual freedoms with civic responsibilities; epistemically open spaces that permit fresh perspectives, connecting knowing to the amplitude of being; and dialogical spaces that allow for civil conversations about differences, linking the art of rhetoric to the polity of the community. As we have illustrated, the Ismaili Imam, through his pluralism project, seeks to promote and provide such dignified, open and dialogical civic spaces.

Not surprisingly, the Aga Khan disagrees with the characterisation of a 'clash of civilisations', and regards it as simplistic and facile. He prefers instead to speak of a 'clash of ignorance' or of the dangers of mutual ignorance, referring to the mutual ignorance between the Islamic and Western worlds – in particular the West's ignorance of the essential nature of the faith of Islam, the history of its civilisations, and the diversity of its cultural traditions and communities of interpretation. He has stated in this connection:

Some years ago, Professor Samuel Huntington warned of an impending 'clash of civilizations' between the West and the Islamic world as the next great confrontation following the end of the Cold War. My position is somewhat different ... What we are now witnessing is a clash of ignorance, an ignorance that is mutual, longstanding, and to which the West and the Islamic world have been blind for decades at their great peril.³

Elaborating on this, the Aga Khan believes that the mutual ignorance relates to matters of both faith and culture, 'where peoples of different faiths or cultural traditions are so ignorant of each other's that they are unable to find a common language with which to communicate'.⁴ Commenting in 1994 on the 'superficiality of understanding' about Islam in the West, he observed that the Islamic world was 'remarkably poorly understood by the West – almost *terra incognita*',⁵ noting that 'for many in the West, the first awareness that there were two major branches of Islam –

Shia and Sunni – came only with the Iranian revolution.’⁶ The West, in his view, was only learning about Islam through its crises:

Before the Iranian revolution, the West did not know the word ‘Shia’. It took the war in Afghanistan for it to discover the word ‘Wahhabi’. It is now in the midst of comprehending the complexities of the Muslim world in the course of its crises. I would have wished that this could have been achieved by other means.⁷

On the failure of many Westerners to comprehend ‘the complexities of the Muslim world’, the Aga Khan observed in another interview that ‘Just as it is not possible to give a single face to the Christian or Jewish world, it is not possible to look at Islam as a single block. Muslims come from different cultures, regions and traditions.’⁸ He has condemned stereotypes of Islam and Muslims as ‘facile and totally erroneous’,⁹ and has roundly denounced as ‘intellectually uncouth’¹⁰ those media depictions that promote ‘the perception that all Muslims and their societies are a homogeneous mass of people living in some undefined theocratic space, a single “other” evolving elsewhere’.

For the Aga Khan, the differences in the mutual understandings of Muslims and Westerners are a consequence of the recent history of the West’s colonisation of the Muslim world, a period which also significantly coincided with the technology-driven modernisation of the West, from which much of the Muslim world was largely excluded. On this point, he has noted that ‘The West does not really understand the pluralism of the Islamic world ... The Islamic world has been exposed to your pluralism; we have been colonised for decades.’¹¹

Such ignorance about Islam, its diverse makeup and fault-lines, can be dangerous, especially when making political decisions. As someone keenly interested in managing risk when planning for the welfare of the global Ismaili community and when undertaking Imamats projects in various parts of the world,

the Aga Khan is acutely aware of the importance of predictability in geo-political situations. The failure to grasp basic facts and circumstances of Muslim societies can easily lead to catastrophe in a country such as Iraq – as the Chilcot Report on the Iraq War recently confirmed.¹² Addressing the Iraq problem in an interview in 2007, the Aga Khan had noted, that where ‘a Sunni minority held power in a majority Shia country, which was itself surrounded by Sunni nations’,¹³ the outcome of an invasion should have been foreseen:

It was perfectly predictable that, from the moment Saddam Hussein was relieved in favour of a democratic consultation, there would be a new re-balancing between the two main branches of Islam. The external effect was even more predictable: once it was established that Iraq is a Shia majority, the surrounding countries would react in accordance with their affiliation, and not in accordance with the process of democratisation. Alas, none of this surprised nor astonished me.¹⁴

Yet there were many in the West, even at its highest levels of leadership, who lacked a basic understanding of the complexities of the Muslim world, and who failed to foresee the nature and extent of the problems that arose in the wake of the Iraq invasion. As Prince Karim observed in 1986, more than two decades earlier, ‘The world of today can no longer afford to ignore the world of Islam.’¹⁵

The Aga Khan’s message particularly resonated in the aftermath of the dramatically violent attack by the al-Qaeda movement on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001. Commenting on that attack, he said: ‘9/11 has scarred America, but not just America. It has scarred the Islamic world.’¹⁶ The attack was completely antithetical to the message of Islam, which, with its view of humanity as interconnected and born from ‘a single soul’, likens the taking of a single human life to a violation visited upon all of mankind:

[W]hosoever slays a soul – unless it be for another soul or working corruption upon the earth – it is as though he slew mankind altogether, and whosoever saves the life of one, it is as though he saved the life of mankind altogether ... (Q 5:32)

Alluding to this verse, the Ismaili Imam condemned the 9/11 attacks and terrorism in the name of Islam:

That the acts of September 11th and all that is behind them are repugnant to the very spirit of Islam and to the beliefs and yearnings of the vast majority of Muslims around the world is beyond question. In the words of the Quran it is as if the entirety of humankind had suffered a death with every life that was so brutally ended.¹⁷

He has also drawn attention to a point that has not been understood by many Westerners, that, as with virtually every religion, individual groups may pursue their own interpretations – or, sometimes, misinterpretations – which are not representative of Islam as a whole:

[W]hat happened on the 11th of September was not an expression of the faith of Islam – it was an expression of a certain group who had certain interpretations of their own and which certainly were not validated by the totalities of the Muslim world ... [T]here is enormous morality in the Islamic world.¹⁸

With the proliferation nowadays of groups like ISIL/ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Taliban, al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, to name but a few, which profess Islam while resorting to mass terrorism, and which impose barbaric prescriptions on their citizenry under the banner of Islam, it is not surprising that this faith itself and its ethos, though grossly misrepresented by such groups, might be misunderstood. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many Westerners seem not to be sufficiently educated about Islam and could therefore be prone to view Muslims through the

distorted lenses of conflict, stereotype or politicised theology, ignoring its messages of peace and compassion, its pluralistic traditions and histories, and its enormous civilisational contributions to the world.

As a Muslim leader, the Ismaili Imam has made it very clear that ‘violence is not a function of the Islamic faith.’¹⁹ Nor is terrorism: ‘I don’t accept the notion that the faith of Islam is associated with terrorism.’²⁰ And as a representative of a faith whose very name (Islam) is the cognate of the Arabic word for ‘peace’ (*salam*), he rejects the ethos of the suicide-killer who indiscriminately massacres innocent people and thereby violates the divine gift of life and the sacred foundations of that peace:

Islam does not teach terrorism any more than Christianity or Judaism. He who blows himself and others up is a criminal and cannot claim to be a servant of God, praise be to Allah. The world religion of Islam teaches peace, compassion and tolerance.²¹

While rejecting terrorism, the Aga Khan also criticises its religious façade, emphasising that religion is being superimposed onto underlying political conflicts, and that this façade is thereby a distortion of religion:

Terrorism has many causes. Poverty, underdevelopment and despair are without doubt among the most important causes. And unsolved political conflicts dating back decades can nearly always be found in the background ... Religion has been added on to the political conflicts, to lend greater legitimacy to personal interests. But the original conflicts themselves have nothing to do with Islam.²²

The Imam stresses that ‘there is a tendency to associate the word “Islam” with situations which have nothing to do with our faith as such.’²³ While recognising that there is sometimes discord within the Umma, he observes that ‘the causes of discord in the Muslim world occur in the main outside the framework of

the Islamic faith ... Associating the name of a religion with a conflict really does not mean that the conflict represents the religion in question.'²⁴ Illustrations from other contexts highlight this fact. For example: 'Few Christians would regard the Inquisition in the past or the IRA today as being representative of Christian principles. Similarly, contemporary pressure groups within the Islamic world are not necessarily characteristic of the central message of the faith.'²⁵

Discord stemming from 'political situations with a theological overlay' is, as Prince Karim notes, often a political legacy of colonialism and the Cold War.²⁶ A difficult legacy, often dismissed by some Western critics, it has created a reservoir of resentment among many Muslims. In various speeches and interviews, the Aga Khan has stressed that tensions in the Middle East, parts of South and Central Asia, as well as Africa, have resulted from causes sometimes misrepresented as religious in nature when they are in fact historical legacies resulting from colonial policies or from insensitively drawn borders in Muslim countries, or from the use of Muslims as pawns or proxies in wars or to enforce political change. In many cases, the inherited disputes have not been resolved but allowed to fester, breeding resentment over generations. The outgrowth of these tensions, and their causes, are commonly misattributed to the faith of Islam, its alleged theological incompatibility with Judeo-Christian traditions, or to the alleged hostility or cultural barbarism of Muslims – all allegations born of prejudice and ignorance. The Aga Khan has alluded to this tendency in several of his public statements, highlighting the ignorance underlying these views, as the following quotation illustrates:

How many leaders, even in the West, whether in politics, the media or other professions which in their own ways shape public opinion, grow up aware that the historic root cause of the conflict in the Middle East was an outcome of the First World War? Or that the

tragedy that is Kashmir is an unresolved colonial legacy, and that neither had anything to do with the faith of Islam? To what extent is the public aware that the deployment of Afghanistan as a proxy by both sides in the Cold War, is a major factor in her recent history of tragic woes? These matters, which now touch the lives of all world citizens, are simply not addressed at any level of general education in most Western countries.²⁷

On distinguishing between the theological foundations of Islam and the political context of Muslim lands, he has further elaborated:

We need to establish a clear differentiation between the Muslim faith and the political developments that we are witnessing today throughout the Muslim countries. I am not saying that Islam is absolutely absent from international tensions, but as a Muslim, I find it extremely difficult to conclude that there is a direct theological implication in the current context.²⁸

These statements illustrate one aspect of the 'clash of ignorance' – the danger of overlaying politics with religion. As the Aga Khan has noted, political conflicts, even if they are associated with religion, are not necessarily truly religious in nature.

The role of the Aga Khan in resolving political conflicts is limited because he is 'not a political figure' and the 'Ismaili Imam has no political ambitions'.²⁹ On one occasion, when asked if he would be prepared to intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he responded:

I would not intervene in a problem that is essentially political. If, on the other hand, you are talking about building a future civil society in that region of the world or in any other, certainly, because we have a significant presence in Egypt and Syria, and also in Pakistan, India and East and West Africa, as well as in Central Asia, which includes Afghanistan.³⁰

What emerges from this statement is that the Ismaili Imam and the various institutions of the Imamatus, while reluctant, as a rule, to intervene politically in resolving disputes, may in specific instances offer to assist in constructing civil society to help politically troubled regions of the world. The Aga Khan's unwillingness to be drawn into political conflicts is entirely understandable, particularly because his outlook of a common humanity is intended to transcend political differences. Thus, he has noted, 'My office as Imam is an entirely non-political one, but the Islamic faith lays great emphasis on the brotherhood of man.'³¹ His contributions to date have therefore been more directed towards building enabling environments to counter fragmenting influences in political conflicts and shoring up pluralism and civil society, rather than towards direct political interventions.

We will discuss the Aga Khan's views regarding civil society in Chapter 8, but we underline here the important role of two civil society groups, namely, educators and the media, in providing a corrective to the 'clash of ignorance'. Their involvement is vital in promoting a better understanding about the inclusive nature of the Muslim faith and its cosmopolitan ethos. We will address Prince Karim's comments on media responsibility in Chapter 8, focusing here on the role of educators.

Understanding the Ethos of Islam: The Role of Educators

The Aga Khan places upon educators a responsibility to debunk false stereotypes about Islam and to promote a better understanding in Western cultures about its faith and ethos. The primary role of educators is to fill the 'knowledge gaps' of the West regarding Islam by providing information to counter the 'historical amnesia' about which he has often spoken,³² as, for instance, in the following address to an audience of university students and educators in the West:

Today in the Occident, the Muslim world is deeply misunderstood. The West knows little about its diversity, about the religion or the principles which unite it, about its brilliant past or its recent trajectory through history ... From the seventh to the thirteenth century Muslim civilisations dominated world culture, accepting, adopting, using and preserving the study of mathematics, philosophy, medicine and astronomy. Yet this fact is seldom acknowledged today, be it in the West or in the Muslim world. This amnesia has left a 600-year gap in the history of human thought.³³

Commenting on the consequences of this knowledge deficit in Western education and its negative impact on media portrayals of Muslims, the Aga Khan has observed further:

Little of what was discovered and written by Muslim thinkers during the classical period is taught in any educational institution, and when it is, due credit is not given. This gap in global knowledge of the history of thought is evident in innumerable ways. It partially explains why the Western news media see Islamic thought as a political force in predominantly Muslim cultures and refer to individuals affiliated with terrorist organisations as Muslim first and only then by their national origin or ideological goals. This is a considerable problem for the Islamic world in its relations with the West, particularly because of the impact public opinion has on the decisions of democratic governments.³⁴

The failure to understand the essential nature of Islam, its humanistic and tolerant ethos, can easily lead to a failure to distinguish between, on the one hand, the political or ideological extremism undertaken in the name of this faith, and, on the other, the peaceful and inclusive nature of the faith itself, and this can lead to unfortunate consequences, particularly for the misunderstood and stereotyped Muslim communities living in the middle of insecure Western societies. The problem of stereotyping minority communities, and thereby threatening their safety,

is part of a broader problem, for, as we have recently witnessed, Muslim groups too have exhibited intolerance to minorities in their midst – thereby misrepresenting their own faith. It points to a problem of mutual misunderstanding.

The Aga Khan is all too aware of this danger, and he regards the role of education as vital to promoting a better understanding among different societies. This is one of the main impetuses of the Ismaili Imam's cultural initiatives, which we have alluded to earlier and will discuss later. To address the problem in the context of the ignorance of Islam in Western societies, he views the absence of a broader corrective curriculum – one that teaches basic general facts about Islam, the diversity of Muslims, their history and their civilisations – as a denial of a basic right for Muslims. Affirming this pedagogical right, he has stated: 'Our aim is to see Islamic traditions represented in the school curricula of the West on equal footing with other similar traditions ... This is one of our rights ...'³⁵ The denial of this right only serves to perpetuate false stereotypes about Islam, creating or widening empathy gaps and undermining cultural sensitivity. The resulting climate of cultural apathy, misunderstandings, distortions and resentments readily plays into the opportunistic hands of those who claim to be Muslims but do not embody its peaceful and tolerant ethic. Thus, the Imam notes:

I feel it particularly important that the breadth and basic tolerance of our faith should be appreciated in areas where Muslims are minorities. If it is not, there is a great risk that pressure groups sheltering behind the façade of the faith, but whose real aims are perhaps more political, social, or economic, will be wrongly taken as expressing its nature.³⁶

The burden of representing Islam accurately to non-Muslims falls not only on Western educators in terms of their pedagogical

openness and responsibility to include Muslim histories and civilisational contributions within curricula, but also on Muslims themselves, for they bear a responsibility to educate themselves and others in this regard. We referred earlier to the Aga Khan's call for an intellectual elite to revive the traditional heritage of Islam. One of the responsibilities of the elite is to provide a corrective to Western misperceptions of the Islamic world. This will require, in the Imam's words, the 'humanistic infiltration of the industrial society in such a way that Islam may be looked upon not only as a religion, but also as a way of life, as a history of rare intensity, as a tradition and as a total culture'.³⁷ Islam therefore has to be portrayed in its totality. It has to be understood not only as a religion but as a civilising ethos – with an appreciation of its ethical and cultural dimensions, its civilisational heritage and pluralism, and, particularly for the West, its connections to the Judeo-Christian world. The Imam has emphasised this goal, underlining that 'Just like other great traditions, the Islamic world cannot be understood only by its faith, but as a total picture whose history is closely tied to that of the Judeo-Christian world'.³⁸

Deeply aware that Western views of Islam are overlaid with images of conflict, drawn from historically notorious events such as the Crusades (in the Middle Ages) and the Reconquista (in the late fifteenth century), the Ismaili Imam has highlighted the importance of presenting a counter-history of overlooked positive facts and ignored historical examples which correct the distortions that have come to dominate negative views of the faith and ethos of Islam. Such a corrective history is one that speaks of 'a tradition of cultural exchange, tolerance and mutual understanding – even during conflictual situations such as the invasion by the Crusaders'.³⁹ He wants Muslims and non-Muslims alike to draw inspiration from 'this subterranean tradition of multi-cultural symbiosis and of tolerant pluralism ... in order to

overcome stereotypical prejudices that aggravate any real or imaginary conflicts that may still exist'.⁴⁰

The Role of the Imamat Institutions in Representing Islam

The educational and cultural institutions of the Ismaili Imamat have an important role to play in representing this 'counter-history' and 'subterranean tradition'. Museums, especially, have an important role because 'without words and without proselytising' they exhibit the integral values of civilisations reflected through their arts and cultures,⁴¹ and thereby 'bring discovery and understanding of the commonalities of our universal heritage',⁴² reintroducing among diverse groups a spirit of mutual tolerance and empathy. The work of the Aga Khan Museum is of particular significance in this regard: 'I am convinced that the future Aga Khan Museum's central task will be both educational and humanistic: to actively promote, internationally, the spirit of *convivencia*'.⁴³ This task, which the Aga Khan Museum has begun to undertake, will require it to contribute to the civilisational discourse between Islam and the West. The rich Muslim civilisations have not only acted as a transmitter of classical wisdom to the modern West (for example, through the Greek philosophical texts that were translated into Arabic and then incorporated into Muslim philosophical treatises, and thence borrowed by Western philosophers), but they have in their own right contributed greatly to Western civilisation in areas as diverse as medicine,⁴⁴ architecture, civil engineering, geography, botany, zoology, optics and astronomy, to name a few areas. The rich contributions of the Muslim past are founded in its attitude to seek wisdom wherever it could be found, to dialogue about intellectual matters with humility and in a spirit of genuine learning – and, in short, to engage with knowledge pluralistically.

The Aga Khan seeks to revive this intellectual spirit among Muslims today. The Ismaili Imam institutions, and particularly those emphasising cultural mandates, seek to promote a view of Islam that goes beyond the narrow confines of theology, and extends to its larger intellectual, pluralistic, and humanistic aspects from which the Western world has benefited. It seeks to foster an understanding of Islam in its totality, and of Muslims as inheritors of diverse cultures and a civilisational history that have contributed, and continue to contribute, vastly to the richness of human civilisations. In this, it is not merely a bridge to the past. It is clear from his various speeches that the Ismaili Imam is seeking a bridge to the future, built on cosmopolitan values to connect the various civilisations of the Western world with those of the Muslim world. Islam, in this sense, is a way for human beings to understand their common humanity.

The full panoply of the Imam institutions, whose work we will consider in Chapter 9, serves as a living representation of the Muslim faith and its ethos. The educational programmes of the Imam promote an integrated and pluralistic view of Islam. The Imam's cultural initiatives, whether through creating world-class cultural exhibitions, restoring heritage buildings, or promoting a revival of cultural values in architecture, all serve not only to foster a better understanding of the great civilisational contributions of Muslims throughout their history, but also to educate modern societies about the principles and values underlying Islam as a living faith.

Similarly, the development work of the AKDN, in improving the quality of human life for all, provides an example of Islam translated into action as a 'way of life'. It serves as the institutionalised social conscience of the Ismailis and its humane work, which benefits many outside the Umma, and is a strong rejoinder to those who seek to depict Islam as lacking compassion or as exclusivist or uncivilised.

In these various ways, the Imamatus institutions play a vital role in bridging divisions between the Islamic world and the West. Their initiatives serve to fill 'knowledge gaps' and to enhance cultural sensitivity and mutual empathy, as well as to counter distortions of Islam.



In this and the preceding chapter, we have surveyed the Aga Khan's approach to strengthening relationships within the Umma and with the Western world, respectively. In this chapter, we have emphasised how the Ismaili Imamatus's initiatives are founded on reinforcing pluralism and on promoting knowledge and empathy to counter the mutual ignorance and antipathy of Muslims and Western societies toward each other. The pluralistic underpinning of the Quranic message, which allows religious difference and mutual coexistence, provides a healthy framework for this endeavour.

The Imamatus's initiatives are aimed at reviving intellectual traditions within Islam to promote a healthy respect between different groups about the dignity and civilisations of the other, and to encourage dialogical engagement among them. They are also aimed at promoting a better understanding not only between the Islamic and Western worlds, but also among Muslims of diverse Islamic cultural traditions and heritage.

In Chapters 8 and 9, we will focus on the Imamatus's work in promoting the ethic of human dignity, with its principal aim of improving the quality of human life.



Courtyard of the Lions of the Alhambra, Granada, Spain.

Cultivating an Enabling Environment

Underwriting Progress

In the socially cohesive world conceived of by Islam, just as harmony serves to strengthen the bonds of inclusiveness as an aspect of freedom, so generosity serves to strengthen the bonds of human dignity as an aspect of equality. In the quest for human progress and a better quality of life, societies should ideally pull together and not leave the disadvantaged or less fortunate in their wake. These ethical ideals entail strategic imperatives. For societies to pull together, an enabling environment is required, one that fosters the conditions necessary to nurture communities, building cooperative capacity in order to underwrite progress.

The term 'progress' begs the question: 'To what end?' For the Aga Khan and the Ismaili Muslims, the ideal of progress is to balance material growth with spiritual limits, and individual freedom with responsibility to God and His creation, in a balance between faith and worldly life. True 'progress' must therefore be consistent with a culture of balance and limit. In order to be salubrious, it must be rooted in humility and the acceptance of legitimate bounds. Recognising that unlimited progress is unnatural and transgressive, the Ismaili conception of social progress is not materialistic. The Imam's focus regarding progress

is therefore not quantitative (amassing wealth or knowledge as an end in itself, or aiming to achieve endless economic growth), but qualitative. Consequently, it aims to improve the quality of human life universally by reducing poverty, illness, insecurity, and the barriers to opportunity, and by building the human capacity for self-improvement and enhancing the wellbeing of others.

Progress can be broadly defined in terms of the two ethical imperatives that are central to the Imamate: as progress towards human fellowship (expressing the ethic of a common humanity) and as progress towards human welfare (expressing the ethic of human dignity). From the perspective of the link between progress and knowledge, these two interrelated aspects of progress can be understood in terms of the twofold ethical purpose of knowledge: to recognise humankind's intrinsic identity within the spiritual realm; and to use knowledge to serve the common good of humanity as responsible stewards of God's creation (something that the Ismaili Imam calls 'enlightened self-fulfillment'). In this way, knowledge as the instrument of progress expresses the two ethical imperatives discussed earlier: it conforms to harmony and equity, and to integrity and human dignity.

While Prince Karim's notion of the enabling environment, at one level, addresses the economic conditions for material prosperity, at a deeper level it is also an expression of the ethics that connect faith to life. Its aim is to tether individual freedom to social responsibility in a mutually reinforcing way that enhances social cohesion, as well as individual creativity and productivity. These goals are underpinned by a vision that is both inclusive and pluralistic, valuing both communal responsibility and individual freedom. Addressing this as a strategic imperative, the Aga Khan has commented as follows:

It is my profound conviction that steps to strengthen institutions and the linkages between them are critical to the freedom of the

individual to be creative and productive in a socially responsible manner. This is the essence of the Enabling Environment.¹

It is noteworthy that the Aga Khan's focus is on both freedom ('the freedom of the individual to be creative and productive ...') and responsibility ('in a socially responsible manner'). This balance is essential to the ethic of Islam, which, while respecting human dignity, opposes both the excessive freedom that frays society and the excessive constraint on creativity that dispirits it. By contrast to these excesses, the Ismaili Imam promotes the balanced notion of 'positive freedom':²

The time has come to evolve concepts and practices of 'positive freedom', the links between individuals and institutions and the rules of the game that encourage mutual trust, promote co-operation, unleash human potentials and make possible a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.³

This notion of freedom, premised on mutual trust and human cooperation, and limited only by the bounds of propriety and of the moral and social conscience of the *fitra*, emphasises its positive aspects – so that one's focus is on virtue, on conforming to wholeness, rather than on restraint. Positive freedom is therefore a driver of hope and is a significant factor in expanding the capacity of each individual and of the community as a whole to build healthy, progressive societies, characterised by the contentment of its citizens.⁴

Consistent with this view of progress and freedom, the Ismaili Imam has identified several ingredients of an enabling environment. These provide the attitudinal and structural supports for the optimisation of positive freedom to secure such healthy and progressive societies. The ingredients of an enabling environment include a culture of pluralism, a strong civil society, a commitment to meritocracy, a responsible media, good governance and an ethic of hope. We will discuss each of these below.

A Culture of Pluralism

As Chapter 5 is devoted to the pluralistic ethos, the remarks here can be brief.

Pluralism is vital to progress. It regards diversity as an asset, emphasising, as an alternative to oppositional conflicts, a co-operative attitude of dialogue and compromise in the face of differences, and an environment in which people can expand their horizons and pull together for the greater good. This ethic is vital to the generation of harmony and goodwill. Recognising this, the Aga Khan has urged that, 'As communities become more pluralistic in fact, they must also become more pluralistic in spirit.'⁵ Pluralist societies make the Other a resource for all, as he notes, stating that, 'Among history's great truths is that a society is only able to advance to newer horizons of greater promise when it overcomes insularity, and recognises strength in difference.'⁶ It is the inclusive and participative vision of pluralism that undergirds the need for equity as an aspect of human dignity, which is itself vital to social cohesion. So he has said: 'If there is no equity in pluralist societies, then you don't have functioning pluralist societies.'⁷ Pluralism provides an essential platform for an enabling environment; it encourages cooperative effort and equity.

A Strong Civil Society

The Aga Khan is also a strong advocate of civil society – a central ingredient in the Imamat's initiatives – because, as he states, 'civil society underwrites human progress'.⁸

The Aga Khan has defined civil society as 'an array of institutions which operate on a private, voluntary basis, but are motivated by high public purposes'.⁹ Civil society institutions – which include non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also private professional institutions and grassroots volunteer groups motivated by high public purposes – are essential to effecting and

sustaining social progress. They make ‘an enormous contribution to human development, filling the gaps between government, the business sector and the family.’¹⁰ They represent cooperative diversity, reflecting a range of viewpoints, as well as different skills and talents, harnessed for the common good.

Civil society institutions can counterbalance inequities in governmental policies and programmes by introducing an external check on them. Furthermore, they can provide counter-viewpoints to challenge the stifling or rigid mind-set of bureaucracies. Their voices can reflect the diversity of society at large, as well as the views of the marginalised, and so they represent fresh ‘voices for change, where change is overdue’ as well as ‘voices of hope for people living in fear.’¹¹ Their contribution to programmes is often crucial to the work of groups like the AKDN, which will frequently seek to cultivate partnerships with them.

However, such institutions need to be actively cultivated and nurtured so that one is dealing with a ‘quality civil society’,¹² that is to say, a society committed to pluralism, inclusiveness and meritocracy, ‘where ethics are honoured, and excellence is valued.’¹³ Sustaining civil society, providing spaces for diverse and enriching points of view, encouraging cooperative behaviour and excellence, are all essential to curbing repressive, oppressive, apathetic or unresponsive governments, and to strengthening social cohesion. A strong civil society is an essential ingredient of the diversity that preserves liberty (according to Lord Acton’s dictum, ‘diversity preserves liberty’).¹⁴ It is also particularly vital in an era of disinformation where truth itself is usually the first casualty, because civil society has the ability to ‘speak truth to power’ and to counter distortive and manipulative aspects of communication.

A Commitment to Meritocracy

In keeping with respect for human dignity, the Aga Khan maintains that a truly enabling environment must foster excellence,

for it is by doing so that societies can draw upon their best elements for the benefit of all.

Traditional societies organised along rigidities of class and other outward barriers have often curtailed merit-based advancement, thereby impeding that previously cited ‘freedom of the individual to be creative and productive in a socially responsible manner’.¹⁵ Recognising that modern societies have evolved from such constraints, the Ismaili Imam has been a strong proponent of meritocracy – in the Jeffersonian sense of the ‘natural aristocracy’ of talent tempered by the spirit of humility and service employed in the common cause – as foundational for an enabling environment. Thus, he states, ‘social progress can be greatest when aristocracies of class give way to aristocracies of talent – or to use an even better term – to meritocracies’.¹⁶

In order to foster excellence, societies cannot afford to marginalise groups, but must afford opportunities to all, and must promote diversity. Pluralism, the Aga Khan notes, is essential to a meritocratic culture, and consequently to building better societies:

If we are to pursue the ideal of meritocracy in human endeavour, then its most perfect form will grow out of a respect for human pluralism, so that we can harness the very best contributions from whomever and wherever they may come.¹⁷

The Aga Khan does not view meritocracy as anti-democratic. He states, ‘On the contrary, I believe that creating opportunities for individual excellence is the very essence of democracy: its reason to be.’¹⁸ This view resonates both with his emphasis on developing an intellectual culture within society and with his call for the establishment of an intellectual elite to guide it and to lead the modern knowledge society.

The commitment to meritocracy is a principle that goes back to the very foundations of the Ismaili Imamate. It can be glimpsed, for example, in Imam Ali’s view that ‘The triumph of

mediocre men brings down the elite.¹⁹ The Aga Khan's support for meritocratic society – as distinct from one based on class, ethnic or other such divisions – illustrates his commitment to intellectual principles and standards of excellence that are in opposition to those generalising, aggregating, averaging and levelling tendencies of modernism that lead to mediocrity.

In the end, it is because of the integral dignity of human nature – its connection to wholeness, and the Muslim belief that the human is made in the image of the divine, and therefore has a potential for excellence – that meritocracy is seen as an expression of human virtue; or, to restate this in the words of the Aga Khan: 'Uncompromising excellence is also an ethical principle.'²⁰ It is ethical in his view because each human being has a responsibility to fulfill their potential to the measure of their gifts and talents, placing those in the service of a greater good, thereby honouring the intrinsic beauty or excellence (*al-ihsan*) of their gifted nature. In doing so, the individual coheres with the divine order and, to that extent, contributes to enhancing both their own good and the greater good.

A Responsible Media

The media can help to shape public opinion in healthy or unhealthy ways. It can distort reality or expose its distortions. It can provide an objective and balanced perspective or it can reinforce false stereotypes and prejudices. It can deal in 'fake news' or in responsible reporting. It can be subverted by the authorities or can 'speak truth to power'. Clearly, responsible media is an important element in enabling civil society to flourish. This is true of both traditional media (such as newspapers, radio and television) and the new social media (such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). The media can play a vital role in fostering conditions for an enabling environment and in building a healthy sense of community – or it can be disruptive.

All too often, irresponsible publications create social divisions, contributing to factionalism and disaffection instead of promoting pluralist attitudes and working for the public good. The Aga Khan has often remarked on deficiencies in the media, particularly in their reporting of Islam, which, he has observed, has frequently been viewed through the lens of 'crisis reporting' ('the inclination to define news primarily as that which is abnormal and disruptive') and 'sensationalism' ('focusing on what is divisive or dramatic or diverting or sensational – at the expense of what is in the interests of society or truly significant').²¹ Noting that there are several reasons for these tendencies – including 'a domineering profit motive',²² the trivialisation of information, poor journalism, corruption and media manipulation – the Ismaili Imam has, for many decades, called for more responsible media.

Among the essential elements of media responsibility, the Aga Khan emphasises a commitment to pluralism and to social accountability. He underlines that pluralism requires intellectual humility, an ability to listen, to avoid being judgemental. Thus, he states, 'Excellence in journalism, it seems to me, stems not from arrogant judgementalism but from intellectual humility.'²³ Because 'pluralism implies a readiness to listen to many voices – whether we agree with them or not – and a readiness to embrace a rich diversity of cultures',²⁴ it is important not to muzzle the press but to allow it to engage with diverse points of view. Therefore, he advocates that 'the press should be free from the control or constraint of governments, and strong enough to resist all forms of intimidation'.²⁵ This factor is particularly important in an age when mass media can be used as instruments for, in the words of the American linguistic philosopher Noam Chomsky, 'manufacturing consent'.²⁶ The Aga Khan has highlighted the fact that the abuse of mass media can undermine democracies, and therefore he is an advocate of 'healthy media pluralism', observing that:

The danger in an age of mass media is that information also can be misused to manipulate the public ... What results can be the illusion of democracy, but not its substance. Demographic pluralism must be reflected in healthy media pluralism.²⁷

Such pluralism must be accompanied not only by media educated beyond lazy stereotypes, but also by social accountability to the public, over and above media owners, governments or lobbyists. The media are ultimately servants of society, and must work both freely and responsibly, in the interest of the common good. Thus, the Aga Khan has noted that the press has in the end 'to be a servant of the larger community':

Not the servant of any one institution in that community. Nor the servant of any business interest. Not the servant of any religious or social or educational interest. Not the servant of government. But the servant of the community as a whole. In the long run, every newspaper must be held accountable for the way it does its work. But accountable to whom? Not to any single authority, official or unofficial. But accountable to the organic, pluralistic community that stretches out over space and time.²⁸

Press freedom, which includes freedom from restraint, therefore does not permit abuse or the licence to say anything whatsoever. Invoking once more the idea of 'positive freedom' cited earlier, the Aga Khan elaborates:

[A] concept of press freedom which not only means freedom 'from' but also freedom 'to' – not just freedom from improper governmental constraints but also freedom to advance the common purposes which give meaning to our lives. Freedom of the press does not mean the right of any journalist to write and to publish anything he or she wants to say.²⁹

It is because the media must 'advance the common purposes which give meaning to our lives'³⁰ that Prince Karim advocates a

pluralistic press that is 'accountable to the collective judgements of the community'.³¹

In recent years, the Aga Khan has cautioned against the negative effects of social media, of new digital technologies which provide 'more access, but less accountability'.³² Far from being a technophobe, he is instead concerned about the irresponsible use of technology. He is not in favour of the uncritical equating of technological capacity with human progress, noting that 'technological advance does not necessarily mean human progress',³³ but sometimes the reverse:

[M]ore communication has not meant more cooperation. More information has also meant more misinformation: more superficial snapshots, more shards of stray information taken out of context. And it has also meant more willful *disinformation*, not only differences of opinion, but distortions of fact. A wide-open Internet allows divisive information to travel as far and as fast as reliable information. There are virtually no barriers to entry and anyone, responsible or irresponsible, can play the game. New digital technologies mean more access, but less accountability.³⁴

Observing the paradox of how global convergence coincides with social divergence, he remarks that new technologies, if used irresponsibly, can also be 'forces of fragmentation',³⁵ creating an illusion of connection while in fact atomising society:

More information at our fingertips can mean more knowledge and understanding. But it can also mean more fleeting attention-spans, more impulsive judgements, and more dependence on superficial snapshots of events. Communicating more often and more easily can bring people closer together, but it can also tempt us to live more of our lives inside smaller information bubbles, in more intense but often more isolated groupings. We see more people everywhere these days, standing or sitting or walking alone, absorbed in their hand-held screens. But, I wonder whether,

in some larger sense, they are really more ‘in touch’? Greater ‘connectivity’ does not necessarily mean greater ‘connection.’³⁶

Technologies are morally ambivalent. They can, as Prince Karim notes, be used either to bridge divisions or ‘to widen cultural gulfs,’³⁷ depending on our own aspirations for them. They can delude us or usurp our faculties if we uncritically embrace them. In a statement that echoes Socrates’ recounting, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, of the Egyptian King Thamus’s admonition to Theuth, ‘the father of writing’, about the dangers of his new invention,³⁸ the Aga Khan underscores the crucial distinction between knowledge and the appearance of wisdom that technologies can provide:

Technologies, after all, are merely instruments – they can be used for good or ill. How we use them will depend, in every age and in every culture, not on what sits on our desktops, but on what is in our heads and in our hearts.³⁹

He notes

In the final analysis, the key to human cooperation and concord has not depended on advances in the technologies of communication, but rather on how human beings go about using – or abusing – their technological tools.⁴⁰

Bearing this in mind, it is important to ensure that the media and new technologies are used responsibly, guided by higher knowledge and ethics, to promote an enabling environment for the common good, and that they operate under appropriate oversight and social accountability.

Good Governance

An enabling environment requires the cooperation of responsibly functioning governmental organisations committed to good

governance and to improving the quality of lives. This entails both stable and competent governments underpinned by a culture of inclusiveness, and a commitment to the common good.

Progress must 'encourage mutual trust, promote co-operation, unleash human potentials and make possible a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts'.⁴¹ To this end, governments must promote (in the Aga Khan's words) 'the global aspiration for a better quality of life ... built upon opportunities that will provide genuine hope for the future'.⁴²

The Ismaili Imam has frequently observed that his democratic leanings spring from his Muslim faith. This is because Islam places a high value on consultative and cooperative government. Yet he notes that 'democracy is as fragile as any other form of human governance'.⁴³ Its viability depends in the end not only on its processes – he has observed that 'the existence of political parties and elections do not alone produce stable governments or competent leadership'⁴⁴ – but on its results.⁴⁵

He therefore advocates a culture of responsible government, responsive to the well-being of its citizens. 'We must not force publics to choose between democratic government and competent government',⁴⁶ he has said. In promoting workable democracies, the Aga Khan is critical of attempts by the Western world to paternalistically impose their versions of democracy on other countries, particularly on Muslim societies. He has cautioned, for example, that 'The West must move away from the idea of wanting to transpose its vision of democracy identically into the Islamic world. This cannot work'.⁴⁷ There is no 'one size fits all' solution, he notes, stating, 'Democracy is a wonderful concept, but it's not failsafe. It doesn't work in every country in every time'.⁴⁸

Instead, the Aga Khan calls for a flexible 'culture of democracy'⁴⁹ (democracy 'adjusted according to the country'⁵⁰) and an ethic of good governance dedicated to improving the quality of the lives of citizens. Government must respect

inclusiveness (the ‘unity of human society’), a principle which he considers ‘a condition *sine qua non* of good governance’, adding, ‘I think you will see governments fail because they do not practise this principle.’⁵¹

Elaborating on inclusiveness, he has emphasised its pluralistic foundations and the importance of a corresponding pluralistic acculturation to make democracy viable:

At the heart of a democratic ethic is a commitment to genuine dialogue to achieve a better quality of life, even across new barriers of distance and diversity. This means a readiness to give and take, to listen, to bridge the empathy gaps as well as the ignorance gaps that have so often impeded human progress. It implies a pluralistic readiness to welcome diversity and to see our differences not as difficult burdens but as potential blessings.⁵²

As we noted earlier, diverse competing interests within society must find a balancing point on which social order can rest. They must find a basis of accommodation, a common ground, which, the Ismaili Imam underlines, is ‘the global aspiration for a better quality of life ... built upon opportunities that will provide genuine hope for the future’.⁵³

Implicit in this pluralistic ethos of responsible government are certain elements which the Aga Khan has frequently stressed: ‘They are: improved constitutional understanding, independent and pluralistic media, the potential of civil society, and a genuine democratic ethic.’⁵⁴ Other elements that he has identified include ‘the idea of balanced authority’ in the making of government decisions, ‘a better understanding of constitutional values’, a respect for ‘the broad diversity of human faiths and cultures’ within secular societies,⁵⁵ and a ‘system of public accountability’,⁵⁶ so that governments are ‘regularly tested by the electoral process’.⁵⁷ Collectively, he believes these elements constitute the underlying conditions for good governance.

An Ethic of Hope

One of the most important, yet often overlooked, elements of an enabling environment is the ethic of hope, about which the Aga Khan has remarked: ‘The right to hope is the most powerful human motivation I know.’⁵⁸

Prince Karim emphasised this element in the title of his 2008 anthology *Where Hope Takes Root*, a phrase taken from his acceptance address on receiving the Tutzing Tolerance Award in 2006.⁵⁹ In this address, he spoke of tolerance growing out of hope as a positive force rooted in faith. Hope is a vital component of the pluralistic ethos that he advocates, as well as of the ethics of interconnection and cooperation. It is also an attribute of faith because it is related to the individual’s desire to be supported by God and by his fellow human beings. By that reckoning, the individual’s duty to hope is a measure of his faith.

Observing the state of the modern world, the Aga Khan has recently lamented that the predominant human force nowadays, regrettably, is fear.⁶⁰ But he has also noted that despondency – the despair which the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins refers to as ‘carriion comfort’⁶¹ – ‘is a betrayal of our faith’;⁶² no doubt because it implies a rejection of divine grace and providence. He has clarified elsewhere that ‘just as fear can be infectious, so hope is infectious.’⁶³ So the question is: How can fear and despondency be reversed and replaced by hope? This is particularly challenging in ‘an increasingly cynical time’, one of diminished faith.⁶⁴ While the Imam looks to governments and civil society institutions to provide an enabling environment for hope, he also emphasises that it is up to each individual to bear the burden of effecting this reversal for themselves:

This reversal from fear to hope is rooted in individuals, in the leadership that they provide to the overall impact of civil society. Governments and institutions must create an Enabling Environment

in which hope can flourish. But the actual process of replacing fear with hope rests with every individual in his or her society.⁶⁵

Implicit in the Aga Khan's view of the individual's ability to overcome fear with hope is the idea that hope rests ultimately on faith – not merely in the mundane forces of human progress and ingenuity, but in the sacred dimension from which these derive and which ultimately sustain them. Just as hope that is untethered to faith can fade if outcomes are not achieved, so hope that is sustained by faith in a greater will than one's own can ride out the vicissitudes of worldly outcomes. As faith is a way of seeing that life involves mystery, so hope becomes a choice that opens humanity to providence and grace. The ethic of hope derives, in the end from faith in the integral unity of humankind and in the moral principles this bond entails – echoing the view expressed by the Aga Khan at Tutzing that faith is the driver of hope, and hope, expressed as tolerance, is a sacred religious imperative.

In the final analysis, it is faith in a divine order that informs human enterprises, and provides its foundation for an enabling environment, for 'human progress must grow out of the human heart and soul. The environment enables – but it is the human spirit, guided and supported by the Divine Will, which eventually triumphs.'⁶⁶



Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi.

Living the Ethics of Islam

Integrating *Din* and *Dunya*

We ended Chapter 8 with a reminder that worldly progress is ultimately inseparable from matters of faith. In this chapter we will further emphasise the nature of this interconnection and its consequences for the Imam's work, which, as previously noted, is focused on improving the quality of human life.

Explaining the connection between worldly matters and matters of faith, the American critic Irving Babbitt (d. 1933) declared:

When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.¹

This observation resonates with the Aga Khan's vision of the integrated nature of reality and of Islam as encompassing both faith and the world (*din wa dunya*).

One consequence of faith being a 'way of life' is that it involves the expression of faith in action, bringing *din* to *dunya*, through acts of creative virtue.² It is significant that,

etymologically, *din* – like the word ‘religion’ – connotes a binding together. This binding force is a spiritual imperative which mandates that, to live a fully integrated life, one must embrace a moral responsibility towards the Other as an aspect of the whole. As the Imam has observed:

Islam is not passive. It does not admit that man’s spiritual needs should be isolated from his material daily activities. A Muslim must play an active role in helping his family and the brotherhood of believers. The object is not to achieve status, wealth and power, but to contribute to society’s overall development. This implies a moral responsibility to help its weaker, less fortunate members.³

Prince Karim’s role, as he has described it, is to ‘integrate the faith with worldly life’,⁴ and he has acknowledged this connective role as being the basis of his personal philosophy: ‘In Islam, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal. I have endeavoured all my life to live and work in accordance with this integrated philosophy.’⁵ The pre-eminent quality that this philosophy mandates is integrity – acting in a manner in keeping with faith in the intrinsic oneness of life, and consequently with the moral praxis that bridges ‘worldly concerns with spiritual ideals’. He has stated

[O]ne cannot talk about integrity without also talking about faith. For Islam, the importance of this intersection is an item of faith, such a profound melding of worldly concerns and spiritual ideals that one cannot imagine one without the other. The two belong together. They constitute ‘a way of life.’⁶

Institutionalising Ethics through the AKDN

Because ethics can express faith, it is the ‘profound melding’ of faith and life that has spurred the Aga Khan to create institutions to implement the ethical imperatives of this fusion. As he explains:

Faith ... is a force that should deepen our concern for our worldly habitat, for embracing its challenges, and for improving the quality of human life. This Muslim belief in the fusion of Faith and World is why much of my attention has been committed to the work of the Aga Khan Development Network.⁷

Simone Weil (1909–1943) once lamented that ‘To find a place in the budget for the eternal is not in the spirit of our age.’⁸ Yet, the Aga Khan is actively promoting a spiritual agenda through his Imamatus institutions. The AKDN, it can fairly be said, aims to realise the social and ethical conscience of the Ismaili community. The endeavours of the Ismaili Imamatus are an expression of *faith through works*, as Adrienne Clarkson recently recognised: ‘It is out of ... the necessary knowledge of living as a community to whom faith shows itself in works that the far-ranging and extraordinary activities of the present Aga Khan emerge.’⁹

On the tenth anniversary of his Imamatus, in 1967, the Aga Khan marked a significant milestone in promoting this agenda. He founded the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in Geneva as a not-for-profit organisation to assist the disadvantaged to attain a better quality of life. For half a century, the AKF has served the needs of marginalised societies, predominantly non-Ismaili, mostly in the developing world in regions of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, relying on volunteers and other benefactors, together with the professional staff of the Imamatus.

The AKF is now one of several agencies within the AKDN, a network of 12 cultural, social and economic development agencies ‘with individual mandates, to engage in critical dimensions of development from distinct yet complementary perspectives and the competencies they require.’¹⁰ The network, one of the largest developmental and humanitarian organisations in the world, currently employs some 80,000 workers and conducts programmes in some 30 countries in the following fields:

- *Health*: Aga Khan Health Services
- *Education*: Aga Khan Education Services; Aga Khan Academies; Aga Khan University (AKU); University of Central Asia (UCA)
- *Housing*: Aga Khan Building Services
- *Culture*: Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC)
- *Habitat*: Aga Khan Agency for Habitat
- *Economic and rural development*: Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)
- *Private sector enterprise*: Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED)
- *Microfinance*: Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance
- *Disaster reduction and humanitarian assistance*: Focus Humanitarian Assistance.

According to the AKDN website, all the agencies are registered in Switzerland as non-profit institutions with three exceptions: the AKU is chartered by the Government of Pakistan as an international university with the authority to operate programmes, branches and campuses anywhere in the world; the UCA is a self-governing regional university whose charter was established pursuant to an international treaty between the Ismaili Imam and the governments of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic; and the AKFED is incorporated as a for-profit development agency under Swiss law, with its project companies operating as commercial entities under the laws of the countries in which they are resident.

As we noted earlier, the AKDN's socio-cultural agencies focus primarily on connecting 'East' and 'West', while its economic development agencies focus primarily on connecting 'North' and 'South'. Both spheres of activity are underpinned by a philosophy of pluralism and a commitment to civil society, the importance of the latter being represented by, in particular, the work of the Global Centre for Pluralism based in Ottawa, Canada.

The Aga Khan has established six governing principles to guide the Imam's work in the field of development: 'breadth of responsibility, an apolitical stance, pluralism, a long view, work across disciplinary boundaries, and work across political boundaries'.¹¹ A striking feature of these principles, some of which are elaborated on below, is that they demonstrate the amplitude of the Imam's vision and scope of engagement of its mission to improve the quality of human lives based on a humanitarian and faith-based ethical mandate.

Humanistic Faith-Driven Objectives

The developmental work of the Imam is focused primarily in the developing world, benefitting diverse communities, without regard to their faith, gender, race or ethnicity – all in furtherance of the Islamic ideal of a 'frontierless brotherhood'.¹² The Aga Khan has explained the basis for this commitment:

The engagement of the Imam in development is guided by the ethics of Islam which bridge faith and society, a premise on which I established the Aga Khan Development Network, known as the AKDN. Its cultural social and economic development agencies seek to improve opportunities and living conditions of the weakest in society, without regard to their origin, gender or faith.¹³

The central objective of the network, 'to improve the quality of human life',¹⁴ has as its underlying ethical motive the respect for human dignity: 'Human dignity – restoring it and sustaining it – is a central theme'.¹⁵ For that reason, AKDN focuses on underprivileged members of society, enabling them via access to services and opportunities to improve their quality of life, 'to help the weakest in society to achieve self-reliance in improving their lives, guided by the Quranic ethic of a common humanity and the dignity of all mankind'.¹⁶ We see here an explicit

reference to the two ethical foundations of the Ismaili Imam – our common humanity and dignity. The focus on the quality of human life is, as we have seen, not to be understood exclusively in terms of material progress. Rather, in keeping with Prince Karim's stated philosophy, it is better understood as an expression of the ethics of Islam, which integrates faith with worldly life.

The Imam's concern with the quality of human life is not interpreted to apply just to the Aga Khan's own particular Ismaili community but extends beyond it to those among whom the *jamats* live, and is central to Prince Karim's role as his community's spiritual leader. Regarding this, he has commented:

The Imam is a Muslim institution with a history going back over 1400 years. As Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, I am to be concerned with the quality of life of the Community and those amongst whom it lives.¹⁷

The range of its engagement and the Ismaili Imam's goals and values derive directly from the faith of Islam:

To the Imam, the meaning of 'quality of life' extends to the entire ethical and social context in which people live, and not only to their material well-being measured over generation after generation. Consequently, the Imam's is *a holistic vision of development, as is prescribed by the faith of Islam*. It is about investing in people, in their pluralism, in their intellectual pursuit, and search for new and useful knowledge, just as much as in material resources. But it is also about investing with *a social conscience inspired by the ethics of Islam*. It is work that benefits all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality or background. Does the Holy Quran not say in one of the most inspiring references to mankind, that Allah has created all mankind from one soul?¹⁸

'Faith should deepen our concern for improving the quality of human life in all of its dimensions', and this guiding principle

‘is the overarching objective of the Aga Khan Development Network’.¹⁹ Accordingly, the work of the AKDN is not driven by commercial objectives (though the Network’s agencies are, of course, established to run in a commercially prudent manner), but is people-driven and ‘not dogma driven, not driven by material return’.²⁰ Its faith-based ethics are focused on ‘goals with universal relevance’, as the Aga Khan has underlined:

Our work has always been people-driven. It grows out of the age-old Islamic ethic, committed to goals with universal relevance: the elimination of poverty, access to education, and social peace in a pluralist environment. The AKDN’s fundamental objective is to improve the quality of human life.²¹

The focus of the AKDN is on investing in people rather than on investing in assets, on building human capital rather than material capital, because, as the Imam emphasises, ‘man is an extraordinary creature, a creation, and ... assisting him to become creative, productive within his national context, is the most productive thing an institution can do’.²²

In this quest for a creative and productive society, the Aga Khan regards the struggle against poverty as one of the Imam’s primary goals – one that, for him, is on par with promoting pluralism:

I passionately view the struggle against poverty, and respect for the values of pluralism, as two of the most significant tests of whether the 21st century is to be an era of global peace, stability and progress.²³

Particular attention must be given to the Aga Khan’s use of the term ‘poverty’. As he employs it, the term is to be understood in relation to the effects of marginalisation, as the ‘lack of access to quality of life’.²⁴ Poverty is not analysed simply in material terms. The gap between a good quality of living and a poor quality –

which expresses itself in terms of criteria such as a 'health gap' or 'education gap' or 'housing gap' – is a function of access to opportunity.²⁵ With the experience of several decades in development, the Aga Khan views poverty as 'a concept which is still poorly understood' because it is often 'analysed exclusively through the material angle' instead of as 'a societal phenomenon, characterised by a lack of access to protection, to security, to healthcare or to education'.²⁶ For this reason, the Imam's programmes focus on providing access to basic needs like housing, health and education, and – increasingly nowadays with people living longer – care for elders. They also seek to reach marginalised or remote societies (such as those in the relatively inaccessible mountain regions of Central Asia or the Northern Territories of Pakistan). The Imam's development initiatives are a part of a voluntarist strategy to counter human despair by initiatives that restore hope. As the Imam has declared:

Our duty is to try to free people from poverty. And to me, poverty means being without shelter, without protection, without access to healthcare, education, or credit, and without hope of ever controlling one's own destiny. This means condemning one's children and grandchildren to unacceptable living conditions. A voluntarist and innovative strategy is needed in order to break this chain of despair and total imprisonment.²⁷

These humanistic concerns derive from a social conscience and quest for social justice that are fundamental to Islam. As the Aga Khan has noted: 'Islam is very, very rigorous, very demanding on the elimination of inequities in society'.²⁸ The Quran repeatedly emphasises the need for social equity, encouraging *those who spend their wealth in the way of God* (see e.g., 2:261). Generosity (of time and knowledge, of kindness and wealth) is an expression of faith and thereby of *ihsan* (virtue or beauty), so the Quran commends the *one who gives and is reverent, and attests to what is most beautiful* (92:5–6). Almsgiving, tending to the needs

of others, especially the aged, widows, orphans and the poor or disabled, are all aspects of Muslim ethics incumbent on the faithful, as it is up to those who are more fortunate in society to help those who are not so fortunate by providing them with both the means and the motivation to achieve a better future. Thus, the Aga Khan has remarked:

There are those who enter the world in such poverty that they are deprived of both the means and the motivation to improve their lot. Unless these unfortunates can be touched with the spark which ignites the spirit of individual enterprise and determination, they will only sink back into renewed apathy, depredation and despair. It is for us who are more fortunate to provide that spark.²⁹

Recognising that there is a thin line between interdependence and dependence, the Aga Khan has pointed out that the aim of the Imamatus is not to create dependencies but to make people self-reliant. Explaining this, he has stated

Often non-profit activities are considered charity. And this is a word that we do not like. Islam has a very clear message about the different forms of generosity. There is that with regard to the poor, which takes the form of gifts. But the recipient remains poor. There exists a second form of generosity that contributes to growing the independence of the person. This concept, in which the goal is to make the person the master of their destiny, is the most beneficial in the eyes of Allah.³⁰

The AKDN's developmental work therefore proceeds from the Islamic premise of 'not just helping, but helping to render the individual capable of governing his or her destiny',³¹ of assisting people 'to go from a notion of an unsatisfactory position of development to an autonomous position'.³² These outcomes may take years, perhaps decades, to achieve, and it is this 'long view' – mentioned earlier, as one of the six principles of the AKDN's

work – where the engagement is often without set time frames, that distinguishes the AKDN from many non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The Aga Khan clarifies that his faith-driven philosophy of human development is not to be misconstrued either as philanthropy or as entrepreneurship:

I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world – especially the Western media – try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility – it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.³³

The Ismaili Imamat's work is therefore pre-eminently an expression of a Quranic ethics. It is a form of 'enlightened self-fulfillment', as the Aga Khan explained in a speech to the Canadian Parliament in 2014, in which he likened the initiatives of the Imamat and of the Ismaili ethic of service to the Canadian spirit of volunteerism:

This Canadian spirit resonates with a cherished principle in Shi'i Ismaili culture: the importance of contributing one's individual energies on a voluntary basis to improving the lives of others. This is not a matter of philanthropy, but rather of self-fulfillment – 'enlightened self-fulfillment'.³⁴

Responsiveness and Sustainability

The Aga Khan has also rejected the characterisation of the Imamat's work as a form of paternalism, stating 'the goal is to create a system which is responsive to peoples' own views,

not what you think their views are.³⁵ This sensitivity to be responsive rather than paternalistic resonates with the Imamāt's respect for promoting human dignity, and it is also a matter of pragmatism. Thus, the AKDN is not engaged with imposing on people external ideas of what constitutes happiness, as the Aga Khan has explained:

One of the most difficult questions I ask, and I've asked a hundred times, is simple. 'What is the definition of happiness for a peasant in Asia or Africa?' If we can't answer that question, we don't know what are the elements that contribute, and the priorities of those elements, we certainly will never be able to deal with the development issues in a manner which is going to be shared by the people we're working with ... Always remember whose needs are being fulfilled. Are they yours or are they the person's you are trying to help?³⁶

This approach towards development also reflects the Imamāt's pluralism, which does not seek a standardised or imposed solution to problems, but instead actively seeks to be truly responsive to the particular varying needs and cultures of its diverse constituencies. To do this requires much planning, including conducting baseline studies that ask, among other things, whether there is a buy-in from local constituent communities. It also requires forming partnerships with the affected communities at the local level, as the Aga Khan has noted:

[O]nly when government, non-government, and commercial organisations come together in, and especially with, a community that the necessary resources can be generated and change can be sustained. This is a guiding principle for the work of the institutions which make up the Aga Khan Development Network, and it is exemplified in its work in the Northern Areas [of Pakistan]. Sustainable development requires village organisations, the empowerment of those organisations, and the creation of partnerships between them and the government, local and non-governmental

organisations, and experts from the leading centres of research and teaching around the world.³⁷

The passage cited above emphasises another key aspect of the Imamat's development initiatives: their focus on sustainability. In this regard, the Aga Khan has stressed three essential conditions for sustainability: pluralism, civil society and good governance, commenting that 'These three conditions are mutually reinforcing. Taken together, they allow developing societies gradually to become masters of the process and make that process self-sustainable.'³⁸

In Chapter 8, we discussed the importance of creating an enabling environment to underwrite progress. In this chapter, we can see how the ingredients of the enabling environment are being implemented by the Imamat through its own methodologies, with the aim of sustaining progress and creating self-reliance instead of dependencies. An important element of this work is the nurturing of culture to nourish healthy societies.

Cultural Development

The preservation and fostering of cultural values is an important aspect of development, particularly in the face of accelerating change in the modern world. Culture, by its nature centripetal, is vital to social cohesion.³⁹ Cultural identity is fundamental to societies that might otherwise be vulnerable to the effects of globalisation – to the pressures of disorienting change, or of homogenisation and disintegration, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The Aga Khan has emphasised this, for example in the following passage, which expresses the importance of cultural factors in development planning:

Values and ideals, and the identities to which they relate and give form, have always been important for humankind. They give direction and points of reference in the face of rapid change.

Successful development requires community engagement and mobilisation, but it also needs to occur in a cultural context which preserves individual local values and ideals.⁴⁰

This 'cultural context' is consequential in nurturing individual dignity, communal cohesiveness, and a sense of heritage and identity. The operating assumption of this perspective is that issues of cultural identity and economic welfare are intimately linked, as discussed below.

A 'Trampoline for Development'

The Aga Khan has remarked that an important lesson learned by the AKDN has been that, far from being a social luxury or add-on to development, culture is an integral component of it and could itself become 'the catalyst for social and economic development'.⁴¹ He has acknowledged that this insight was an important impetus behind the programmes of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the AKTC, which operate on the premise that cultural enhancements are a 'powerful trampoline for development':

When I created the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, I discovered that the cultural dimension of the Islamic world was an extraordinarily powerful trampoline for development. It became apparent that by developing patrimonial sites one could improve the quality of life of the people who live in and near them. The populations of these historic areas are often the poorest in the countries concerned. Here, by acting in the realm of culture, it was actually possible to improve the quality of life for the poorest of the poor. By giving its true value back to culture, new forms of productivity, a new form of socio-economic development, come into being.⁴²

An example of this synergetic relationship of cultural enhancement and economic development can be found in the al-Azhar Park restoration project in Egypt. Begun in 1992 and spanning

more than a decade, the project transformed a 74-acre area in Cairo, which had been a debris dump for over 500 years, into a park and 'green lung' for the city. During this process, it also preserved a 1.5-kilometre twelfth-century Ayyubid wall that had been buried in the neighbouring Darb al-Ahmar district. Through this restoration, the lives of its inhabitants were radically improved, both economically and culturally, providing a remarkable illustration of the link between culture and progress, and thereby affirming a central premise of AKTC's work, 'that cultural enrichment and historic restoration can also be effective springboards for economic and social progress'.⁴³

In addition to the al-Azhar Park project, the AKTC has engaged in several other restoration projects as part of its Historic Cities Programme, among which, notably, have been Humayun's Tomb in India, the Citadel of Aleppo in Syria (now sadly damaged by the ongoing war), the Baltit Fort in Pakistan, the Old Cities of Kabul and Herat in Afghanistan, the Stone Town in Zanzibar, and the Great Mosque of Mopti in Mali.

Culture and Muslim Identity

We have shown the important role of the Imamat's cultural agencies in addressing identity tensions within the Umma and in countering misunderstandings about Islam in the West. The AKTC's role as a custodian of cultural knowledge extends to preserving and transmitting cultural values. This is vital to the pluralistic initiatives of the Imamat, to enhancing the cultural identities and values of the diverse Muslim populations in an increasingly globalised world. For Muslim societies, identity loss has been a major concern, as the Aga Khan has often remarked. He has spoken of younger generations in these societies as being 'intellectually unchallenged and culturally undernourished',⁴⁴ and has stressed the importance of ethical and cultural nourishment to counter these consequences, stating, 'we must

re-invigorate our own value systems and cultural expressions.’⁴⁵ Noting that ‘acculturation is one of the problems we’re facing in the Islamic world’,⁴⁶ the Aga Khan has ensured the Imamāt’s cultural agencies such as AKTC help restore pride in Muslim culture and civilisations. Culture is seen as a transmitter of values, and the civilisations that the AKTC and other organisations build are a source of pride and identity. They not only strengthen identities within the Umma, and thereby create conditions to better impact economic well-being, but also educate and bring together the diverse societies and cultures of the Muslim and Western worlds.

The Aga Khan recognises there are many young Muslims who understand that:

[T]he idea that there is some inherent, permanent division between their heritage and the world of today is a profoundly mistaken idea; and that the choice it suggests between an Islamic identity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, full participation in the global order of today, is a false choice indeed.⁴⁷

His call for cultural revival is therefore couched in terms that attempt to reconcile Islam with modernity. So, he has stated, ‘let’s revive our cultures so that modernity is not only seen in the terminology of the West, but in the intelligent use of our past’.⁴⁸ The intelligent use of the past is a quest for the principles informing the diverse expressions of Muslim cultures, not in order to repeat those same cultural expressions anachronistically in modernity, but to draw from them their informing principles and the traditions that conveyed them and to apply them intelligently to the changing contexts of the modern world. An important feature of this quest is the ability to view cultural expressions in terms of their symbolic content – to read the ‘signs’, not only of the ever-renewing theophany, but also of cultural history.

Architecture as a Transmitter of Values

The practice of this philosophy can be seen in the Aga Khan's approach to architecture. From the Shia perspective, the Imams, as possessors of *ta'wil*, guide the *jamat* to perceive the abiding divine order in the midst of change, and to cohere with it through ethical behaviour. Like his predecessor Imam Ali, who repeatedly emphasised to his followers the symbolic nature of theophany⁴⁹ to remind them of their relationship with God and his creation, Prince Karim points to various symbolic elements, for it is by contemplating the divine order that man can know his place and purpose in it.

He has actively championed architecture as a medium of metaphysical expression, underlining how architectural designs, particularly within Islam's rich heritage, point to God and to the inherent dignity of man. He has placed special emphasis on the integrative role of architecture: to meld tradition and modernity ('the past and the future – inherited tradition and changing needs'), nature and man ('the Gifts of Nature and the potentials of the Human Mind'), and form and function ('aesthetic inspiration and practical utility').⁵⁰ Architecture, viewed in this unifying fashion, is infused with what he describes as 'the Spirit of Pluralism – an approach to life that welcomes difference and diversity – one that embraces diversity itself as a Gift of the Creator, honouring cultural differences as the valued legacies of our predecessors.'⁵¹ Thus he has spoken of 'the potential of architecture to communicate across the boundaries that may otherwise divide us',⁵² and has promoted what he terms an 'Architecture of Pluralism' – 'one that will encourage all of us to listen to one another and to learn from one another, with a deep sense of humility and a realisation that diversity itself is a gift of the Divine'.⁵³

In terms of engaging with cultural history, Prince Karim has spoken of 'the twin dangers of slavishly copying the architecture

of the past and of foolishly ignoring its rich legacy', stressing instead the need to 'thoroughly internalise the collective wisdom of bygone generations, the eternal Message and ethic with which we live, and then reinforce them in the language of tomorrow'.⁵⁴ The intelligent use of the past, he emphasises, eschews 'bogus orientalism',⁵⁵ mere nostalgia for domes and minarets, or mimicry for 'a façade of Islamic architecture, hiding the new behind a shallow imitation of the old'.⁵⁶ Instead, it encourages architecture to be viewed in terms of its spiritual symbolism and its ethical function, focusing on principles and values that are fundamental to Islam and to the inherent dignity of human beings. Art must ultimately relate to what is essential to man, to our being human, and it therefore has a spiritual function. This spiritual function is a significant feature of architecture as an art form. In the words of the celebrated English architect and designer of St Paul's Cathedral, Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723), 'Architecture aims at eternity; and therefore is the only thing incapable of modes and fashions in its principles'.⁵⁷

Speaking of this function, the Aga Khan has noted that 'great architecture, like great art, captures esoteric thought in physical form'.⁵⁸ The built form valorises space, ordering it according to sacred principles that reflect the cosmic norms of centrality (symbolising the origin and end, the primal font and vantage of order), verticality (symbolising the *axis mundi* or gateway to heaven) and complementarity (symbolising the unified separateness or *coincidentia oppositorum* of the one and the many, of essence and substance). There is, Prince Karim argues, a close link between art and faith, between beauty and mystery, which coexist intimately within artistic intelligence. Art, like mysticism, attempts 'to capture that which is ineffable and beyond being'.⁵⁹ The Ismaili Imam draws a direct parallel

between this transcendental function of art and the symbolism of the Quran in the following passage:

Does not the Quran challenge the artist, as much as the mystic, to go beyond the physical – the outward – so as to seek to unveil that which lies at the centre but gives life to the periphery? Is not a great work of art, like the ecstasy of the mystic, a gesture of the spirit, a stirring of the soul that comes from the attempt to experience a glimpse of, and an intimacy with, that which is ineffable and beyond being?

The famous verse of 'light' in the Quran, the Ayat al-Nur,⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

The 'cosmos full of signs and symbols,' which reflects theophany, also thereby reflects the divine order, manifesting the connection between aesthetics and ethics, between art and the spiritual dimension – underlining that the great Platonic transcendentals (Truth, Goodness and Beauty) are convertible and are ultimately one. The French philosopher Étienne Gilson (d. 1978) has remarked on the epistemological implications of this unity: 'The beautiful is to knowledge what the good is to desire.'⁶² True beauty, whether in nature or in art, resonates an ethical meaning and a symbolism which the sensitive spirit can discern. If we are to overcome the impoverished perception of reality that popular culture inures us to, we must bring to life in ourselves a higher sense of art, its symbolism and its ethical significance.⁶³

The Aga Khan lays particular emphasis on the symbolism of the Imamāt institutional buildings and *jamati* architecture, highlighting both their sacred as well as ethical meanings. For example, the Delegation Building in Ottawa is intended to be 'a metaphor for humanism and enlightenment, and for the humility that comes from the constant search for answers that

leads inevitably to more questions.⁶⁴ Speaking of his role in the selection of rock crystal as the primary material featured in that building's construction, Prince Karim has remarked on its symbolic qualities of translucence:

Rock crystal is an extraordinary natural phenomenon. It plays with light, and in our world that is very important; it has a quasi-mystical component because, depending on the angle under which it is viewed, you see it differently. It has many facets both literally and figuratively that are fascinating.⁶⁵

He has highlighted, in particular, the spiritual significance of rock crystal's iridescent mystery as 'an appropriate symbol of the Timelessness, the Power and the Mystery of Allah as the Lord of Creation'.⁶⁶

Another example of the Imam's use of architectural symbolism is the Toronto complex, which combines three elements: the Ismaili Centre (symbolising intellectual spirituality), the Park (symbolising the connecting theophany of the natural world) and the Museum (symbolising the spirituality of artistic and cultural pluralism). 'Together, these three projects will symbolise the harmonious integration of the spiritual, the artistic and the natural worlds – in keeping with the holistic ideal which is an intimate part of Islamic tradition'.⁶⁷

A more recent example is the symbolism of the relocated Global Centre for Pluralism at its new headquarters on the site of the former War Museum on Sussex Drive in Ottawa. At the opening ceremony on 16 May 2017, the Aga Khan spoke of two features of the design: its garden, 'a tranquil space for contemplating the past and thinking about the future', and its opening to the Ottawa River, 'not only a refreshing symbol, it is also a connecting symbol, connecting this site to the rest of Canada and the rest of the world'.⁶⁸

Noting that 'In much of Islamic architecture you find a sense of spirituality',⁶⁹ the Imam has contrasted this spirituality

with the ‘thoughtless skyscrapers’ and soulless productions of modernism,⁷⁰ ‘the elephantine massiveness of so much of today’s world,’⁷¹ cautioning that ‘when art is separated from faith-based roots, other influences can dominate – including soulless technology and empty secularisation.’⁷² To guard against this soullessness (note particularly his use of the adjective ‘empty’ to qualify the term ‘secularisation’), he has emphasised a spiritual vision of reality and underlines ‘the profound interaction between faith and the environment, between a society’s deep cultural and ethical structure.’⁷³ This integrative philosophy, reflecting the moral dimensions of culture and space, is a guiding ethos of the Imam’s holistic approach to the environment, reinforcing the Aga Khan’s view that ‘For us there is no fundamental division between the spiritual and the material: the whole world is an expression of God’s creation and the aesthetics of the environment we build are correspondingly important.’⁷⁴

Stressing this integrative factor as fundamental to his understanding of the relationship between the metaphysical space as container and the physical structure as content, he notes the corresponding connection between aesthetics and ethics in relation to the environment:

Since all that we see and do resonates on the faith, the aesthetics of the environment we build and the quality of the social interactions that take place within those environments, reverberate on our spiritual life. The physical structure of Islam is therefore an important concern for me.⁷⁵

With regard to the ethical function of architecture, and mindful that culture transmits values, the Imam lays particular stress on promoting architectural projects that improve people’s lives and that respect their dignity – projects that enhance the cultural pluralism of diverse societies, and that restore their cultural pride. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture,

now established as a prestigious and coveted recognition of architectural merit, of designs that blend form, function and ethics, began in discussions about 'the deconstruction of the cultural inheritance' of Islam, its loss of cultural continuity and the impact of this loss on Muslim societies.⁷⁶ A fundamental aim of the Award was to connect culture, through architecture, to the quality of life:

The Award was born out of concern for the quality of life, rather than just the professional dynamics of architecture as it has been known in the Western world. In fact, we saw that as a moral obligation.⁷⁷

The Aga Khan has explained that the Award for Architecture grew out of the insight that the built environment is a basic indicator of the quality of life, and therefore a 'direct reflector of poverty'.⁷⁸ Recognising that buildings shape people as much as people shape them, he has observed that 'architecture has a capacity to transform the quality of human existence',⁷⁹ and that 'every time you put a building in a community of people, in some way you affect that community of people'.⁸⁰

For architecture, as with all Imamat projects, the Imam has stressed the importance of pluralism. One can see this pluralistic ethic represented in the diverse Ismaili Centres from London to Lisbon, from Dubai to Dushanbe. Like all Imamat buildings, the centres are intended to be 'ambassadorial buildings',⁸¹ representing the values of the Shi'i Ismaili community. Created 'to enable the community to practise its faith, maintain its traditions, and protect its identity',⁸² they contain a *jamatkhana* (the prayer hall reserved for Ismaili *tariqa* practices, 'a place for contemplation and search for enlightenment')⁸³ as well as other areas, spaces that are envisioned to become intellectual watering holes for the community (for 'the promotion of social development and the enhancement of

intellectual discovery’,⁸⁴ to ‘foster a mutually rewarding dialogue between tradition and modernity’,⁸⁵ and to ‘demystify our faith’).⁸⁶ The pluralism that such buildings reflect is among the best qualities in architecture, because these institutions serve a basic need to unite diverse groups by providing spaces that encourage dialogue, the healing of divisions, and the sharing and showcasing of diverse cultural expressions to promote a mutual understanding among communities:

At its best, architecture is an inherently pluralistic enterprise – one that honours diversity, including diversity within and among Islamic communities. At its best, architecture will help people to come together across old divides rather than re-enforcing those divides and isolating one group from another.⁸⁷

Ethics and the *Jamat*

Before concluding this chapter which has included an illustration of the ways in which the Imamatus institutions aspire to exemplify the precept of ‘living the ethics of the faith’, we should note that the Ismaili *jamat*s and their *jamati* institutions also display a humanistic ethic as a feature of their own ethical acculturation.

The *jamat*s are close-knit communities which operate programmes for social governance, housing, health and education (both religious and secular), and provide ethics-driven communal dispute-resolution services, welfare assistance and emergency relief programmes to benefit their constituents. Because there is a recognition that ‘when the norms of fairness and decency are violated in any way, then the foundations of society are undermined’,⁸⁸ Ismailis are encouraged to act ethically. Fairness and decency means making decisions on the basis of moral reasoning and behaving with a sense of accountability and generosity. Ismailis are taught the basic human virtues of service that are institutionalised in the work of the Imamatus institutions – to assist the poor and the elderly and to help the marginalised – and

many of them generously contribute their time and knowledge to the *jamat* and to the wider societies among whom they live. In encouraging the *jamats* to formally donate their time and knowledge through the institutions of the Ismaili Imamate, the Aga Khan has adopted a deliberate strategy of tracking knowledge within its institutions so that it can be shared as a resource with communities of need, primarily those in the developing world. Such resource bases operate locally, thereby avoiding the creation of knowledge dependencies. About these databanks of shared knowledge among Ismaili volunteers, the Aga Khan has noted:

I tried to create capacity in the Western world so that Western professionals, as well as Muslim professionals being educated in the West, could serve their own communities, their own cultures and their own populations. It's a sharing of knowledge, and the Western world, as far as I am aware, has been very, very generous with that knowledge.⁸⁹

This particular initiative and also the ethical conduct of the *jamat* generally, are ultimately grounded in faith: virtue becomes a way to '*vie with one another in good deeds.*' (Q 2:148). In the terminology of the Ismaili faith, virtue represents the outer (*zahiri*) expression of an inward (*batini*) reality.

Through the Imamate Institutions such as the AKF, and in other ways too, Shi'i Ismailis are known to contribute generously to the wider societies among which they live. They take evident communal pride in their social conscience and the public recognition that the Imamate's work garners from world leaders and prominent philanthropists such as Bill Gates (whose Foundation has partnered with the AKDN on some projects). What is not often recognised, but what it is hoped this book will clarify, is that their work – understood as a partnership between the *jamat* and their Imam – is a practical expression of the ethics of their faith.



Interior view of Charles V Palace at Alhambra, Granada, Spain.

Global Convergence

Assessing the Legacy of the Aga Khan

Prince Karim Aga Khan, now in his eightieth year of life and the sixtieth year of his Imamate, is the longest-serving Ismaili Imam. While his role as Imam of the Shi'i Imami Ismaili Muslims has spanned over six decades, the present Imamate's mission of creating convergence and building a bridge to a better future remains a 'work in progress'. Despite this temporal proximity, one can identify the major themes and initiatives of the present Imamate, and begin to assess the legacy of the Aga Khan.

The Aga Khan has been called 'an icon of not only thought and philosophy but of action'.¹ In this final chapter we will assess his legacy in the areas of both thought and action. In doing so, we will consider the impact that the Imam's ideas and work have had on human lives, and on the enduring nature of his initiatives as a legacy.

The Aga Khan as a Visionary

From the very outset of his Imamate, the Aga Khan has presented a coherent vision of spiritual harmony that expresses itself in the ideal of a united and compassionate community. He has urged his Ismaili followers to live integrated, ethical lives, in conformity

with their faith and their shared vision of human fellowship. In the Takht Nashini (enthronement) address in Bombay, in 1958, Prince Karim stated

Our faith teaches us that we have obligations far beyond our own or even our family's interests ... By the way you conduct your daily lives, by the compassion you show to your fellow men and women, and above all by your faith in God, you will ultimately be judged.²

This combination of faith and ethics, doctrine and praxis, is the foundation upon which the Imam has built his institutions and his *jamats*, creating an architecture of global convergence which is central to his legacy.

This unifying foundation is regarded by Ismailis as the Prophet Muhammad's own abiding legacy, one upon which the Ismaili Imam is continuing to build. The prophetic legacy is expressly articulated in the AKDN's Ethical Framework:

By grounding societal values in the principle of moral responsibility to the divine, Islam lifts the sense of the public and social order to a transcendent level. The lasting legacy of the Prophet Muhammad is the strong suffusion of the mundane, of daily life, with the spiritual.³

As has been emphasised throughout this book, the central idea of the Ismaili ethos is that the intrinsic oneness of reality mandates ethical conduct. This idea is reflected in a cosmopolitan vision of a common humanity, in which each human being is seen as being connected to the Other by a spiritual bond which forms the basis of their ethical responsibility to live according to principles of truth and justice. In this unified world view, integrity and dignity co-inhere. These dual ethical principles reflect, respectively, 'the principle of integration' (that all things intrinsically converge) and 'the principle of complementarity' (that, as an aspect of such convergence, the polarities of life complement each other through the equilibrium of spirit and matter).

The principles of integrity and dignity are fundamental to the Aga Khan's world view. They mandate an ethics of integration, the duty to cohere in wholeness through inclusiveness and compassion. In this way, a balance is sought to be achieved between faith (*din*) and worldly life (*dunya*), which reconciles the particular with the universal, the individual with the communal, and the outward (*zahiri*) with the inward (*batini*). The Ismaili Imam has referred to this world view as an 'outlook of global convergence'.⁴

As we have seen, cosmopolitanism is a key element of the global convergence envisioned by the Aga Khan. It is a central feature of his message for the need to reintegrate a fragmented humanity, riven by the ethos of modernism. The cosmopolitan ethic which the Aga Khan espouses, embraces diversity and complexity, and, in doing so, it addresses the need to balance the universal and the particular, with a compassionate and pluralistic ethic. Compassion is rooted in a respect for human dignity, while pluralism mandates a respect for difference, and for unifying principles and openness to diverse viewpoints. Cosmopolitanism values qualities of empathetic engagement and cultural sensitivity, and advocates a spirit of dialogue and compromise, whereby the ultimate aim is neither to homogenise nor to relativise diversity but, respecting differences, to find common ground consistent with balancing individual and social interests in a way that is true to both, and also true to the ideal of our shared humanity. In the search for such a balance, the aim is to improve the quality of human lives, while building capacities to advance individual potentials and to serve the common good. As one observer has remarked

Ismaili tradition ... is grounded in the ethics of Islam in which economic, social and cultural all come together to determine the quality of life for human beings. As the Aga Khan often says, 'we have been created as one by a single Creator'.⁵

As part of this ethical praxis, 'a guiding principle of the Imamāt's institutions is to replace walls which divide with bridges that unite'.⁶ This important objective of the Imamāt's vision, and one that is fundamental to assessing the Aga Khan's legacy, can be noted in how he has positioned the AKDN in its role as a 'connector' that bridges societal divisions. He promotes the task of creating cohesion as not only an institutional purpose, but also as an individual and a communal enterprise. He has referred to it as a way to construct a better future for all. Such a 'Bridge of Hope' would, he says, be founded on shared principles and values,⁷ and, he says, would offer those who walk on it 'visions of opportunity' to live better lives.⁸

This is a message of hope, embodied in a unitive vision which looks to the diverse elements of society pulling together as part of a common humanity, acting for the common good. As this is such a central message, it can be considered a major element of the Ismaili Imam's legacy. He has expressed reservations about the fact that not all Muslim societies subscribe to this cosmopolitan vision,⁹ and has cautioned about the dangers of mounting conflict in an increasingly globalising world that abandons the pluralistic ethic of inclusiveness. He has also pointed to centrifugal forces, linked to the ethos of modernism, which cause societies to fray, and, to counter these deleterious effects in a cynical age, he has focused on certain ideas that are calculated to have universal purchase: unification on the basis of our common humanity, improving the quality of life for all, creating enabling environments with good governance, pluralistic participation by diverse elements of civil society, responsible education, accountable media and offering hope and help to improve the lot of marginalised or disadvantaged elements of society.

While conditions are, arguably, more polarised in a globalising world, with the forces of provincialism and nationalism arrayed against those more receptive to cosmopolitan ideals, and although the Aga Khan has sounded a note of pessimism in his

statement that ‘today the strongest human force, sadly, is fear’,¹⁰ the precarious state of the world currently only underscores the importance of his message of hope, and the enduring need for his vision of unity and compassion.

The extent to which his message and his hope for global convergence will prevail may be uncertain, but there can be no doubt as to its value. Because it is promoted by a modern Muslim leader at a time when Islam is under assault, it also helps to challenge those who misunderstand the nature of the faith and ethos of Islam, and who regard it as monolithic, inward-looking, or hostile, particularly toward Western or liberal forms of civilisation. This view of Islam is one that is being welcomed by many in the West. To quote one Western politician:

[The Aga Khan is] ... a man who shows us a face of Islam that many of us do not know and sadly all too often we do not want to know: an Islam that is open, tolerant and willing to engage in dialogue.¹¹

This face of Islam, being anchored in traditional principles rooted in its faith, does not need to fear modernity. In refuting the ethos of modernism, it does not eschew the modern. In embracing its own faith pluralistically, it is able to coexist with the faith of others. In its cosmopolitan ideals, it is tolerant to the extent only of the intolerance of others.¹²

The question of intolerance is of particular concern to the Aga Khan. For the most part throughout their varied history, Ismaili Muslims (a minority not only within the larger Umma but also within the minority of Shi‘ism) have lived without the unfettered ability to practise their faith openly. That condition subsists even today in certain parts of the Ismaili diaspora. While Ismailis have dissimulated their faith at times in their history in order to survive hostile elements,¹³ today they are largely secure within the Western world – even thriving in places like Canada – but they are marginalised and even

under attack in some regions where pluralistic ethics have not taken root. The Ismaili Imam's message of subsuming narrow identities within the vision of a common humanity, while preserving the distinctiveness of cultural and religious identities, with its concomitant ethical implications, is crucial to enabling his Ismaili followers to negotiate potential identity conflicts, not only among their sometimes suspicious hosts but also in relation to the challenges of modernisation, modernism, globalisation and occidentalism.

The Aga Khan's vision and outlook of global convergence, built on a melding of faith and ethics, and on a balancing of the spiritual and the worldly domains, is the basis of the intellectualism he has sought to instil within his followers and to ignite within the Umma. Although these intellectual elements have always been present within Islam itself and in the message of its Prophet, they have been given new meaning and application by the present Ismaili Imam in order to guide his modern-day followers to adapt to the changing contexts of the contemporary world. As such, his articulation of a cosmopolitan message for a globalising world constitutes a major component of his legacy.

The Aga Khan as Reformer

The Aga Khan has held office as Imam of the Ismailis during a tumultuous era of deep and accelerating change, one that has seen the *jamats* grow from regional and disparate aggregations to a global *jamat*. It has required active reforms to manage this change.

We will highlight his reforms in five areas: (1) constitutional reform to address the needs of the global *jamat*, (2) securing recognition of the Ismaili faith within the Umma, (3) asserting the continuity of the Imamate and its legal status within the modern world, (4) intellectual reform to address issues of Ismaili identity in the modern world and (5) institutionalising the ethos

of the Ismaili social and moral conscience through the Imamate Institutions.

Constitutional Reform

To address the needs of his global community, the Aga Khan has established a modern Ismaili Constitution with corresponding global *jamati* institutions. The Ismaili Constitution which he promulgated in 1986 is the first such codification in the modern era. It affirms the central principles and theological premises of the Ismaili Imamate in its preamble,¹⁴ and establishes a variety of reforms, including *jamati* structures for the governance and well-being of its diverse *jamats*, positioning them to better cope with their integration into the modern world. These reforms are ongoing because the Constitution is not 'cast in stone' but is a living document, adapting to the changing needs of the worldwide *jamats*.

Recognition within the Umma

At a time when the Umma has been beset by conflicts, Prince Karim has ensured that the Ismaili Muslims and their Shi'i Imami Ismaili school of thought are appropriately recognised. His protocol, elaborated in the Amman Message, affirms the theological legitimacy of the Ismaili faith within the pluralism of Islam. This legitimising acknowledgement is a significant achievement for the minority Ismaili Muslims in the modern era.

The Status of the Imamate

While previously the Ismaili Imamate's recognition, in a political sense, was tied to territorial rule (as in the Fatimid period), the present Aga Khan has taken steps to achieve new forms of acknowledgement for the provenance and continuity of the Ismaili Imamate in the modern world. During his tenure,

the Aga Khan has taken steps to ensure that the Imamatus continues to obtain a growing legal and political affirmation of its 14-century historical status through various international treaties and protocols. He has established the Seat of the Ismaili Imamatus and has instituted an ambassadorial presence for it through the Imamatus's Delegation. While the Imamatus is politically neutral, it has increasingly acquired influence internationally, among governments and in civil society, particularly with regard to matters relating to socio-economic development and to policies and programmes impacting the quality of life of citizens assisted by its institutions.

Intellectual Reform

Under Prince Karim's guidance, the diverse *jamats* have emerged from the shadows of colonial rule and, partially, from the Iron Curtain, into the increasingly modernising and globalising world. With this have come many challenges. Perplexed by a 'divergent squint', the less modernised Muslim world has encountered the more modernised Western world with a combination of incomprehension and adulation, and has struggled, in the haze of historical amnesia, to find its own identity. Globalism, changing mobility patterns, shifting demographics and encounters between diverse communities have created opportunities, but also the potential for disaggregation and conflict. In the secular world, an unquestioning acceptance of scientific rationalism and materialistic modernism has continued to pose challenges for faith-based traditions. Unprecedented material progress, unbridled individual freedoms, populist cultures that are often intolerant of the minorities in their midst, and under-regulated and isolating new technologies, have created tensions and have posed new ethical dilemmas. The complexities of modern life have deprived some elements of the *jamats* of a sense of stability, making them more vulnerable to centrifugal forces and fragmenting social influences.

To confront and navigate these myriad challenges, the Aga Khan has looked to re-establish an intellectual revival within his own community by his messages of cosmopolitanism, pluralism, civil society, meritocracy, good governance, and the ethical dimension of faith (*din wa dunya*) – all of which are founded in Muslim traditions, and are true to the principles and values of Islam and its vision of the just society. He has promoted a commitment to principles of integrity and dignity, and to the values of harmony, compassion and fairness, which are central to his Muslim faith.

By coalescing Ismaili values around principles while simultaneously fostering local traditions and cultures, and by creating institutional spaces for the global *jamats* within which they can work cooperatively for the good of the disadvantaged members of society, and also by promoting intellectual spaces for dialogue and exploration, Prince Karim is helping his followers to forge a pan-Ismaili identity geared to withstand a world which, while it is diversifying, is becoming more interactive.

In order to help heal the actual or potential rifts within the global *jamats*, the Umma and the wider societies of the modern world, he is positioning his Imamatus and the Ismaili community to be agents of positive change:

I believe the Ismaili community and its Imamatus's commitment to the brotherhood of man and the quality of his life can contribute to countering the dangerous polarisation of our world and of our times.¹⁵

Building the Imamatus Institutions

The various programmes of AKDN, which have been the principal vehicles for the translation of the Aga Khan's ethical vision into action, have sought to improve the lives of the marginalised, disadvantaged and underprivileged populations of the developing world, and to engender a sense of mutual understanding and harmony among diverse societies to help bridge their divisions.

Among the wide range of Imamat institutions that the Aga Khan has created – in particular the agencies of the AKDN – the following stand out as especially significant:

- The Aga Khan Foundation, founded in Geneva, in 1967, is one of the largest not-for-profit private development agencies in the world. It coordinates and supports much of the development work undertaken by its sister agencies within the AKDN.
- The Institute of Ismaili Studies, founded in London, in 1977, is a major institution for Muslim civilisational studies, with the object of promoting the scholarship of Muslim cultures and societies, historical as well as contemporary, and of connecting with other societies and faiths. Its graduate teaching programmes have collaborated with several major international universities.
- The Aga Khan Trust for Culture oversees, inter alia, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Aga Khan Museum, and engages in an array of cultural endeavours and historical restoration programmes aimed at facilitating a better understanding of Muslim identities. The Award for Architecture, established in 1977, is a prestigious award, recognising designs that respect form, function, dignity and the ethics of the built environment.
- The Aga Khan University and the University of Central Asia are among the first Ismaili universities to have been established by Ismailis in a millennium. Primarily serving the developing world and Muslim societies, these institutions are part of the Imamat's long-term vision to help the lives of local communities where the campuses are located, and to promote intellectualism in the Umma, and so to assist in reviving the role of Muslims in the advancement of knowledge and civilisation.
- The Global Centre for Pluralism, a pioneering institution in its field, was established in Ottawa in 2006, in partnership

with the Canadian government, to promote pluralism, and a respect for diversity, while advancing the common good. It has been described as ‘a stethoscope’ at the heart of pluralism.¹⁶

By any measure, the establishment of these institutions represents a remarkable achievement. They reflect the Ismaili Imam’s aspirations for global convergence and, at the same time, exemplify how faith can be translated into action. The Imam’s institutions are creating a meta-space for Ismailis to put their faith into action, to forge identities that build around notions of community and social endeavours aimed at the common good. Though they remain works in progress and are at differing stages of institutional development and capacity, as a whole they must be regarded as an important and enduring component of this Imam’s legacy.

In the rich and diverse history of the Ismaili Imamate, it is creditable to claim that there has been no greater social architect and institution-builder than the 49th Ismaili Imam. This is a significant claim when one considers the prolific period of the Fatimid Imams, and in particular the achievements of Imam Mu‘izz in the tenth century, as well as the rich legacy of the late Imam, the present Aga Khan’s grandfather, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah (Aga Khan III). However, the claim is borne out not only when one considers the institutional and cultural legacies of the present Imam – which build on those of his grandfather – but especially his world view on which this heritage is founded.

In reflecting the civilisational values of Islam, the work of the Ismaili Imamate fosters a humanistic ethos and serves to remind Muslims – and others – of the contributions of Muslim civilisations, and of the importance of humanistic values: respect for human dignity; reverence for the sacredness of life; inclusivity, fraternity, tolerance, compassion, generosity, fairness and goodwill; intellectual learning and excellence; service and social conscience; and a commitment to bettering human lives.

Such values are vital in an age that is at risk of losing sight of any meaning or purpose beyond what Wendell Berry (referring to a poem by Kathleen Raine) has termed 'the Nihil of the Age'.¹⁷

The work of the Ismaili Imam, argued in this book to represent ethics in action, exemplifies the core messages of Islam, addresses misunderstandings about it, and corrects much of the negative politicised and media images of Islam in the modern world.

Conclusion

When the late Imam, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, helped to establish the Aligarh University in India, he espoused three ideals: 'preach the gospel of free enquiry, of large-hearted toleration, and of pure morality'.¹⁸

As his successor, the present Aga Khan has aspired to live up to those ideals. In the tradition of his forebears, he has sought to uphold intellectual traditions within the *jamat* and the Umma and has established centres of educational excellence. He has been an advocate of global pluralism, encouraging Muslims to revive their rich heritage of tolerance, and has promoted an understanding of the broad and inclusive spirit of Islam to counter misperceptions of the religion. Above all, he has been an ethical reformer, emphasising that the Ismaili Imam's work has been inspired by a vision of the 'family of man' as the basis of its ethics of social conscience, accountability and moral responsibility. In all these ways, Prince Karim has established a legacy for his Imam which is worthy of his grandfather's aspirations.

An indicator of his personal commitment to his office and his 'faith in action', mentioned earlier, can be encapsulated in his attitude towards his work. His comment 'responsibilities are a burden we love to bear'¹⁹ is indicative of this and of his belief that service to humanity brings joy and ennobles the greater spirit in all people.

A humanistic reformer with a geological sense of time, the Aga Khan has sought to serve humanity and to enable individuals and societies to fulfil their aspirations to lead better lives through the various Imamatus institutions he has created.

When asked in a 1996 interview how he would wish to be remembered, the Aga Khan replied

Probably not in name or face. I far prefer that certain important things that occurred during my Imamatus should continue: relations between the Ismaili community and other parts of the Islamic Ummah; between the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world; certain concepts of the 'Unity of Man' – that you don't serve yourself best by being mean and inward looking and you do not serve your future generations that way.²⁰

These broad themes encompassed in the expression 'unity of man' – harmony and equity, integrity and dignity, tolerance and justice, and the ideal of being 'a human' in the sense referred to in the 'Bani Adam' epigraph which opens this book – are all reflected in the Aga Khan's life and work. They are found in his message of the shared humanity of all people and of its ethical imperatives. They are seen in his personal example of service, which he describes as enlightened self-fulfillment, in the cause of uplifting humanity, and in the Imamatus institutions he has built to advance that humane objective. Collectively, they will be his lasting legacy. His conception of the bond between the material and spiritual worlds, and its expression in the work of the Ismaili Imamatus, can be seen as a veritable 'Bridge of Hope', inspiring and enabling all who walk upon it to live, true to the essence of their humanity, as one.

Appendix of Quranic Citations

- 1:6 *Guide us upon the Straight Path.*
- 2:62 *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans – whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.*
- 2:111–12 *And they said, 'None will enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' Those are their hopes. Say, 'Bring your proof, if you are truthful.' Nay, whosoever submits his face to God, while being virtuous, shall have his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve.*
- 2:115 *To God belong the East and the West. Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God. God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.*
- 2:143 *Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you ...*
- 2:148 *Everyone has a direction toward which he turns. So vie with one another in good deeds. Wheresoever you are, God will bring you all together. Truly God is Powerful over all things.*
- 2:213 *Mankind was one community; then God sent the prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners ...*
- 2:285 *We make no distinction between any of His messengers ...*

- 3:7 *And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge ...*
- 3:67 *Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a hanif, a submitter, and he was not one of the idolaters.*
- 4:1 *O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations. Truly God is a Watcher over you.*
- 4:48 *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him ...*
- 4:122 *But for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall cause them to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein forever ...*
- 4:124–5 *And whosoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer, shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be wronged so much as the speck on a date stone. And who is better in religion than the one who submits his face to God, and is virtuous, and follows the creed of Abraham, as a hanif? And God did take Abraham for a friend.*
- 4:174 *O mankind! Verily there has come unto you a proof from your Lord. And we have sent down unto you a clear light.*
- 5:32 *[W]hosoever slays a soul – unless it be for another soul or working corruption upon the earth – it is as though he slew mankind altogether, and whosoever saves the life of one, it is as though he saved the life of mankind altogether ...*
- 5:48 *For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.*
- 6:12 *He has prescribed Mercy for Himself ...*
- 7:156 *My Mercy encompasses all things ...*
- 7:172 *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they said,*

- 'Yea, we bear witness' – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Truly of this we were heedless' ...*
- 10:37 *This Quran could not have been fabricated [by anyone] apart from God; rather, it is a confirmation of that which came before it, and an elaboration of the Book in which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds.*
- 10:47 *For every community there is a messenger ...*
- 12:53 *But I absolve not my own soul. Surely the soul commands to evil, save whom my Lord may show mercy. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.*
- 15:21 *Naught is there, but that its treasures lie with Us, and We do not send it down, save in a known measure.*
- 16:36 *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community ...*
- 17:110 *Call upon God ('Allah'), or call upon the Compassionate ('Rahman'). Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.*
- 24:35 *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light. God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind, and God is Knower of all things.*
- 30:30 *Set they face to religion as a hanif, in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind – there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not.*
- 33:72 *Truly We offered the Trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were wary of it – yet man bore it; truly he has proven himself an ignorant wrongdoer.*
- 40:78 *Indeed, We have sent messengers before thee. Among them are those whom We have recounted unto thee, and among them are those whom We have not recounted unto thee. And it was not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave ...*

- 41:53 *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things?*
- 42:11 *[N]aught is like unto Him, yet He is the Hearer, the Seer.*
- 45:1–6 *Ha. Mim. The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise. Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for believers.*
- And in your creation and in what He has scattered of animals are signs for a people who are certain.*
- And in the variation of the night and the day, and in that which God sends down from the sky as provision whereby He revives the earth after its death, and in the shifting of the winds are signs for a people who understand.*
- These are the signs of God that We recite unto thee in truth. So in what discourse after God and His signs do they believe?*
- 45:13 *He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth – all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect.*
- 49:13 *O mankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware.*
- 50:16 *We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.*
- 55:1–30 *The Compassionate taught the Quran; created man; taught him speech. The sun and moon are upon a reckoning. And the stars and the trees prostate. Heaven He has raised and the Balance He has set, that you transgress not the balance. So set right the weight and fall not short in the balance. The earth has He laid down for creatures. Therein are fruit and date palms bearing sheaths, husked grains and fragrant herbs. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? He created man from dried clay, like earthen vessels, and He created jinn from smokeless fire. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?*
- Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?*

He mixed the two seas, such that they meet one another. Between them lies a barrier that they transgress not. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?

From them came forth pearls and coral stones. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?

His are the ships towering aloft upon the sea like standards. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?

All that is upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?

Those in the heavens and on the earth entreat Him: every day He is upon a task. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?

56:95 *Verily, this is the truth of certainty.*

57:3 *He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things.*

75:2 *And I swear by the blaming soul ...*

89:27-28 *O thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting.*

91:7-10 *[B]y the soul and the One Who fashioned it and inspired it as to what makes it iniquitous or reverent. Indeed he prospers who purifies it. And indeed he fails who obscures it.*

93:1-11 *By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise. And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. And surely thy Lord shall give unto thee, and thou shalt be content. Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich? So as for the orphan, scorn not. And as for one who requests, repel not. And as for the blessing of thy Lord, proclaim!*

95:4 *[T]ruly, We created man in the most beautiful stature ...*

102:5 *Nay! If you knew with the knowledge of certainty ...*

102:7 *Then you would surely see it with the eye of certainty.*

109:1-6 *Say, 'O disbelievers! I worship not what you worship; nor are you worshippers of what I worship; nor am I a worshipper of what you worship; nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.'*

Notes

Preface

- 1 The Shia Muslims hold that in the year 632, when the Prophet was returning from his farewell pilgrimage, he stopped at a site between Mecca and Medina, known as Ghadir Khumm, and, taking his son-in-law Ali by the hand, he stated 'He of whom I am the master, of him Ali is also the master' (*man kuntu mawlahu fa-Ali mawlahu*). The Shia and Sunni groups place different interpretations on this event.
- 2 Remarks by Adrienne Clarkson made at the inaugural Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship, Toronto, 21 September 2016.
- 3 M. Ali Lakhani, 'Living the Ethics of One's Faith: The Aga Khan's Integral Vision', *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, 34 (2014), pp. 33–62. The journal can be accessed online at www.sacredweb.com.
- 4 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 5 Address to the Évora University Symposium, Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
- 6 This role is discussed more extensively in Chapter 2.

Chapter 1: The Ismaili Imam and the Imamatus

- 1 The term 'traditional religious thought' denotes the metaphysics grounded in the apprehension of reality as absolute, which finds

- expression in classical and medieval philosophy and in all the major faith traditions. It holds that reality is both 'beyond' and 'within' existence, that its transcendent spirit is also imprinted immanently, in the heart of human nature, and that man is thereby connected to the whole of reality, and possesses a capacity to know this intrinsic bond.
- 2 The term 'Imam' in this specific sense should be distinguished from the term 'imam' denoting a Muslim cleric or religious functionary.
 - 3 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, Ottawa, 6 June 2005.
 - 4 Message to the International Islamic Conference, Amman, Jordan, 4 July 2005. The term *madhhab* (plural, *madhahib*) is an Arabic term used to denote a school of thought within Islamic jurisprudence. The term *zahir* is a Quranic term denoting the manifest dimension of reality. It is contrasted with the term *batin* denoting the hidden (spiritual and intellectual) aspects of reality. The *batin* is an elaboration of the interiority of the *zahir*. The two aspects are therefore not opposed but complementary.
 - 5 The 'Rashidun', or 'Rightly Guided' caliphs, is an appellation for the first four Sunni caliphs who succeeded the Prophet, namely: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.
 - 6 Unlike other Sufi *tariqas* which trace their lineage through Imam Ali, the Naqshbandi *tariqa* traces its lineage from the Prophet through the first Sunni Caliph, Abu Bakr, and thence through the Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. However, Imam Ali's intellectual influence is believed to permeate all Sufi traditions.
 - 7 Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce luncheon, 'The Aga Khan Social Welfare and Economic Development Institutions in India', New Delhi, 14 January 1983.
 - 8 Interview with Caroline Pigozzi, *Paris Match*, 28 December 1995.
 - 9 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, Ottawa, 6 June 2005.
 - 10 The Aga Khan III has stated, 'we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain *Ibnu'l-Waqt* (i.e., children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent

- his Faith according to the standard of the *Waqt* or space-time.’ Foreword to Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazbhoy, *Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations* (London, 1937).
- 11 Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (New York, 1954), p. 185.
 - 12 Interview with Aroon Purie, *India Today*, February 1989.
 - 13 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
 - 14 See Sami G. Hajjar and Steven J. Brezezinsky, ‘The Nizari Ismaili Imam and Plato’s Philosopher-King’, *Islamic Culture*, 16 (1977), pp. 303–16.
 - 15 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
 - 16 Interview with Martim Cabral and Nuno Rogeiro, *Sociedade das Nações*, Lisbon, 21 July 2008.
 - 17 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 Address to the International Press Institute, 54th General Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya, 22 May 2005.
 - 20 Agreement between the Portuguese Republic and the Ismaili Imamat in June 2015.
 - 21 Preface to Stefano Bianca, *Syria: Medieval Citadels Between East and West* (Aiglemont, 2007).

Chapter 2: Ethical Foundations

- 1 Address to the Asia Society, ‘Islamic Architecture: A Revival’, New York, 25 September 1979.
- 2 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 26 July 1982.
- 3 On receiving the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Medal for Architecture at the University of Virginia, ‘Islamic Architecture: Concerns and Directions’, Charlottesville, VA, 13 April 1984.
- 4 Address upon acceptance of the Charter of the Aga Khan University (AKU), Karachi, Pakistan, 16 March 1983.

- 5 Address to the Asia Society, 'Islamic Architecture: A Revival', New York, 25 September 1979.
- 6 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 23 August 1985.
- 7 This has profound implications, particularly as regards the modernist world view, which is addressed later. For instance, the principle of *tawhid* is opposed to those philosophies of modernist science which devalue intellection by denying its transcendent foundation and which exclude grace from knowledge.
- 8 The term 'Truth' is used here in the sense of the Vincentian Canon, which refers to the test for orthodoxy in Catholicism, and it is based on the three criteria articulated by the French monk St Vincent of Lérins (d. 450), namely, that which is believed everywhere (*ubique*), always (*semper*) and by all (*ab omnibus*). While the Vincentian Canon pertains to the Catholic faith, it is equally applicable to metaphysical Truth, which, being principal, is universal and perennial.
- 9 'Aristocratic' because the intellect is hierarchically superior to the psyche and the corporeal senses.
- 10 Address upon acceptance of the Charter of the AKU, Karachi, Pakistan, 16 March 1983.
- 11 These lines are taken from the poem 'Paracelsus' by Robert Browning (1812–1889). The poem begins with the following famous lines:

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
 From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
 There is an inmost centre in us all,
 Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
 Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
 This perfect, clear perception – which is truth.

- 12 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
- 13 The term 'sacred' here refers to the presence of God in creation. It is the imprint of the infinite in the finite, of the eternal in time, of the centre in the periphery – recalling the English poet-mystic William Blake's celebrated quatrain at the beginning of 'Auguries of Innocence':

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.

- 14 Address given at the inauguration ceremony of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the AKU and Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan, 11 November 1985.
- 15 Interview with Stefan Aust and Erich Follath, 'Islam is a Faith of Reason', *Spiegel Online*, Berlin, 12 October 2006.
- 16 Interview with Pierre Cochez and Jean-Christophe Ploquin, *La Croix*, Paris, 8 April 2003.
- 17 Inauguration ceremony of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the AKU and Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan, 11 November 1985.
- 18 A prophetic *hadith* narrated by Imam Jāfar al-Sadiq and quoted by al-Qadi al-Nu'man, in *Da'aim al-Islam*, tr. Asaf A.A. Fyze and revised by Ismail K. Poonawala as *The Pillars of Islam* (Delhi, 2004), Vol. 2, p. 313.
- 19 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 20 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 21 *The Quatrains of Rumi*, tr. Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi (San Rafael, CA, 2008), p. 570.
- 22 The Quran (Q 57:3) refers to God as the *First* (signifying the origin) and the *Last* (signifying the One to whom we return).
- 23 Humanity is created from the same Spirit and this metaphysical unity is the basis of each person being, in biblical terms, their 'brother's keeper' (Genesis 4:9).
- 24 The expressions 'inner man' and 'outer man' are not expressly employed by the Ismaili Imam, but they are implied in Quranic revelation, traditional metaphysics and, specifically, in the Ismaili philosophy of the *batin* (inner) and *zahir* (outer) aspects of reality.
- 25 The concept of trusteeship (*amana*) is closely related to the divine covenant between God and humanity, discussed below.

- 26 Titus Burckhardt writes: 'where knowledge joins its own being, and where the Being knows Itself in Its immutable actuality, one can no longer talk of man. So far as the spirit immerses in this state it identifies itself, not to individual man, but to Universal Man (*al insan al-kamil*), who constitutes the internal Unity of all creatures. Universal Man is the all; it is by a transposition of the individual to the universal that one calls him 'man'; essentially, he is the eternal prototype, Divine and unlimited, of all beings.' Introduction to 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili's *Universal Man* (Beshara, Sherborne, Gloucester, 1983), p. ii.
- 27 In a nuanced op-ed in the *New York Times* recently (13 July 2017), entitled 'Shariah's Winding Path Into Modernity', Mustafa Akyol explores diverse views regarding *shari'a*. One approach is to understand law as an attempt to express morality, rather than as a formalistic code.
- 28 See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York, 1989), p. 283.
- 29 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dubai, UAE, 13 December 2003.
- 30 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
- 31 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 32 Opening ceremony of the Kabul Serena Hotel, Kabul, Afghanistan, 8 November 2005.
- 33 See M. Ali Lakhani, 'The Metaphysics of Human Governance: Imam Ali, Truth and Justice', in *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam: The Teachings of Ali ibn Abi Talib*, ed. M. Ali Lakhani, with an introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington, IN, 2006).
- 34 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 12 October 2009.
- 35 These are the supreme commandments: 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.' Mark 12:30–1, KJV. The metaphysician Marco Pallis

- observes that the love of God contains the love of neighbours 'eminently', as cause contains effect: *Sword of Gnosis*, ed. Jacob Needleman (Baltimore, MA, 1974), at p. 71.
- 36 The Peterson Lecture, annual meeting of the International Baccalaureate, Atlanta, GA, 18 April 2008.
 - 37 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dubai, UAE, 26 March 2008.
 - 38 *Shirk* is usually understood as idolatry or ascribing partners to God (see, e.g., Q 4:48). The most obvious cause of this is reductive thinking, reducing the greater to the lesser. This is related to the distinct Quranic concept of *kufṛ* or 'covering up', which is usually understood as disbelief but contains the sense of opaque vision.
 - 39 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 20 May 2008.
 - 40 This transcendent reality is metaphysically One, or, in the words of the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:16): 'undivided in things divided'.
 - 41 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 30 August 2003.
 - 42 The agreement between the Portuguese Republic and the Ismaili Imamat for the Establishment of the Seat of the Ismaili Imamat in Portugal, dated 3 June 2015, states in its recitals: 'Considering that both Parties assume, as common objectives, *the defence of human dignity*, economic and social development, interfaith dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as ways of achieving justice and peace ...' (emphasis added).
 - 43 From 'Prospecting the Past, Inspiring the Future', the preface to *The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme: Strategies for Urban Regeneration*, ed. Philip Jodidio (Munich, 2011).
 - 44 Message to the International Islamic Conference, Amman, Jordan, 4 July 2005.
 - 45 From 'Prospecting the Past, Inspiring the Future', ed. Philip Jodidio.
 - 46 The editors of *The Study Quran* note in their commentary to verse 2:2: '*Taqwa* comes from the root *w-q-y*, which evokes the sense of wariness, care, and protection. As it concerns the attitude of human beings toward God, *taqwa* conveys the sense of fear, mindfulness, and a constant awareness of God's Presence and Power.'

- 47 The Covenant of Alast refers to a primordial covenant between humanity and God, by which humanity testified as to its spiritual origin and undertook to continually witness it. This witnessing is the basis of the Muslim creed, or *shahada*. The term 'Alast' derives from the key Arabic phrase, *alastu bi-rabbikum* ('Am I not your Lord?') in verse 7:172.
- 48 The term *dunya* connotes the lower dimension of forgetfulness (represented by the material world), while *din* connotes the higher realm of God-consciousness (the divine order). Note the hadith, 'Verily this *dunya* is cursed and all that is in it is cursed save the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and that which is conducive to it, and the scholar ('*alim*) and the student of knowledge (*muta'allim*).'
Tirmidhi, *Hadith*: 2322.
- 49 Remarks at a private lunch, Aiglemont, 11 July 2017.
- 50 Acceptance speech, Carnegie Medal for Philanthropy, Edinburgh, 4 October 2005.
- 51 Speech at the Takht Nashini ceremony, Bombay, 11 March 1958: 'An international community with a strong social conscience.'
- 52 State banquet, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 27 November 2007.
- 53 Public address, Shugnan, Tajikistan, 25 September 1998.
- 54 An example of the link between God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and the imperatives of a social conscience is found in one of the earliest revealed *suras* (verses) of the Quran, 93:1–11, in which the Prophet is comforted and exhorted to care for the less fortunate just as God has cared for him.
- 55 Presentation address at the eighth Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, the Citadel, Aleppo, Syria, 6 November 2001.
- 56 At the inauguration of the Naryn Campus of the University of Central Asia (UCA), 19 October 2016.

Chapter 3: Tradition and Modernity

- 1 According to the Franciscan scholastic philosopher St Bonaventura (d. 1274), 'God's centre is everywhere. His circumference nowhere'; *Journey of the Soul into God (Itinerarium Mentis in Deum)*, 5, cited in *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, presented by Whitall N. Perry (new ed., Cambridge, 1991), p. 814.

- 2 Presidential address, International Seerat Conference, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1976.
- 3 Aga Khan University (AKU) Donors' Tea Party, Karachi, Pakistan, 17 November 1994.
- 4 Opening ceremony of the renovated Baltit Fort, Hunza, Pakistan, 29 September 1996.
- 5 Address at the 'Musée-Musées' Round-Table Conference, Louvre Museum, Paris, 17 October 2007.
- 6 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 23 August 1985.
- 7 Address at the 'Musée-Musées' Round-Table Conference, Louvre Museum, Paris, 17 October 2007.
- 8 Third Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Marrakesh, Morocco, 24 November 1986.
- 9 Commencement address, Brown University, Providence, RI, 26 May 1996.
- 10 Convocation ceremony, Peshawar University, Peshawar, Pakistan, 30 November 1967.
- 11 At the AKU Donors' Tea Party, Karachi, Pakistan, 17 November 1994.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Convocation ceremony, University of Sind, Hyderabad, Pakistan, 6 February 1970.
- 14 Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals (La Trahison des Clercs, 1927)*, tr. Richard Aldington (1928; repr. Piscataway, NJ, 2007).
- 15 At a dinner in honour of the President of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 30 May 1995.
- 16 At the inauguration ceremony of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the AKU and Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan, 11 November 1985.
- 17 Commencement address, Brown University, Providence, RI, 26 May 1996.
- 18 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy's residential campus, Mombasa, Kenya, 14 August 2007.
- 19 The references to the three phrases are from 'How the World is Shaped by the "Clash of Ignorances"', *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi, Kenya, 15 June 2009.

- 20 Opening ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Kenya, 20 December 2003.
- 21 Address at the third Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Marrakesh, Morocco, 24 November 1986.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 In his essay 'Standing by Words', the American poet and agrarian philosopher Wendell Berry refers to 'particular love for particular things, places, creatures, and people, requiring stands, acts, showing its successes and failures in practical or tangible effects.' Berry notes that particular love 'implies a responsibility just as particular, not grim or merely dutiful, but rising out of generosity. I think that this sort of love defines the effective range of human intelligence, the range within which its works can be dependably beneficent. Only the action that is moved by love for the good at hand has the hope of being responsible and generous'; *Standing by Words: Essays* (Washington, DC, 1983), pp. 60–1.
- 24 Cited by the Aga Khan at Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan's book launch, Karachi, Pakistan, 14 February 1981.
- 25 At the 25th graduation ceremony, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Presidential address, International Seerat Conference, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1976.
- 28 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World', *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1983.
- 29 Interview with Pranay Gupt, early 1999. (The NanoWisdoms archive of the Aga Khan's public pronouncements provides no further information about this interview.)
- 30 Interview, Pakistan Television Corporation, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 November 1985.
- 31 Interview with Pranay Gupte, early 1999 (see Note 29). An example of the Aga Khan's disdain for 'isms' (in this instance, in a political context) appears in the following quotation taken from an interview with Geoffrey Barker, 'Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West', *The Age*, Melbourne, 14 July 1979: 'If one political system is

- working and is giving good results, the idea of disrupting it for an “ism” is not an applicable concept to me.’
- 32 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
 - 33 Ibid.
 - 34 Keynote address, ‘The Spirit of Creative Encounter’, at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
 - 35 The phrases appear in Charles Dickens’s last will made in 1869. The full passage reads: ‘I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man’s narrow construction of its letter here or there.’ Quoted by Robert Butterworth in *Dickens, Religion and Society* (London, 2016), p. 23.
 - 36 Interview with Geoffrey Barker, ‘Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West’.
 - 37 The Russian thinker Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (d. 2008) noted in his famous address at Harvard, ‘Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relationships, this creates an atmosphere of spiritual mediocrity that paralyses man’s noblest impulses’; ‘A World Split Apart’, in *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Ronald Berman (Washington, DC, 1980), p. 8.
 - 38 These lines of Sir Muhammad Iqbal were quoted by the Aga Khan in his address at the prize ceremony of the first Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 23 October 1980.
 - 39 At the 25th graduation ceremony of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
 - 40 These words, from the English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Idyll’s of the King* (a retelling of Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*), are spoken by the dying King Arthur.
 - 41 Interview with Bachi Karkaria, ‘Education Has Not Kept Pace with Globalisation’, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 27 November 2004.
 - 42 Kenzo Tange, quoted by the Aga Khan at the acceptance address for installation as a Foreign Associate Member of the Académie

- des Beaux-Arts, Kenzo Tange Chair at the Institut de France, Paris, 18 June 2008.
- 43 Interview with Akbar Ahmed, 'The Quiet Revolutionary', *Guardian Weekly*, London, 18 August 1991.
 - 44 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, DD TV (Delhi Doordarshan), New Delhi, 27 November 2004 (emphasis in original).
 - 45 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World'.
 - 46 Interview, Pakistan Television Corporation, Pakistan, 12 November 1985.
 - 47 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World'. Science, therefore, must proceed in the spirit of humility, mindful of transcendence and therefore of the legitimacy of faith as a dimension of human intelligence.
 - 48 At the convocation ceremony, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada, 15 May 1987.
 - 49 '[E]very man should expend his chief thought and attention on the consideration of first principles ... and all the rest will follow.' Plato, *Cratylus*, 436d.

Chapter 4: The Ethos of Modernism

- 1 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London, 1987), p. 98. Dr Nasr has also stated, 'modernism rejects the primacy of absolute and ultimate truth transcending the human order and descending upon the human realm from the Divine Order'; Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jehanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2010), p. 182.
- 2 Address to the Asia Society, 'The Physical Structure of Islam', Islamic Architecture: A Revival, New York, 25 September 1979.
- 3 In keeping with the planimetric conception of reality, with multiple levels of being, and with the corresponding view of multiple levels of meaning (as, e.g., in the medieval Western conception, exemplified by Dante, which conceives of literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical levels of meaning), the Quran

affirms that the full significance of God's revealed texts, including apprehending the inner (*batini*) levels of meaning, requires intellectual mastery.

- 4 Henry Corbin, 'The Question of Comparative Philosophy: Convergences in Iranian and European Thought', in *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (Irving, TX, 1980), p. 3.
- 5 In the words of the Russian philosopher Sergei Levitzky (d. 1983), 'The denial of the Absolute leads to the absolutization of the relative.' Quoted in Mihajlo Mihajlof, *Russian Themes* (New York, 1968), p. 37. Also, note Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'If we have not the concept of an end beyond values ... we are in great danger of making our own relative values into absolutes'; from his letter to Professor Sidney Hook, dated 17 January 1946, in *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, eds Alvin Moore, Jr and Rama Poonambulam Coomaraswamy (Oxford, 1988), p. 7.
- 6 Interview with Margot Dougherty and Richard B. Stolley, 'In Him, East and West Meet', *Life Magazine*, New York, December 1983.
- 7 Golden Jubilee inaugural ceremony, Aiglemont, France, 11 July 2007.
- 8 At the luncheon of the Industrial Promotion and Development Company (IPDC) of Bangladesh, 'Economic Development and the Enabling Environment', Dhaka, Bangladesh, 6 January 1983.
- 9 Remarks by the Aga Khan at Évora University Symposium, 'Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies', Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
- 10 Commencement ceremony of the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 11 The phrase is taken from the science-fiction novel by the Oxford don, Christian theologian and 'Inkling', C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (1943; New York, 1996), p. 70.
- 12 William Shakespeare, *King John* II, i, lines 574 and 568.
- 13 See the discussion on the meaning of the term 'progress' at the beginning of Chapter 8.
- 14 Takht Nashini (Enthronement) ceremony, Karachi, Pakistan, 23 January 1958.
- 15 Interview with Paul Chutkow, 'The Aga Khan's Vision', *Connoisseur Magazine*, London, September 1983.

- 16 Takht Nashini (Enthronement) ceremony, Kampala, Uganda, 25 October 1957.
- 17 Quoted by Alister McGrath in *Christianity: An Introduction* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2006), p. 102.
- 18 Cited under the heading 'Faith' in *The Quotable Hitchens: From Alcohol to Zionism – The Very Best of Christopher Hitchens*, ed. Windsor Mann (Cambridge, MA, 2011).
- 19 Interview with António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee, *Paroquias de Portugal*, Lisbon, 23 July 2008.
- 20 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World', *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1983.
- 21 Interview with Stefan Aust and Erich Follath, 'Islam is a Faith of Reason', *Spiegel Online*, Berlin, 2 October 2006.
- 22 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 23 Convocation ceremony, Peshawar University, Peshawar, Pakistan, 30 November 1967.
- 24 Press conference, Kampala, Uganda, 18 September 1959.
- 25 Interview with Massimo Nava, 'I Am Amazed by the Ignorance on Islam', *Corriere della Sera*, Italy, 22 October 2001.
- 26 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 27 Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (New Haven, CT, 2010), Introduction, p. xiii.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 29 The former Czech President Václav Havel (d. 2011) observed in *Open Letters* (London, 1991), 'The fault is not one of science as such but of the arrogance of man in the age of science. Man simply is not God, and playing God has cruel consequences'; from the chapter 'Politics and Conscience', p. 255.
- 30 Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York, 2010), p. 3.
- 31 See M. A. Lakhani, 'The Clash of Fundamentalisms', in *Clashing Fundamentalisms: When Rival Truth Claims Meet Head-On*, ed. Leslie A. Kenny (Victoria, British Columbia, 2008), pp. 38–57.

- 32 A useful study of this by an Ismaili scholar is Karim H. Karim's award-winning book, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Montreal, 2000). The book 'seeks to undermine news media discourse that defines Islam as the Western world's "primary Other," an Other that has filled the "threat vacuum" produced by the collapse of the Soviet empire and the decline of the Communist menace.'
- 33 Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago, 1948), Introduction, p. 3 of the 2013 edition.
- 34 In the words of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'The traditional position is that God alone can properly say "I". Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* is a circular argument, an ego subsisting in both the subject and the predicate.' Quoted in *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, ed. Alvin Moore, Jr and Rama Poonambulam Coomaraswamy, p. 63.
- 35 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 36 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
- 37 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 38 Seerat Conference, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1976.
- 39 For Muslims, the prophetic norm, exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, is the outward embodiment of humanity's primordial nature (*fitra*). For Ismailis, the prophetic norm is also exemplified by the Imam of the Time. It is the aspiration of each believer to live according to this norm which, because each human being is believed to possess a common primordial nature (Q 30:30), is the basis of the Muslim conception of human perfectability (embodied in *al-insan al-kamil* – or the perfect man).
- 40 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, 2006), p. 144.
- 41 This passage, from Claes G. Ryn's *A Common Human Ground* (Columbia, MO, 2003), p. 9, addressed Ryn's criticisms of postmodernist multiculturalism, but it is equally applicable to relativism that parades under the description of 'pluralism'.
- 42 Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Elizabeth Hubbard, dated 22 February 1756, reprinted from *The Massachusetts Magazine, or*

Knowledge and Rational Entertainment, 1 (1789), p. 100, and found in full online at wwwFOUNDERS.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-06-02-0171 (accessed May 2017): 'We are spirits. That bodies should be lent us, while they can afford us pleasure, assist us in acquiring knowledge, or doing good to our fellow creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God ...'

- 43 In Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Lear*, IV, ii, the Duke of Albany, on learning of his wife's wicked deeds, calls her a 'changed and self-cover'd thing', and he remarks:

That nature, which contemns its origin,
Cannot be border'd certain in itself;
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use.

- 44 The individuality of selfhood is not related to the distinction one finds in Jean-Jacques Rousseau between 'amour propre' (a socially conscious sense of selfhood) and 'amour de soi' (a sense of selfhood based on more primitive instincts) because Rousseau's analysis is purely psychological, not grounded in spiritual ontology. A more apt analogy is found in Dante's conception of selfhood which he associates with 'proper love', the link between God, one's neighbour and one's self. In Islam, the notion of selfhood is linked to the multiple levels of being, and the Quran therefore distinguishes between multiple levels of self, including the sinful self (*nafs al-ammara* – Q 12:53), the repentant self (*nafs al-lawwama* – Q 75:2) and the serene self (*nafs al-mutmainnah* – Q 89:27). In its highest, most subtle, sense, for Muslims, the immanent self is *ruh*, the spirit, while the transcendent self is the divine creative spirit of God whose breath is the creative and sustaining spirit which the Sufis refer to as *nafas rahmani*, the Breath of the All-Merciful (the Arabic term for breath, *nafas*, is a cognate of *nafs*, the term for self). Beyond these levels of selfhood, according to certain esoteric doctrines including those shared by Sufis and Ismailis, lies the level of the hidden treasure and the unknowable Godhead (the *batin* of the *batin*).

- 45 In the divine treasury, it is God Himself who is the hidden treasure referred to in the well-known *hadith qudsi* of the Prophet: 'I was a hidden treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them.'
- 46 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, All India TV and Radio, February 1989.
- 47 Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye, 'The Power of Wisdom,' *Politique Internationale*, Paris, 1 March 2010.
- 48 The very term 'Islam' denotes both 'submission' and 'peace'.
- 49 Interviewed in the film *An Islamic Conscience: The Aga Khan and the Ismailis*, dir. Shamir Allibhai, William Cran and Jane Chablani, with consultants Dr Ali Asani and Dr Malise Ruthven, 2007. The film can be found at www.agakhanfilm.org (accessed August 2017). The excerpt is cited at NanoWisdoms.
- 50 Simply put, 'dialogical' identities are relational, while 'monological' identities are self-enclosed. The Canadian thinker Charles Taylor argues that monological ideals are a source of the malaise of modernity, and he stresses the value of dialogical approaches as a solution to this malaise. He addresses these ideas in his Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Massey Lectures, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Anansi, Toronto, Ontario, 1991).
- 51 First Inaugural Address of US President Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801 (Princeton, NJ, 2006), pp. 148–52.
- 52 Arguably, one of the great symptoms of the modern malaise is loneliness, which is prevalent in crowded modern cities, and is even more pronounced amid the distractions of the new technologies which, while seemingly creating connections through 'networking', 'chat-rooms' and social media, in reality diminish human contact and alienate the individual from more profound social connections associated with 'community'. In the end, the roots of loneliness can be traced to the loss of faith which erodes community.
- 53 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.

- 54 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs, Brown University, Providence, RI, 10 March 2014; and the Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
- 55 These lines of Iqbal were quoted by the Aga Khan in his keynote address at the International Development Conference, 'The Enabling Environment: An Urgent Challenge', Washington, DC, 18 March 1987.
- 56 The Peterson Lecture, annual meeting of the International Baccalaureate, Atlanta, GA, 18 April 2008.
- 57 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York, 1984), p. 254.
- 58 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Aga Khan Museum and Park, The Ismaili Centre, Toronto, 28 May 2010.
- 59 The underlying sense of the middle course is that of justice, balance, the avoidance of extremes, and it is also connected to the notion of the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) mentioned in the opening chapter of the Quran, 1:6.
- 60 See 'A World Split Apart', in *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Ronald Berman (Washington, DC, 1980), pp. 9, 13, 18.
- 61 Interview with Don Cayo, *Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, 28 November 2008.
- 62 Plato, *Republic*, Bk VIII, 562c, 564a.
- 63 Edmund Burke, *Letter to the Sheriffs of the City of Bristol*, 3 April 1777.
- 64 In King Arthur's final speech from the barge (from 'The Passing of Arthur' in Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*), he states: 'For so the whole round earth is every way / Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.' Man is free to the extent that his soul belongs to God.
- 65 Letter 53, *Nahjul-Balagha: Sermons, Letters and Sayings of Imam Ali*, tr. Syed Mohammed Askari Jafery (2nd edn, New York, 1981).
- 66 Address to the conference marking Nation Media Group's 50th anniversary, 'Media and the African Promise', Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2010.
- 67 National Press Club reception, 'The Role of the Press in Developing Countries', Dhaka, Bangladesh, 18 November 1977.
- 68 Commissioning ceremony of the Nation Media Group Printing Press, Nairobi, Kenya, 17 March 2016.

- 69 Keynote address, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Commonwealth Press Union Conference, Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Interview with Aroon Purie, *India Today*, February 1989.
- 72 Remarks at the Évora University Symposium, 'Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies', Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
- 73 This verse from T.S. Eliot's 'Choruses from the Rock' was cited by the Aga Khan in his keynote address at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 74 These lines of Imam Ali have been cited many times by the Aga Khan, notably in his acceptance address at the Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006, and at the commencement ceremony of the American University in Cairo, 15 June 2006.
- 75 Commencement ceremony, the American University in Cairo, 15 June 2006.
- 76 At the dinner hosted by the All Nations Club of Calcutta, 22 September 1962.
- 77 The Peterson Lecture, Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate, Atlanta, GA, 18 April 2008.
- 78 The tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, 'Pluralism', and conversation with John Ralston Saul, Institute for Canadian Citizenship, Toronto, 15 October 2010.
- 79 Keynote address, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Commonwealth Press Union Conference, Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 At the 25th graduation ceremony, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 82 Foundation Stone Ceremony, the Aga Khan Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 20 May 2008.
- 83 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
- 84 Opening ceremony of the Aga Khan Park, Toronto, 25 May 2015.
- 85 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
- 86 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
- 87 Ibid.

- 88 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 89 Convocation ceremony, Peshawar University, Peshawar, Pakistan, 30 November 1967.

Chapter 5: Pluralism and the Cosmopolitan Ethic

- 1 In a noteworthy exchange between President Trump's adviser Stephen Miller and CNN interviewer Jim Acosta, in August 2017, the former accused the latter of a 'cosmopolitan bias,' implying that he was unpatriotic. As Jeff Greenfield argued in a *New York Times* essay, 'The Ugly History of Stephen Miller's "Cosmopolitan" Epithet' (NYT, 3 August 2017), cosmopolitanism is felt as a threat by some to Trump's 'America First' provincialism and also to Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban's preference for 'illiberal democracy'.
- 2 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 3 Recital E in the Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, dated 13 December 1986, states that the Constitution is intended to be in conformity with 'the Islamic concepts of unity, brotherhood, justice, tolerance and goodwill'.
- 4 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 5 Address to the Enabling Environment Conference, Kabul, Afghanistan, 4 June 2007.
- 6 The Quran stresses that God's message, though diversely expressed to a plurality of communities during different intervals of history, is universal and perennial, and therefore in accord with the principle that 'Truth is One'.
- 7 In his memoirs, Aga Khan III acknowledges the universality of the divine revelation and the numerous messengers who have conveyed the messages of this revelation, citing 'all the Prophets of Israel' as well as 'similar Divinely-inspired messengers in other countries – Gautama Buddha, Shri Krishna, and Shri Ram in India, Socrates in Greece, the wise men of China, and many other sages and saints among peoples and civilisations of which we have now lost trace.' *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (New York, 1954), p. 174.

- 8 The term *muslim* means a 'submitter', thereby illustrating the notion of *islam* as a broader concept of submission to truth instead of the confined notion of adherence to the historically revealed religion of Islam.
- 9 In this respect, the Quran is analogous to the Christian doctrine of faith and good works – see James 2:17, Matthew 7:20.
- 10 Address to the international colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Quran and its Creative Expressions,' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Interview with António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee, *Paroquias de Portugal*, Lisbon, 23 July 2008.
- 13 Keynote address to the annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, 6 September 2004.
- 14 Interview with António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee, *Paroquias de Portugal*, Lisbon, 23 July 2008.
- 15 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 16 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 17 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
- 18 Interviewed in the film *An Islamic Conscience: The Aga Khan and the Ismailis*, 6 December 2007, dir. Shamir Allibhai, William Cran and Jane Chablani, with consultants Dr Ali Asani and Dr Malise Ruthven, 2007. The film can be found at www.agakhanfilm.org (accessed August 2017). The excerpt is cited by NanoWisdoms (emphasis added).
- 19 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, 'Pluralism,' and conversation with John Ralston Saul, Institute for Canadian Citizenship, Toronto, 15 October 2010.
- 20 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the character Ivan Karamazov sets out various arguments about God and morality. One of these is the view summarised as 'if there is no God, then everything is permitted.' The phrase appears differently in different translations. It is found in Pt 4, Bk 11, Ch. 4 ('A Hymn and a Secret').

- 24 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 25 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
- 26 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 27 Keynote address, Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.
- 28 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs, Brown University, Providence, RI, 10 March 2014.
- 29 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 30 'How the World is Shaped by the "Clash of Ignorances"', *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi, Kenya, 15 June 2009.
- 31 Quoted by Roger Kimball in his introduction to the English translation reprint of Julien Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (Piscataway, NJ, 2007), p. vxii.
- 32 Roy Henry Vickers, CM, OBC, is a Canadian First Nations artist. The quotation, attributed to him, is cited widely on the Internet.
- 33 Acceptance remarks on receiving the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship, Toronto, 21 September 2016.
- 34 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
- 35 William Butler Yeats, 'The Second Coming', in his *Collected Poems* (London, 1933), pp. 210–11.
- 36 In Benjamin Barber's book *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York, 1995), based on his prescient and influential article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1992), the American political thinker explored the thesis of a struggle between the forces of corporate and commercial globalism (McWorld) and of reactionary traditional forces (jihad).
- 37 The Peterson Lecture, annual meeting of the International Baccalaureate, Atlanta, GA, 18 April 2008.
- 38 From President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's commencement address at the American University, Washington, DC, 10 June 1963: 'So, let us not be blind to our differences – but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the

- final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.' Published online at www.jfklibrary.org (accessed May 2017).
- 39 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
 - 40 Opening ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Kenya, 20 December 2003.
 - 41 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
 - 42 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture.
 - 43 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
 - 44 Opening ceremony of the restored Humayun's Tomb Gardens, New Delhi, 15 April 2003.
 - 45 These words, of the former Canadian Prime Minister and Nobel laureate Lester B. Pearson, were quoted by the Aga Khan at the convocation ceremony, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 18 June 2004.
 - 46 The Medina Charter was a model of tolerance. It took almost a millennium (after the religious wars had ravaged Europe) for its spirit to be emulated by the West in the temporary peace of the Edict of Nantes (enacted by Henry of Navarre as King Henry IV in 1598, until it was revoked by King Louis IV in 1685).
 - 47 The Farewell Sermon of the Prophet is widely recorded in the *hadith* literature, for example, al-Bukhari, no. 1623, 1626, and Muslim, no. 98.
 - 48 From the introduction to 'Geographies of Islam' exhibition leaflet (Toledo, 2008); available online at www.akdn.org/publication/geographies-islam (accessed May 2017).
 - 49 From the introduction to 'The Worlds of Islam in the Collection of the Aga Khan Museum' exhibition leaflet (Madrid and Barcelona, 2009); available online at www.akdn.org/publication/worlds-islam (accessed May 2017).
 - 50 Interview with Chris Mikula and Hayley Mick, *Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, 7 June 2005.
 - 51 The tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
 - 52 Ibid.
 - 53 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, 2006), p. 144.

- 54 Opening ceremony of the new headquarters of the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, 16 May 2017.
- 55 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
- 56 Keynote address, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Commonwealth Press Union Conference, Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 57 See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, 2006). Appiah states (at p. xix), 'we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association'.
- 58 Eric Voegelin, 'Necessary Moral Bases for Communication in a Democracy', in *Problems of Communication in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. Reynolds C. Seitz et al. (Milwaukee, WI, 1956), p. 62.
- 59 From former President Obama's acceptance speech on receiving the Profile in Courage Award at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, MA, on 7 May 2017. The text of the speech is posted at www.npr.org/2017/05/08/527378943/obama-calls-on-congress-to-have-courage-on-health-care (accessed June 2017).
- 60 The tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.

Chapter 6: Cohesion Within the Umma

- 1 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 2 The Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, the Citadel, Aleppo, Syria, 6 November 2001.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time', *al-Mustaqbal*, Cairo, 20 December 1986.
- 5 Conversation with Diana L. Eck, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 6 At the Golden Jubilee inaugural ceremony, Aiglemont, France, 11 July 2007.
- 7 Public address, Shugnan, Tajikistan, 25 September 1998.
- 8 Convocation ceremony, Peshawar University, Peshawar, Pakistan, 30 November 1967.

- 9 The Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Doha, Qatar, 24 November 2010.
- 10 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time'.
- 11 The 25th graduation ceremony, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 12 Address at the 'Musée-Musées' Round-Table Conference, Louvre Museum, Paris, 17 October 2007.
- 13 Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Modern Struggle between Faith and Reason* (London, 2017), p. xv.
- 14 From 'A Bridge of Hope', *Brown Alumni Magazine*, Providence, RI, September 1996.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Interview with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin, *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, January 2002.
- 17 Address to the Avignon Forum, 'The Value and Importance of Cultural Diversity and its Role in Promoting Peace and Development', Avignon, France, 16 November 2008.
- 18 Address at the 'Musée-Musées' Round-Table Conference, Louvre Museum, Paris, 17 October 2007.
- 19 From 'A Bridge of Hope', September 1996.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, *L'Express*, Paris, 4 July 2007: 'un héritage politique très lourd qui repose non pas sur des bases théologiques'.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 'Enhancing Pluralism', keynote speech by the Aga Khan, concluding the Prince Claus Fund's Conference on Culture and Development, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 7 September 2002.
- 24 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World', *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1983.
- 25 Interview/round-table discussion with the German press following the 2005 Die Quadriga Prize award ceremony, Berlin, Germany, 3 October 2005.
- 26 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.

- 27 Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Seals of Wisdom), tr. Aisha Bewley, Ch. 10, 'The Seal of the Wisdom of Divine Unity', p. 48; www.sufi.ir/books/download/english/ibn-arabi-en/fusus-al-hikam-en.pdf (accessed August 2017).
- 28 Address to the international colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Quran and its Creative Expressions', organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 29 Interview with Aroon Purie, *India Today*, February 1989.
- 30 Address to the two Houses of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 25 September 2001.
- 31 Sura 109 expresses the idea that there is freedom in faith, but the consequences of faith or disbelief will befall one according to the merit of that faith or disbelief.
- 32 Interview with António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee, *Paroquias de Portugal*, Lisbon, 23 July 2008.
- 33 A further example of religious pluralism implicit in the Quran is found in its treatment of all the prophets (from Adam to Muhammad) as being of equal rank, allowing for the pre-eminence of the Prophet of the Age. See Q 2:285: *We make no distinction between any of His messengers ...*

Chapter 7: Islam and the West

- 1 See Bernard Lewis's article entitled 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' in the September 1990 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*; and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996).
- 2 The phrase was made famous by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his book, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London, 2003).
- 3 At the banquet hosted in honour of Governor Rick Perry, Houston, TX, 23 June 2002.
- 4 Convocation ceremony, Aga Khan University (AKU), Karachi, Pakistan, 6 December 2003.
- 5 Commencement ceremony, 'Encounters', Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 27 May 1994.
- 6 Ibid.

- 7 Interview with Pierre Cochez and Jean-Christophe Ploquin, *La Croix*, Paris, 8 April 2003.
- 8 Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, *L'Express*, Paris, 4 July 2007.
- 9 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 23 August 1985.
- 10 From 'A Bridge of Hope', *Brown Alumni Magazine*, Providence, RI, September 1996.
- 11 Interview with Philip Jodidio, 'Bridging the Gulf', *Connaissance des Arts*, Paris, January 2002.
- 12 The Chilcot Inquiry's final report, on Britain's involvement in the Iraq War that began in 2003, published 6 July 2016, condemned Britain's case for the war, its planning and the aftermath.
- 13 Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, *L'Express*, Paris, 4 July 2007.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time', *al-Mustaqbal*, Cairo, 20 December 1986.
- 16 At the inauguration of the Ismaili Centre, Houston, TX, 23 June 2002.
- 17 At the banquet hosted in honour of Governor Rick Perry, Houston, TX, June 23 2002.
- 18 Interview with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin, *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 2 February 2002.
- 19 'A Bridge of Hope', September 1996.
- 20 Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, DD TV (Delhi Doordarshan), New Delhi, India, 27 November 2004.
- 21 Interview with the German press following the 2005 Die Quadriga Prize award ceremony, Berlin, 3 October 2005.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, 'Aga Khan's Three-Point Strategy for Third World', *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1983.
- 24 Interview with Caroline Pigozzi, 'The Confessions of the Aga Khan', *Paris Match*, 3 February 2005.
- 25 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 23 August 1985.
- 26 Golden Jubilee inaugural ceremony, Aiglemont, France, 11 July 2007.

- 27 Keynote address to the Governor General's 2004 Canadian Leadership Conference, 'Leadership and Diversity', Gatineau, Canada, 19 May 2004.
- 28 Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian.
- 29 Interview with Anthony Mann, 'The Quiet Prince of Islam', *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, London, 27 May 1979.
- 30 Interview with Caroline Pigozzi, 'The Confessions of the Aga Khan'.
- 31 At the dinner hosted by the Vice President of India, Delhi, 12 January 1983.
- 32 From 'A Bridge of Hope', September 1996.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time'.
- 36 Opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, Vancouver, 23 August 1985.
- 37 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time'.
- 38 Keynote address to the Governor General's 2004 Canadian Leadership Conference, 'Leadership and Diversity', Gatineau, Canada, 19 May 2004.
- 39 From the preface to Stefano Bianca, *Syria: Medieval Citadels between East and West* (Turin, 2007).
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 From the introduction to 'Geographies of Islam' exhibition leaflet (Toledo, 2008).
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 From the introduction to 'The Worlds of Islam in the Collection of the Aga Khan Museum' exhibition leaflet (Madrid and Barcelona, 2009).
- 44 Muslims constructed the first purpose-built hospital (in Persian, *bimaristan*) in the seventh century. The Ismaili Imams have continued this tradition by constructing a network of hospitals, including the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi. There have been numerous Muslim contributions to medical science, most notably by Ibn Sina (d. 1037, known as Avicenna in the West) and Al-Razi (d. c.925, known as Rhazes in the West), among many others.

Chapter 8: Cultivating an Enabling Environment

- 1 Keynote address at the International Development Conference, 'The Enabling Environment: An Urgent Challenge', Washington, DC, 18 March 1987.
- 2 In Isaiah Berlin's essay titled 'Two Concepts of Liberty', delivered as a lecture at Oxford in 1958, he distinguished between the notions of positive and negative liberty; found in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969) pp. 118–72. In a generalised sense, the former focused on elements that empower liberty, the latter on impediments to it.
- 3 Keynote address at the International Development Conference, 'The Enabling Environment: An Urgent Challenge', Washington, DC, 18 March 1987.
- 4 An example of a modern society that has sought to measure progress qualitatively is Bhutan, which, by its Constitution of 2008, instituted a measure of Gross National Happiness (GHP).
- 5 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 6 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Maputo, Mozambique, 25 June 2004.
- 7 Conversation with Diana L. Eck, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 8 Keynote address to the annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, 6 September 2004.
- 9 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 10 Keynote address to the annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, 6 September 2004.
- 11 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 12 Ibid. Also mentioned at the convocation ceremony of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 18 June 2004; and the 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs, Brown University, Providence, RI, 10 March 2014.

- 13 Convocation ceremony of the Aga Khan University (AKU), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 24 February 2015.
- 14 Lord Acton, 'Nationality', in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, Vol. 1: *Essays in the History of Liberty*, ed. J Rufus Fears (Indianapolis, IN, 1986), p. 425. The full quotation is: 'Liberty provokes diversity, and diversity preserves liberty by supplying the means of organisation.'
- 15 Keynote address at the International Development Conference, 'The Enabling Environment: An Urgent Challenge', Washington, DC, 18 March 1987.
- 16 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Hyderabad, India, 22 September 2006.
- 17 From 'How the World is Shaped by the "Clash of Ignorances"', *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi, Kenya, 15 June 2009.
- 18 Convocation ceremony of the AKU, Karachi, Pakistan, 17 November 1990.
- 19 Quoted by Whitall N. Perry in *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (2nd edn, Middlesex, 1981), p. 968.
- 20 First convocation ceremony of graduates from the Faculty of Health Sciences School of Medicine, AKU, Karachi, Pakistan, 20 March 1989.
- 21 From the Aga Khan's keynote address to the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Address to the International Press Institute, 54th General Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya, 22 May 2005.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Keynote address at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 26 The phrase 'manufacturing consent' is from the title of the book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, and is adapted from the phrase 'the manufacture of consent' in the book *Public Opinion* (1922) by Walter Lippmann (d. 1974). In 1992, the documentary film entitled *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and*

the Media also addressed this concept, which relates to the use of propaganda for propagating power, legitimately or otherwise, within institutions such as governments, political organisations, business and the media.

- 27 Keynote address at the Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.
- 28 Opening ceremony of the Nation Press and Building, Nairobi, Kenya, 12 March 1997.
- 29 Keynote address at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 'The Spirit of Creative Encounter', Cape Town, 17 October 1996.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, 'Pluralism', and conversation with John Ralston Saul, Institute for Canadian Citizenship, Toronto, 15 October 2010.
- 33 The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 34 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
- 35 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
- 38 Plato, *Phaedrus* (274e to 275b): "This invention, O king," said Theuth, "will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of memory and wisdom that I have discovered." But Thamus replied, "Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read

many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise". From *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, tr. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA and London, 1925); www.perseus.tufts.edu (accessed May 2017).

- 39 Tenth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture.
- 40 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture.
- 41 Keynote address at the International Development Conference, 'The Enabling Environment: An Urgent Challenge', Washington, DC, 18 March 1987.
- 42 Keynote address at the Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.
- 43 Keynote address to the Governor General's 2004 Canadian Leadership Conference: 'Leadership and Diversity', Gatineau, Canada, 19 May 2004.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 The Aga Khan recognises this to be a fact of political science, remarking that 'A UNDP survey of South American publics some years ago demonstrated that most people preferred an effective authoritarian government to an ineffective democratic one. Quality of life was the prime concern.' Keynote address at the Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.
- 46 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 47 Interview and round-table discussion with the German press following the 2005 Die Quadriga Prize award ceremony, Berlin, 3 October 2005.
- 48 Interview with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin, *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, January 2002.
- 49 Keynote address to the annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, 6 September 2004.
- 50 Interview with Pierre Cochez and Jean-Christophe Ploquin, *La Croix*, Paris, 8 April 2003.
- 51 Conversation with Diana L. Eck, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 12 November 2015.
- 52 Keynote address at the Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.

- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 57 Keynote address at the Athens Democracy Forum, Athens, 15 September 2015.
- 58 From 'A Bridge of Hope', *Brown Alumni Magazine*, Providence, RI, September 1996.
- 59 The Aga Khan, *Where Hope Takes Root: Democracy and Pluralism in an Interdependent World*, introduction by the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson (Vancouver, 2008).
- 60 Aiglon College graduation ceremony, Chesières, Switzerland, 21 June 2014.
- 61 From the untitled sonnet known as 'Carrion Comfort', in *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, 1953), poem 41.
- 62 Convocation ceremony at the AKU, Karachi, Pakistan, 3 December 2005.
- 63 Aiglon College graduation ceremony, Chesières, Switzerland, 21 June 2014.
- 64 Remarks at the Évora University Symposium, 'Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies', Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
- 65 Aiglon College graduation ceremony, Chesières, Switzerland, 21 June 2014.
- 66 The Enabling Environment Conference, Kabul, Afghanistan, 4 June 2007.

Chapter 9: Living the Ethics of Islam

- 1 Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (1924; Indianapolis, IN, 1979), p. 23.
- 2 This point is not peculiar to Islam but is true of all religions. In Platonic terms, Truth is reflected in Goodness and in Beauty. Religion teaches man to integrate the inner and the outer.
- 3 *Global and Mail* dinner, Toronto, 14 May 1987.
- 4 Interview with Caroline Pigozzi, *Paris Match*, 28 December 1995.

- 5 Interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais, 'The Critical Time', *al-Mustaqbal*, Cairo, 20 December 1986.
- 6 Commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 7 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 8 Quoted by George A. Panichas in his review essay, 'A Passionate Platonist', *Modern Age* (Summer–Autumn, 1970), p. 342.
- 9 The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Special Convocation, Trinity College, University of Toronto, 25 November 2013.
- 10 Address to the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 3 May 2003.
- 11 Address at the Concert Hall, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 27 May 1995.
- 12 Recital D in the Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, ordained, signed and sealed by the Aga Khan on 13 December 1986.
- 13 Keynote address to the annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, 6 September 2004.
- 14 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 15 Conference on Indigenous Philanthropy, Islamabad, 17 October 2000; commencement ceremony, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, 15 May 2006.
- 16 Opening ceremony of the Kabul Serena Hotel, Kabul, Afghanistan, 8 November 2005.
- 17 Opening ceremony of Alltex EPZ Limited, Athi River, Kenya, 19 December 2003.
- 18 Ibid. (emphases added).
- 19 The 88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs, Brown University, Providence, RI, 10 March 2014.
- 20 Interview with Pranay Gupte, USA, early 1999 – cited on the Nano-Wisdoms website, with no further particulars or sources provided.
- 21 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 22 Interview with Javed Jabbar, Pakistan TV, Karachi, Pakistan, 18 February 1981.

- 23 Acceptance address on receiving an honorary doctorate, University of Évora, Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
- 24 Interview with Reem Haddad, Syrian TV, Aleppo, Syria, 29 August 2008.
- 25 See, for example, the work of Sir Michael Marmot, former president of the World Medical Association, in his study, *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World* (London, 2015), which forcefully demonstrates that access to health resources reduces health inequalities and improves the quality of people's health as well as their overall quality of life.
- 26 Cited in the interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, *L'Express*, Paris, 4 July 2007.
- 27 At the State Banquet, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 27 November 2007.
- 28 Interview for the documentary 'Islam and the West', 'Morgenland' ('Orient'), ZDF Enterprises, Germany, 30 May 2009.
- 29 Interview with Roy Bonisteel, 'Man Alive', Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canada, 8 October 1986.
- 30 Interview with Eric Chol and Christian Makarian.
- 31 Acceptance remarks and conversation with Peggy Dulany at the David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award ceremony hosted by the Synergos Foundation, London, 22 October 2012.
- 32 Interview with Sandeep Unnithan, 'What Keeps Him on Course with Reviving Cultural Heritage in Developing World', *India Today*, Delhi, 13 October 2013.
- 33 Acceptance speech, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
- 34 Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa, 27 February 2014.
- 35 Post-Ogden Lecture conversation with Christina Paxson, Brown University, Providence, RI, 10 March 2014.
- 36 Interview with Roy Bonisteel, 'Man Alive'.
- 37 Opening ceremony of the Baltit Fort, Hunza, Pakistan, 29 September 1996.
- 38 Keynote address to the Nobel Institute's seminar, 'Democratic Development, Pluralism and Civil Society', Oslo, Norway, 7 April 2005.

- 39 In his essay 'The Importance of Cultural Freedom', Richard M. Weaver distinguishes culture as auxiliary to religious expression, 'a vestibule between man's worldly activities and the concept of a supra-nature which lies at the core of most religions. Anyone who engages in cultural activity, however unconscious he may be of this truth, is testifying to a feeling that man is something more than a part of nature. And only when man has begun to create a culture does he feel that he has found a proper way of life.' See 'The Importance of Cultural Freedom', *Modern Age*, 6, 1 (1961–1962), pp. 22–33; reprinted in *In Defense of Tradition: Collected Shorter Writings of Richard M. Weaver, 1929–1963* (Indianapolis, IN, 2000), p. 405.
- 40 Opening ceremony of the Baltit Fort, Hunza, Pakistan, 29 September 1996.
- 41 'Prospecting the Past, Inspiring the Future', preface to *The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme: Strategies for Urban Regeneration*, ed. Philip Jodidio (Munich, 2011).
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Inauguration ceremony for the restoration of Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, 8 September 2013.
- 44 Convocation ceremony, the Aga Khan University (AKU), Karachi, Pakistan, 6 December 2003.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Interview with Richard Engel, 'A Hollywood Stepson and a Muslim Leader', NBC, 13 December 2010.
- 47 The 25th graduation ceremony of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 48 Interview, Agence France-Presse, Aleppo, Syria, 13 September 2008.
- 49 The first Shi'i Imam urged humanity to contemplate the wonders of the created world, and to seek therein – whether, for example, in the intricacies of a peacock's feather or of a bat's wing, or the marvels of a gnat or ant – signs of the hidden Creator, the Grand Architect of the universe. See *Nahjul-Balagha: Sermons, Letters and Sayings of Imam 'Ali*, tr. Syed Mohammed Askari Jafery (2nd edn, New York, 1981).
- 50 All three citations are from the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2016 ceremony, al-Ain, UAE, 6 November 2016.
- 51 Ibid.

- 52 Acceptance address, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's Gold Medal, Ottawa, 27 November 2013.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 At the fourth Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Cairo, Egypt, 15 October 1989.
- 55 Address to the Asia Society, 'The Physical Structure of Islam,' 'Islamic Architecture: A Revival', New York, 25 September 1979.
- 56 Opening remarks at the second seminar in the series, 'Conservation as Cultural Survival,' the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Istanbul, Turkey, 26 September 1978.
- 57 Tract I, Volume XIX, p. 126, in *The Wren Society*, 20 volumes (London, 1924).
- 58 Opening ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, Ottawa, 6 December 2008.
- 59 Foreword to *Spirit and Life: Masterpieces of Islamic Art from The Aga Khan Museum* (Geneva, 2007); see also the address to the international colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Quran and its Creative Expressions,' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 60 Q 24:35.
- 61 Address to the international colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Quran and its Creative Expressions,' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19 October 2003.
- 62 Étienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (1960; New York, 1963), p. 176.
- 63 The Ceylonese philosopher of art and polymath, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (d. 1947), states, 'The study of art, if it is to have any cultural value, will demand ... in the first place an understanding and acceptance of the whole point of view from which the necessity for the work arose, and in the second place a bringing to life in ourselves of the form in which the artist conceived the work and by which he judged it.' *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York, 1956), p. 30.
- 64 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, Ottawa, 6 June 2005.
- 65 Interview with Philip Jodidio, published as 'The Processes of Change,' in *Under the Eaves of Architecture: The Aga Khan: Builder and Patron* (Munich, 2007), pp. 36–45, at p. 44.

- 66 Opening ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, Ottawa, 6 December 2008.
- 67 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, the Aga Khan Museum and their Park, Toronto, 28 May 2010.
- 68 Opening ceremony of the new headquarters of the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, 16 May 2017.
- 69 'The Processes of Change', at p. 41.
- 70 Interview, 'Celebrating Beauty', *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 27 November 2004.
- 71 First Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 23 October 1980.
- 72 Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Doha, Qatar, 24 December 2010.
- 73 Opening address, Expressions of Islam in Buildings Seminar, 'Faith, Tradition, Innovation, and the Built Environment', Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 15 October 1990.
- 74 Opening remarks at the ninth seminar, 'The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo', the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Cairo, 11 November 1984.
- 75 Address to the Asia Society, 'The Physical Structure of Islam', 'Islamic Architecture: A Revival', New York, 25 September 1979.
- 76 'The Processes of Change', at p. 43.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize ceremony, Lisbon, 6 September 2013.
- 80 Interview with Paul Chutkow, 'The Aga Khan's Vision', *Connoisseur Magazine*, London, September 1983.
- 81 Interview with Peter Mansbridge, 'One-on-One', Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Toronto, 1 March 2014.
- 82 Ismaili Council dinner, London, 9 August 1994.
- 83 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dubai, UAE, 13 December 2003.
- 84 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Lisbon, 18 December 1996.
- 85 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 30 August 2003.

- 86 Acceptance address, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's Gold Medal, Ottawa, 27 November 2013.
- 87 Tenth Aga Khan Award for Architecture presentation ceremony, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 4 September 2007.
- 88 'When we talk about the ethical realm, when we attack corruption, we are inclined to think primarily about government and politics. I am one, however, who believes that corruption is just as acute, and perhaps even more damaging, when the ethics of the civil and private sectors deteriorate ... When a construction company cheats on the quality of materials for a school or a bridge, when a teacher skimps on class work in order to sell his time privately, when a doctor recommends a drug because of incentives from a pharmaceutical company, when a bank loan is skewed by kickbacks, or a student paper is plagiarised from the internet – when the norms of fairness and decency are violated in any way, then the foundations of society are undermined.' graduation ceremony of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 9 June 2009.
- 89 Interview for the documentary 'Islam and the West', 'Morgenland' ('Orient'), ZDF Enterprises, Germany, 30 May 2009.

Chapter 10: Global Convergence

- 1 James Wolfensohn (former president of the World Bank) at the 2005 Vincent Scully Prize Award Ceremony, 25 January 2005.
- 2 Takht Nashini speech, Bombay, 11 March 1958.
- 3 'Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN): An Ethical Framework', prepared by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, available online at www.iis.ac.uk/aga-khan-development-network-akdn-ethical-framework (accessed February 2017).
- 4 The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Stone Ceremony, Ottawa, Canada, 6 June 2005.
- 5 Adrienne Clarkson, LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium, Toronto, Canada, 15 October 2010.
- 6 Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, Ottawa, 6 June 2005.
- 7 From 'A Bridge of Hope', *Brown Alumni Magazine*, Providence, RI, September 1996: 'We have much to build with: A common

- Abrahamic monotheistic tradition. Common ethical principles founded on shared human values. These are the materials with which to build a bridge. I see its structure resting on the realities of our world and strengthened by sound intellect.’
- 8 Acceptance remarks on receiving the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship, Toronto, 21 September 2016.
 - 9 Conversation with Diana L. Eck, Harvard University (Cambridge, MA) 12 November 2015: ‘this notion of one humanity in the faith of Islam is a very, very powerful force. But it’s not always presented in the form that I tried to present it today. And it is there, it is clear for those who wish to see it and understand it, but not all Muslim societies take that on board.’
 - 10 Aiglon College Graduation Ceremony, Chesières, Switzerland, 21 June 2014.
 - 11 Former German Foreign Minister, and current President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, on presenting the Tutzing Evangelical Academy’s Tolerance Award to the Aga Khan, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.
 - 12 ‘A cosmopolitan culture is a culture tolerant to the expression of diversity, open to discussion, curious in relation to the other. This tolerance is based on the fight for individual freedoms – of thought, of expression, of religion, of association – as a maximum value of society’s political organisation and has, as its limit, its own intolerance: in other words, we can only not be tolerant before other’s intolerance.’ His Excellency Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, at the Évora University Symposium, Évora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.
 - 13 The Arabic term used to describe this dissimulation is *taqiyya*.
 - 14 Paragraph E of the Ismaili Constitution states that the Ismaili Imams, ‘in accordance with the needs of the time, have given rules of conduct and constitution in conformity with the Islamic concepts of unity, brotherhood, justice, tolerance and goodwill.’
 - 15 At the luncheon in honour of the President of the Republic of Kenya, ‘The Aga Khan Social Welfare and Economic Development Institutions in Kenya’, Nairobi, Kenya, 12 October 1982.

- 16 Remarks by Adrienne Clarkson at the opening ceremony of the new headquarters of the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, 16 May 2017.
- 17 See Wendell Berry, 'Against the Nihil of the Age', *The Sewanee Review*, 109, 4 (2001), pp. 542–563. The lines from the British poet and metaphysician, Kathleen Raine (d. 2003), quoted by Berry, read:

Against the *nihil*
 One candle-flame, one blade of grass,
 One thought suffices
 To affirm all.

From *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine* (Washington, DC, 2001), the first stanza of 'Short Poems 1994', p. 342.

- 18 Cited by the Aga Khan at the first convocation ceremony of graduates from the Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Medicine, Aga Khan University (AKU), Karachi, Pakistan, 20 March 1989.
- 19 *Elle* magazine interview, Paul Giannoli, 'Mystery of the Aga Khan' (France), 20 August 1969. In the interview, while noting that he regarded his function as the Ismaili Imam to be attached to his person until his death, the Aga Khan refused to characterise its responsibilities as burdensome, stating in French, 'Ne parlez surtout pas de fardeau! J'ai reçu de mon grand-père de lourdes responsabilités, mais qui ne sont pas pesantes ... C'est un bonheur de se consacrer à une telle communauté, de travailler pour des hommes. Les responsabilités sont un fardeau que l'on aime porter.' ['Do not speak of it at all as a burden! I inherited from my grandfather these weighty responsibilities, but they are not heavy ... It is a pleasure to devote oneself to serving such a community, to working for humanity. The responsibilities are a burden that we love to bear.']
- 20 Interview with Roy Bonisteel, 'Man Alive', Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canada, 8 October 1986.

Index

Page numbers in *italics* indicate illustrations; 'n' after a page number refers to the endnote number.

'*abd* (servanthood) 77

Abu Said Abu'l-Khayr 16

accountability 76, 79, 88, 143, 144, 147, 172, 186

social accountability 78, 142, 143, 145

Acton, Lord 139

Adam 27, 220n33

Adamic virtue 80

'*adl*, *see* justice

Aga Khan xvii

dual role 5

Aga Khan III (Sir Sultan Mohamed Shah – 48th Ismaili Imam) 6, 40, 43, 185, 186, 196–7n10, 214n7

Aga Khan IV (Prince Karim al-Husseini – 49th Ismaili Imam) xvii, xviii, 1–2, 175, 179

background 2–3

'Imam of the Time' xix, 3

Islamic ethics xviii–xix, 1, 32

legacy 175, 176, 178, 180, 185, 186–7

metaphysics 12, 70

pluralism 70, 85, 94, 98–9, 101, 109,

183, 186

as reformer 180–6, 187

as visionary 175–80

Aga Khan Award for Architecture 31, 104, 163, 170–1, 184

Aga Khan Education Services 41, 154

Aga Khan Museum 75, 104, 131, 169, 184

Aga Khan University 154, 184

Aga Khan University Hospital 222n44

AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network) 8, 31, 42, 176, 183

developmental work 132, 153–4, 155, 159, 184

ethical premise and foundation of 8, 22, 27

humanistic faith-driven objectives 155–60

institutionalising ethics through AKDN 152–5

institutions of 31, 153–4

purpose and role 9, 178

responsiveness and sustainability 160–2

see also Imamat, Ismaili Imamat

AKF (Aga Khan Foundation) 31, 153, 154, 173, 184

akhlaq (ethics, creative virtues) 20–1

see also khalq, khalaqa

AKTC (Aga Khan Trust for Culture) 31,

104, 112, 154, 163, 164, 165, 184

Historic Cities Programme 164

Akyol, Mustafa 200n27

Ali b. Abi Talib (1st Shi'i Imam) 4, 23,

77, 81, 89, 93, 140, 166, 195n1, 196n5,

196n6, 213n74

- Hazrat Ali 81
nass xvii
Shi'at Ali xvii
 successor of the Prophet xvii, 2
 Aligarh University 186
amana (trusteeship) 20, 31, 32, 199n25
 Amman Message 4, 7, 28, 181
 'amour propre' and 'amour de soi' 210n44
 Appiah, Kwame Anthony 70, 103, 218n57
'aql, *see* intellect
 architecture 132
 esoteric meaning of buildings 167
 ethical function of 170–1
 integrative role of 166
 intelligent use of the past 167
 pluralism 166, 169, 170, 171–2
 quality of life and 171
 symbolism 167–71
 symbolism of Delegation Building 168–9
 symbolism of Global Centre for Pluralism 169
 symbolism of Ismaili Centres 169, 171
 as transmitter of values 166–72
 see also symbol, symbolism
 atheism 59–60
 Attar, Farid al-Din: *Conference of the Birds* 74–5
 Augustinian division 5
 Avicenna (Ibn Sina) 16, 222n44
 al-Azhar mosque xxiv
 al-Azhar Park 31–2, 163–4
 al-Azhar University 3

 Babbitt, Irving 151
 Bani Adam ix, xv, 102, 187
 Barber, Benjamin: *Jihad vs. McWorld* 216n36
batin (hidden reality, inward) 4, 54, 65, 177, 196n4, 210n44
 'inner man' 19, 20, 21, 97, 199n24
 virtue 173
 see also *zahir*
ba'ya (spiritual allegiance) 5

 Bellaigue, Christopher de 111
 Benda, Julien 40
 Berry, Wendell 42, 186, 204n23, 235n17
bimaristan 222n4
 al-Biruni 95
 Blake, William 198–9n13
 Bonaventura, St. 202n1
 Browning, Robert 15, 198n11
 Burckhardt, Titus 200n26
 Burke, Edmund 76

 certainty, *see* *yaqin*
Charlie Hebdo cartoons 79
 Charter of Medina 99, 217n46
 Chilcot Report 122, 221n12
 Christianity 25, 99, 112, 121, 198n8, 200n35, 215n9
 see also Judeo-Christian tradition
 civil society 100, 111–12, 126, 127, 141, 147, 148, 154, 162, 178, 182, 183
 definition 138
 importance of 127, 138–9
 strong civil society 137, 138–9
 Clarkson, Adrienne 153
 clash of civilisations 119, 120
 clash of ignorance 80, 119–27
 education about Islamic heritage to counter ignorance 127–31
 historical amnesia 112–13, 127–8, 182
 misperceptions and stereotypes 121, 123–4, 128–9, 131
 colonisation, colonialism 65, 112, 113, 114, 121, 125–6
 see also politics
 common good 25, 55, 93, 101, 136, 139, 143, 145, 146, 177–8, 185
 common humanity 23, 30, 69, 82, 83, 104, 113, 114, 127, 132, 176, 178, 180
 cosmopolitanism and 87, 90, 93
 ethic of a common humanity 1, 21, 22, 24, 32, 119, 136, 155
 the Umma as a common humanity 107–9
 common spiritual patrimony 11, 12, 17–18, 21, 24
 community xviii, 7, 73–5

- lived ethics, as practiced by the *jamat* 172–3
see also Umma
- compassion (*rahman*) xviii, 1, 18, 22–3, 77, 177, 179
- conscience:
 moral conscience 29–30, 137, 181
 social conscience 22, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 68, 92, 101, 132, 137, 156, 158, 173, 181, 185, 186
- consensus, *see ijma*
- Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims 88, 214n3, 234n14
- constitutional reform 180, 181
- consultation, *see shura*
- ‘convivencia’ 99–102, 131
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 207n5, 209n34, 231n63
- Corbin, Henry 54
- cosmopolitan ethic xix, 18, 42, 72, 90–4, 105, 177
 common good 93
- cosmopolitanism 62, 70, 81, 85, 109, 176, 177, 180, 183
 building a Muslim cosmopolitan ethos around the pillars of Islam 109
 common humanity and 87, 90, 93
 cosmopolitan culture 234n12
 diversity and 91–2
 as ethic of harmonious and equitable coexistence 87
 global convergence and 177
 Quran and 88
see also pluralism
- Covenant of Alast 29, 30, 202n47
- covering up, *see kufi*
- creation 11–12, 15, 20, 27
 obligation of humankind to care for creation 32
see also khalq, khalaqa
- culture 162
 cosmopolitan culture 234n12
 cultural development 162–3
 cultural education 9
 cultural harmony 8
 cultural identity 109, 162, 163, 164, 180
 cultural sensitivity 80, 82, 83, 103, 104, 129, 133, 177
 cultural pluralism 104, 169, 170
 culture and Muslim identity 164–5
 culture of pluralism 137, 139
 culture as ‘trampoline for development’ 163–4
 ethical acculturation 41, 172
 Western intellectual culture 40
see also architecture
- Danish cartoons 79
- Dar al-‘Ilm (House of Knowledge) 3
- Dawkins, Richard 59
- democracy 128, 140, 143, 146–7, 226n45
- Descartes, René 63, 67, 209n34
 Cartesian schism 63
- development 22, 98
 AKDN 132, 153–4, 155, 159, 184
 cultural development 162–3
 culture as ‘trampoline for development’ 163–4
- faith and 155–60
 not philanthropy but enlightened self-fulfilment 160
- poverty and 8, 157–8, 159
- quality of life and 8, 132, 133, 135, 136, 146, 147, 151, 153, 155–7, 160, 163, 182, 229n25
- self-reliance and 155, 162
- sustainability and 161–2
- dialogue 95, 98, 120, 183
 ‘dialogical’ relations 73, 95, 120, 133, 211n50
 pluralism, pluralistic dialogue xviii, 101, 105
- Dickens, Charles 45, 205n35
- dignity (*karama*) xxi, 1, 20, 28–9, 68, 156, 176–7, 187
 ‘the dignity of difference’ 119–20
 ethic of human dignity 1, 22, 29, 32, 133, 136
 ethic of respect for human dignity 28–9
 as ethical imperative 21, 22
fitra and 19
 moral dignity 22

din, see faith

din wa dunya, see faith and the world

diversity xv, 25, 70, 83, 89

as act of divine benevolence 82

cosmopolitanism and 91–2

diversification without disintegration
83, 96–9

diversity of mankind 17

'diversity preserves liberty' 139

engagement with 42, 95, 97, 105

homogenisation and 82, 83, 94, 97

identity and 82, 83, 91

transcendent unity embraces diversity
18

see also pluralism

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor 215n23

Karamazovian dictum 92

dunya, see the world

ecological responsibility 31

education 41–2, 110–11, 158, 178

aims of 41

cultural education 9

educators, role of 79, 127–31

female education 43

media, role of 127, 128

providing a counter-history 131

see also ethical literacy; spiritual
literacy

Eliot, T.S. 50, 80

empathy xviii, 14, 22, 95, 102–3

cultural sensitivity and 82

definition 102

'empathy gaps' 79, 102–5, 129

ethic of connectivity 24

pluralism and 17, 103–4

enabling environment 135, 136–7, 162,
178

ingredients of 137–49, 162

engagement xviii, 22, 42

engagement with diversity 92, 95, 97,
105

Enlightenment 67, 111, 168

equilibrium 5, 22, 38, 39, 55, 75,
97, 176

see also moderation

equity 20, 28, 30, 87, 90, 187

compassionate equity 18

as ethical imperative 21, 23, 68, 84, 89,
136

pluralism and 138

social equity 31, 158

ethical imperatives 7, 21–3, 32, 68, 84, 88,
89, 90, 108, 136, 152, 187

ethical literacy 13, 41, 172

ethics xvi, xviii–xix, xxi, 176

aesthetics and 168, 170

balancing of faith and life through
ethics 5

Christian ethic 25

as corollary to the metaphysical
perspective 9, 12

ethic of a common humanity 1, 21, 22,
24, 32, 119, 136, 155

ethic of connectivity 24–5

ethic of exploration and
interconnectedness 25–8

ethic of hope 137, 148–9

ethic of human dignity 1, 22, 29, 32,
133, 136

ethic of Islam 6–7, 48, 137

ethic of respect for human dignity
28–9, 32

ethic of responsible stewardship 31–2

ethic of service, generosity and
cooperation 29–31

ethics as expression of faith 19–21

faith/ethics link 19–21, 32, 48, 61, 62,
87–8, 152, 176, 180

lived ethics, as practiced by the *jamat*
172–3

social change and ethical issues 48

see also cosmopolitan ethic

exegetical, hermeneutical authority, see *ta'wil*

faith (*din*) 35, 61, 62

balance between the spiritual and
material realms 5, 20

as criteria for salvation 88–9

definition 14

faith/ethics link 19–21, 32, 48, 61, 62,
87–8, 152, 176, 180

- intellect and 7, 14–17, 32, 35, 47–8,
49, 63
unchanging essence/principles of 6,
35, 45
see also *usul al-din*
- faith, interpretation of 115–16
Imam and 5, 15, 35, 45
- faith and the world (*din wa dunya*) xix, 27,
32, 55, 58, 183
balancing of 30, 43, 177
ethics as bridge between faith and the
world 20
faith and development 155–60
imbalance created by secularism 60
integrating *din* and *dunya* 151–2,
156
spiritual/temporal Augustinian division
5
see also the world
- fallibilism 101
- Fatimids xxiv, 3, 181, 185
- fitra*, *see* nature
- forgetfulness, *see* *nisyan*
- formalism 20, 45, 200n27
- Franklin, Benjamin 71, 210n42
- freedom 71–2, 79
abuse of 77–8
freedom and license 76–9
freedom and the press 78–9, 143
individual freedom 7, 44, 120, 136
positive freedom xxi, 137, 143
Quranic view of 76, 77, 220n31
responsibility and 7, 76, 77, 84, 93, 95,
120, 136–7
secular freedom 7
- fundamentalism 64–5, 113
political fundamentalism 60
religious fundamentalism 59,
64–6
secular fundamentalism 59–60, 62,
63
see also secularism, secularity
- Gayumars, King xv
- Ghadir Khumm 195n1
- ghafla* (heedlessness of God) 26
- Gilson, Étienne 168
- Global Centre for Pluralism 98, 100, 154,
169, 184–5
- global convergence 1, 9, 144, 176, 177, 179,
180, 185
- globalism, globalisation 23, 36, 37, 81, 82,
94, 96, 99, 101, 119, 162, 178, 180, 182,
216n36
- God 12
The 99 Names of Allah 10
the Absolute 4, 11, 12
Allah 22
the Compassionate 22
the Creator 15, 17, 20, 177, 230n49
God/man relationship 11, 54
as humanity's origin and its locus of
return 18
- God-consciousness, *see* *taqwa*
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 94–5
- good governance 137, 145–7, 178, 183
see also politics
- harmony xviii, xix, 20, 22, 89, 97, 175,
187
communal harmony 9, 31
cultural harmony 8
as ethical imperative 21, 23, 68, 84, 89,
136
intrinsic oneness 23
oneness of reality 11
- Harris, Sam 60, 64
- Havel, Václav 208n29
- hereditary designation, *see* *nass*
- hidden reality, *see* *batin*
- Hitchens, Christopher 59
- hope 23, 93, 146, 147, 158, 179
Bridge of Hope 178, 187
ethic of hope 137, 148–9
- humanism 168
- humanitarian organisation 153
- humanitarian values 2, 155,
185–6
- humility 14–15, 24, 25, 26, 44, 49,
58, 61, 72, 76, 79, 80–1, 93, 95,
105, 109, 131, 135, 140, 142,
166, 168

- intellectual humility 63, 102, 142
- science and 206n47
- Huntington, Samuel P. 119, 120
- Ibn al-ʿArabi 21, 115
- Ibn Khaldun 100–1
- identity 70–1, 82
 - cultural identity 109, 162, 163, 164, 180
 - culture and Muslim identity 164–5
 - diversity and 82, 83, 91
 - identity politics 82, 87
 - individuality and 72, 74
 - Muslim identity 110, 112, 117, 164
 - pan-Ismaili identity 183
- idolatry, *see shirk*
- ignorance, arrogance and insensitivity 79–81
 - see also* clash of ignorance; empathy
- ijma* (consensus) 67–8
- Ikhwan al-Safa' (Brethren of Purity) 23
- imago dei* xv, 20, 23
- Imam 14
 - faith, interpretation of 5, 15, 35, 45
 - 'Imam of the Time'/Hazar Imam xix, 3, 209n39
 - no political ambitions 126–7
 - role of the Ismaili Imam 5–8, 15
 - as spiritual guide 15, 54, 156, 166
 - see also ta'lim; ta'wil*
- Imam Ali, *see* Ali b. Abi Talib
- Imam Mu'izz 185
- Imamat, Ismaili Imamat 1, 7–9, 28, 153, 156
 - cultural initiatives 42–3, 104, 112, 129, 132, 133, 160
 - definition 8
 - Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat 8
 - Imamat institutions xviii, 1–2, 9, 40, 132–3, 172–3, 176, 183–6, 187
 - quality of human life 156–7
 - role of 8–9
 - role of Imamat institutions in representing Islam 131–3
 - Seat of 8, 182, 201n42
 - status of 181–2
 - see also* AKDN
- inclusiveness 18, 81, 147, 177
 - pluralism and 87
 - principle of 17, 18, 87, 89, 146–7
 - Quran on 12, 88, 89
- individuality, individualism 28, 62, 66
 - community and 74–5
 - individuality/individualism distinction 71, 73
 - individuality in Islam 71–2, 75
 - self-serving individualism 56, 70–81
 - transgressive individualism 28
- insan*, *see under* man, mankind
- The Institute of Ismaili Studies 184
- integrity 9, 12, 23, 27, 42, 44, 49, 79, 80, 108, 114, 136, 152, 187
 - ethical integrity 75, 92
 - as ethical imperative 21
 - importance of 84
 - moral integrity 22, 29
 - principle of integration 39, 54, 176, 177, 183
- intellect ('*aql*) 16, 19, 49, 68, 108
 - change and 48–50
 - definition 14, 15
 - Divine Intellect/'*aql-i kul* 16
 - faith and 7, 14–17, 32, 35, 47–8, 49, 63
 - intellectual humility 63, 102, 142
 - intellectual knowledge 53, 54
 - likened to light 14, 16
 - Shi'i interpretation of 16
 - supra-rational intellect 14
- intellection 13, 14, 198n7
 - prerequisites of 14–15
 - revelation and 13–14, 15
- intellectual elite 40–1, 130
 - reform of 182–3
- intellectual-moral authority, *see ta'lim*
- interfaith ecumenism 90–1, 92
 - see also* proselytism
- Internet and social media 74, 78, 80, 144
- 'cave of virtuality' 74
- dehumanizing effects of 74
- loneliness 144, 211n52
- Iqbal, Allama Muhammad 46, 47, 74
- Islam 2, 21, 45–6, 152
 - adaptation through changing times 35

- ethic of Islam 6–7, 48, 137
- a faith of reason 16
- message of xxi
- modernity and 45, 51, 165, 179
- pillars of Islam 61, 109
- politics and 113–14
- a social faith 30
- submission 72, 97, 211n48, 215n8
- Islam, principles of 50
 - holistic, all-encompassing vision 5, 6, 11, 12, 42, 64, 67, 70, 87, 152
 - Imam and 6
 - intrinsic harmony, inclusiveness and interconnectedness 11–12, 18, 128
 - peaceful message and tolerant ethos 72, 124, 128
 - universalism 95
 - vertical and horizontal relationships 11
 - see also* *usul al-din*
- Islam and the West 39, 103, 107, 112–13, 179
 - 9/11 attacks 122–3
 - Muslim values 39, 41, 42, 55, 110
 - Muslim world view 67, 68
 - Westernisation 112
 - see also* clash of ignorance; Islam, principles of; occidentalisation; tradition and modernity; Western world
- Islamic Law, *see* *Shari'a*
- Ismailis 3, 4, 23, 54, 179–80
 - background 3
 - criteria of moral conduct 68
 - intellectual heritage 3
 - place within the Umma 4, 181
 - population 3
 - scriptural and legal interpretation 45–6
 - see also* Nizari Ismailis
- Itihna'ashari 3
- Ja'far al-Sadiq (6th Ismaili Imam) 2, 4, 23, 196n6
- Ja'fari school 4
- Jefferson, Thomas 73
- al-Jili, 'Abd al-Karim 200n26
- Judeo-Christian tradition 50, 125, 130
- justice ('*adl*) 23, 89
 - just society 93, 94, 117, 183
 - social justice xviii, xix, 9, 22, 31, 61, 62, 93, 109, 158
- karama*, *see* dignity
- Kennedy, John Fitzgerald 97, 216–17n38
- khalifa* (vicegerent) xv, 113
 - responsibility 77
 - see also* '*abd*
- khalq, khalaqa* (creation) 20
 - see also* *akhlaq*
- kindness 77
- knowledge 15, 81
 - aim of 15
 - ethical dimension of 7
 - faith and knowledge 14, 27, 32
 - 'ilm/spiritual knowledge 26
 - intellectual knowledge 53, 54
 - progress and 136
 - self-knowledge 25, 26, 48, 75
 - 'visionary knowing/discursive knowing' distinction 17
 - see also* *yaqin*
- knowledge gaps 79, 102–5, 127, 133
 - see also* clash of ignorance
- kufir* (covering up) 26, 210n38
- legacy:
 - Aga Khan IV 175, 176, 178, 180, 185, 186–7
 - prophetic legacy 14
 - spiritual legacy 17, 87
- Levitzky, Sergei 207n5
- Lewis, Bernard 119
- Lewis, Clive Staples 57
- Logos 14, 16, 54, 68
- Malik al-Ashtar 77
- man, mankind:
 - as Allah's greatest creation 29
 - common spiritual patrimony 17–18

- diversity of mankind 17
- homo religiosus* 66
- human identity 50, 58
- 'inner man' 19, 20, 21, 97, 199n24
- insan* 30
- al-insan al-kamil*/perfect, universal man
 - xv, 20, 69, 200n26, 209n39
- integral nature of man 18–19
- 'outer man' 19, 20, 21, 97, 199n24
- self-fulfilment 136, 160, 187
- self-transcendence 20, 66
- unity of man 11, 117, 187
- see also* nature
- materialism 1, 55–66, 73, 135, 182
 - effects of 57–8
 - materialistic ethos 58, 60, 66
 - see also* modernism
- media responsibility 127, 137, 178
- mediocrity 140, 141, 205n37
- meritocracy 78, 137, 139–41, 183
- metaphysical oneness, *see tawhid*
- metaphysical oneness, corollaries of
 - 13–21, 69
 - common spiritual patrimony 17–18
 - ethics as the expression of faith 19–21
 - faith and intellect 14–17
 - integral nature of man 18–19
 - revelation and intellection 13–14
 - see also tawhid*
- metaphysics xix, xxi, 4, 6–7, 12, 35
 - diversity 89
 - ethics and 9
 - see also* metaphysical oneness, corollaries of; *tawhid*
- Miskawayh 30
- moderation 76, 81
 - see also* equilibrium
- modernism 1, 83–4
 - centrifugal, fragmenting and fraying
 - influence of 32–3, 36, 37, 57, 59, 178
 - challenges posed by 48, 55–6, 180
 - modernity/modernism distinction 53
 - ethos of modernism 36, 48, 51, 53, 73, 179, 206n1
 - see also* materialism; reductionism; relativism
- modernity, modernisation, modern life 38, 121, 182
 - change, rapidity of 36–7
 - Islam and 45, 51, 165, 179
 - Ismaili perspective on modernity 4, 45
 - time and 36
 - see also* tradition and modernity
- morality 60, 64, 69, 90, 123, 186, 200n27, 215n23
- Muhammad, Prophet of Islam 13, 14, 23, 26, 44, 61, 69, 116, 209n39
- Black Stone incident 96
- Farewell Sermon 99, 217n47
- Prophet's Covenantants 99
- revelation and 15
- succession xvii–xviii, 2
- see also* Charter of Medina
- multiculturalism 104, 209n41
- nafs*, *see* self, soul
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein 53, 206n1
- nass* (hereditary designation) xvii
- nature (*fitra*) 29, 70, 137
 - dignity and 19
 - ethics and 20
 - human nature 19, 71
 - integral nature of man 18–19
 - primordial nature 13, 19, 20, 21, 27, 29, 30, 48, 67, 72, 77, 100, 209n39
 - spiritual nature 1, 19, 23, 59, 67
- nisyan* (forgetfulness) 30
- Nizari Ismailis xvii, 3
- noblesse oblige* 77
- Obama, Barack 104
- objectivity 19, 54, 55, 66, 67, 70, 101
- occidentalisation 38, 180
 - Muslim identity and 112
 - see also* Western world
- One essence, *see* 'single soul'
- outward, present, *see zahir*
- Pallis, Marco 200–201n35
- Pearson, Lester B. 99
- 'permanent things' 50

- Plato 48, 74, 76, 145, 168, 197, 206n49, 225–6n38, 227n2
- pluralism xvi, xviii, 22, 25, 82, 88–9, 100–1, 138
- Aga Khan IV 70, 85, 94, 98–9, 101, 109, 183, 186
- architecture and 166, 169, 170, 171–2
- building a culture of pluralism 94–6, 100
- ‘convivencia’ as model for pluralism 99–102
- cultural pluralism 104, 169, 170
- culture of pluralism 137, 139
- definition 87
- diversity and 101, 102
- empathy and 17, 103–4
- equity and 138
- importance of 98
- inclusiveness and 87
- Ismailis 3, 4
- metaphysics of participation 89
- pluralistic acculturation 100, 101, 147
- pluralistic ethos 62, 80, 99, 101, 114, 119, 138, 147, 148
- principle of pluralism 46, 115, 155
- principled pluralism 70
- promotion of 9
- Quran and 18, 107, 114–15, 116, 133, 220n33
- religious pluralism 116, 220n33
- see also* cosmopolitanism
- politics 60, 68, 109, 110–11, 121–7
- Cold War 120, 125, 126
- distinguishing Islam from political conflicts with ‘a theological overlay’ 124–6
- identity politics 82, 87
- Islam and 113–14
- Ismaili Imam 181–2
- political fundamentalism 60
- theocracy 110–11
- see also* colonisation, colonialism; democracy; fundamentalism; good governance
- Portuguese Agreement 8, 28, 201n42
- positivism 63–4
- postmodernism 55
- poverty 31, 41, 93, 124, 171
- development and 8, 157–8, 159
- moral poverty 76
- see also* wealth
- principles 3, 20, 21–2, 68, 92, 101–2, 140, 161, 165, 176, 206n49
- focus of Aga Khan IV on, as foundation of ethics 1, 6, 7, 35, 38, 39, 45, 51, 69–70, 84, 109, 156–7, 167, 178, 234n7
- immutable principles 53
- metaphysical principles 4, 68, 70
- principle of complementarity 38, 39, 116, 167, 176
- principle of inclusiveness 17, 18, 87, 89, 146–7
- principle of integral oneness/unity 12, 69, 198n7
- principle of integration 39, 54, 176, 177, 183
- principle of measure 72
- principle of pluralism 46, 115, 155
- principle of verticality 167
- principled pluralism 70
- tradition and 43–8
- universal principles 90, 116
- see also* Islam, principles of
- progress 53, 135–6, 138, 151
- material progress 57, 156, 182
- sustainable progress 31
- Prophet Muhammad, *see* Muhammad, Prophet of Islam
- proselytism 90–1
- see also* interfaith ecumenism
- provincialism 87, 91, 178, 214n1
- Qadi al-Nu‘man 23
- quality of life 5, 7, 21, 22, 31, 56, 93–4, 105, 177–8, 183, 226n45
- architecture and 171
- development and 8, 132, 133, 135, 136, 146, 147, 151, 153, 155–7, 160, 163, 182, 229n25

- Quran xix, 26, 69, 88
 criteria for salvation (faith and good works) 88, 215n9
 faith 116
 freedom in 76, 77, 220n31
 inclusive vision (intrinsic unity of being) 12, 88, 89
 Light Verse 26, 75, 168
 metaphysical oneness (transcendence and immanence) 12
 'Muslim', definition of 88, 215n8
 'no compulsion' 114, 116
 parable, allegory, metaphor and symbolism 115
 pluralism in 18, 107, 114–15, 116, 133, 220n33
 as a proof and a clear light 13
 revelation 13
 'single soul' 107, 109
 taking a life/saving a life 123
 universal message 88, 214n6
- rahman*, *see* compassion
 Raine, Kathleen 186, 235n17
 Rashidun Caliphs/Rightly Guided Caliphs 4, 196n5
 rationalism 53, 60, 182
 reductionism 45–6, 54, 55, 81, 97
 see also modernism
 relativism 21, 46, 54–5, 97, 101, 209n41
 moral relativism 48, 69
 unprincipled relativism 56, 66–70
 see also modernism
 responsibility 18
 freedom and 7, 76, 77, 84, 93, 95, 120, 136–7
 human responsibility 11–12, 22
 moral responsibility 32, 91, 152, 176, 186
 responsible stewardship 22, 68
 social responsibility 32, 136–7
 spiritual responsibility 27, 77
 revelation 13, 14
 modern science and 49
 Muhammad, Prophet of Islam 15
 revelation and intellection 13–14, 15
 universality of the divine revelation 214n7
 Robinson, Marilynne 63
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 210n44
 Rumi, Jalaluddin 18
- sacredness, the sacred 18, 26, 27, 59, 68, 198n13
 sense of the sacred 15, 22, 26, 32, 53, 55, 66
 Sa'di of Shiraz 102
 science 63–4, 208n29
 ethical questions 49–50
 humility and 206n47
 Islam and 49
 revelation and 49
 scientific atheism 59–60
 tradition and 49
 scientism 59, 63–4
 secularism, secularity 59–62, 170
 Aga Khan's views on 60–1, 111
 secular freedom 7
 secular fundamentalism 59–60, 62, 63
 secularisation in Muslim societies 111, 112
 soft/hard secularism 59, 60
 Seerat Conference, Karachi 44, 69, 109
 self, soul (*nafs*) 30, 210n44
 higher/lower soul 30
 intellection and 14
 revelation and 13
 transcendent soul 17–18
 see also 'single soul'
 selfhood 24, 30, 71, 74, 210n44
 servanthood, *see* 'abd
 service 26, 27, 29–31, 32, 140, 172, 185, 186
shahada (Muslim creed or testament) 12, 13, 29, 30, 202n47
 Shakespeare, William 57, 71, 210n43
Shari'a (Islamic Law) 20–1, 45, 110
 Shia 19, 110, 121, 122, 166, 179, 195n1
 background xvii

- Shi'at Ali* xvii
 sub-groups 2–3
shirk (idolatry) 26, 54, 59, 201n38
shura (consultation) 67–8
 Simurgh 74–5
 'single soul' 17, 19, 27, 29, 68, 71, 74, 87, 122
 Quran 107, 109
 Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr 76, 205n37
 spirit 196n1
 ruh 210n44
 spirit/matter relationship 5, 11, 12
 spiritual/temporal Augustinian division 5
 spiritual allegiance, *see ba'ya*
 spiritual literacy 13, 26, 42
 see also symbolism
 spirituality 21, 58, 59, 64, 108, 114, 117, 169–70
 stewardship: responsible stewardship 22, 68
 Sufism 4, 7, 17–18, 20, 21, 54, 68, 210n44
 tariqa 4, 108, 171, 196n6
 Sunnis 110, 121, 122, 195n1
 background xvii–xviii, 2
 symbol, symbolism 75, 166, 168
 architecture 167–71
 Quran 115, 168
 see also architecture
 sympathy, *see* empathy

ta'lim (intellectual-moral authority) 5–6, 15
 see also Imam
 Tange, Kenzo 47
taqwa (God-consciousness) 29, 30, 99, 201n46, 202n48, 202n54
tawhid (unity, metaphysical oneness) xviii, 6, 11–12, 18, 32, 69, 198n7
 intrinsic oneness 23, 32, 87, 152, 176
 principle of integral oneness/unity 12, 69, 198n7
 Quran 12, 116
 see also Imam; metaphysical oneness, corollaries of
ta'wil (exegetical, hermeneutical authority) 6, 7, 15, 54, 101, 166

 Taylor, Charles 73, 211n50
 technology 37, 43, 49, 121, 144–5, 170
 see also Internet and social media
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord 46, 76, 205n40, 212n64
 terrorism 65, 123–4
 9/11 attacks 122–3
 theophany 13, 14, 24–5, 46, 49, 68, 71, 75, 87, 89, 104, 116, 165, 168, 169
 diversity of 26
 failure to perceive 54
 witnessing of 29
 Theuth, 'the father of writing' 145, 225–6n38
 time 36, 44, 45, 47, 49
 a limitless mirror (eternity) 36
 a shrinking cage (materialistic conception of time) 36, 50
 Todorov, Tzvetan 75
 tolerance xviii, 84, 92, 94–5, 98, 186, 217n46
 Fatimids 3
 intolerance 103, 129, 179, 182, 234n12
 limits of 70
 a sacred religious imperative 88
 spiritual roots of 93
 tradition 4, 38, 47
 principles and 43–8
 role of 47
 science and 49
 time and 36, 47
 traditional religious thought 195–6n1
 unchanging principles 47
 tradition and modernity 112
 divergent squint 37–8, 40, 110, 182
 equilibrium through complementarity 38, 39
 no conflict in Islam 42, 48, 49, 51
 ossification and flexibility 43, 46
 tensions between tradition and modernity 36–7, 38, 50
 transcendence 12, 14, 19, 67, 70
 self-transcendence 20, 66
 tribalism 56, 66, 81–5
 trusteeship, *see amana*

- truth 15, 23, 67–8, 89, 198n8
 access to 15–16
 fundamental truth 7
 Goodness, Beauty, and 168, 227n2
 reason and 67
- Umma (community) 27, 164–5, 180, 181, 186
 as a common humanity 107–9
 ideal of 75
 Ismailis 4, 181
 pluralism: re-envisioning the Umma 114–17
 stress factors within 65, 107–8, 109–14
see also community
- uniformity 18, 54, 66, 97, 109, 114, 119
- University of Central Asia 154, 184
- uns* (intimate communal fellowship) 30
- usul al-din* (principles of the faith) xix, 4
see also faith; Islam, principles of
- vicegerent, *see* *khalifa*
- Vickers, Roy Henry 95, 216n32
- Vincentian Canon 198n8
- virtue 173
 creative virtue 20–1, 90, 96, 97, 102, 151
- Voegelin, Eric 104
- ‘way of life’ xix, 21, 61, 69, 100, 132, 151, 152
- wealth 31, 55, 58
see also poverty
- Weaver, Richard M. 66, 70, 230n39
- Weil, Simone 153
- Western world 2, 38, 69, 76, 82, 121
 Western intellectual culture 40
 Western values 39, 43, 110, 113
see also Islam and the West
- women:
 education 43
 Islam and 71–3
- the world (*dunya*) 11–12, 30, 55, 202n48
see also faith and the world
- Wren, Christopher, Sir 167
- yaqin* (certainty) 67
 stages of 26–7
see also knowledge
- Yeats, William Butler 96
- zahir* (outward, present) 4, 65, 177, 196n4, 199n24
 ‘outer man’ 19, 20, 21, 97, 199n24
 virtue 173
see also *batin*