

Morality Should Be Shaped By All In S'pore

Zheng Huifen and Tan Tatt Si

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The Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) recent survey findings on religious harmony are a goldmine of information. The Humanist Society (Singapore) (HSS) welcomes the opportunity to discuss attitudes regarding beliefs and morality.

For now, we wish to respond to comments reported in "Religious identity strongest in Muslims, Protestants" (June 18), in which the Bishop of the Lutheran Church called on religious groups to work together to strengthen Singapore's moral values.

He foresees a scenario, though, of a more united religious community versus the non-religious. This seems to assume an us-versus-them approach in morality discussions, with which the HSS disagrees. All members of our nation, regardless of belief, have an equally valid voice and role in building Singapore. The HSS is a group for humanists and like-minded people who lead fulfilling, moral lives without the need for religion. We emphasise the role of reason, compassion and tolerance in our lives.

The survey appears to say freethinkers disapprove less of sex in non-married and same-sex relationships. This may simply reflect greater tolerance of and compassion for people in circumstances they may not control. Most religions have a call to love thy neighbour. Surely, we cannot discriminate against others based on sexuality? As nations evolve, so does the idea of what is moral or acceptable.

Previously, interracial marriage or social mingling was "bad". Countries such as the United States and South Africa had brutal segregation and apartheid laws respectively. Slavery was acceptable in civilised society, often justified using religion.

Attitudes are now different. In most countries, people interact and marry freely without racial discrimination. Slavery is banned worldwide; no reasonable person would use religion to justify slavery.

The HSS agrees with the IPS report where it noted: "While religion provides its adherents a framework to evaluate morality, this will need to be tempered with a respect for those who may not share similar religious values.

"What is needed is greater dialogue to achieve coherence between the various principles espoused by different religions and a set of universal principles agreeable to all, including secularists."

To humanists, the moral question is how humans can live with dignity, without discrimination and help our fellow humans to do likewise. We look forward to the dialogue about Singapore's morality.