

## **Religious or not, S'poreans' morality is growing**

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I refer to the article "Lessons for S'pore on the rise and fall of empires" (Sept 13).

In it, former top civil servant Lim Siong Guan discusses Singapore's future in reference to Sir John Glubb's essay, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*, which analyses the rise and fall of great nations.

Mr Lim cites Glubb's remarks about the "weakening of religion" and proceeds to note that Singapore's non-religious population is increasing, implying that this is a possible sign of the Age of Decadence.

I have some points to make. First, our morality has roots in our ability to empathise with others. This quality of empathy is, in turn, a result of natural selection, behavioural evolution, education and literacy.

Mr Lim should not be surprised that ethics change as society progresses. For example, humanity no longer finds concepts such as slavery, racial segregation or religious genocide tenable.

Second, non-religious Singaporeans continue to do good.

At the Humanist Society, we have helped the needy, taken care of our environment and raised funds for aid organisations, all without supernatural motivations.

We believe that humans are responsible for giving meaning to and shaping their own lives and, in doing so, building a better world. Many within our non-religious community have found ways of living moral, productive and meaningful lives.

There should not be any insinuation about their lack of a belief system, and they should not be seen as pre-believers, either to be proselytised to or ridiculed.

Lastly, intellectual debates are vital because they expose our biases, blind spots and irrationality. One feature of a resilient country is its ability to ask difficult questions about itself and adapt to changing circumstances.

During Singapore's formative years, questions about merger and independence, communism and capitalism, national identity and cultural identities were raised.

Though we have been successful in walking the path we did, we should not think that to be the only path. Glubb's essay, published in 1978, should be tempered by the present social and geopolitical dynamics.

We look forward to Mr Lim's next two lectures.