



Disapprove of LGBT but don't oppress, says Turkish scholar

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Muslims do not have the right to oppress the beliefs and behaviour of which they disapprove, including those of the LGBT community, says Mustafa Akyol, a prominent Turkish scholar.

Akyol said that although the traditional Islamic view considers homosexual relations “haram”, he believes that not everything that is religiously banned should also be banned by the state.

People were now living in modern states where every citizen has equal rights, and this included the right to live as they see fit unless they harm others, he said.

Akyol, a senior fellow on Islam and modernity at the Cato Institute, a US-based libertarian think tank, was commenting on a Malaysian government plan to widen the scope of existing shariah law to take action against social media users for insulting Islam and “promoting the LGBT lifestyle”.

He told FMT: “Muslims should know that they can disapprove of certain beliefs or behaviours, but this does not give them the right to oppress those beliefs or behaviours.

“Imagine what if some people disapprove Muslim beliefs and behaviours, and try to ‘correct’ them by state power?”

“China is doing that against Muslim Uighur, and we rightly condemn this totalitarian oppression.”

Last week, the deputy minister in charge of religious affairs, Ahmad Marzuk Shaary, said certain quarters posted comments and graphics on social media that insulted Islam while promoting the LGBT lifestyle.

LGBT refers to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Akyol said conservative Muslims should take inspiration from a crucial Quranic verse, “to you your religion, to me mine” and apply it to people with different lifestyles.

The LGBT community in Malaysia were not trying to prevent conservative Muslims from practising their religion or living their own traditional style.

“Then why should they not be able to live as who they are, and be honest about it, without harming anyone?”

Akyol, who previously called for compassion when dealing with the LGBT community, also said Islamic authorities should try to understand why some people, in every society, are sexually different from the heterosexual majority.

He said there is a misconception that the LGBT community chose their lifestyle “often as a result of pursuing endless sexual desire”.

Yet most people in the LGBT community say that they were born with their tendencies — in other words, it is a part of their nature, or ‘fitra’.

“So, Islamic authorities should think: If God created certain people with a certain fitra, and if they are living accordingly without harming anyone, why would Islam really condemn them?”

Akyol said with a new reading of religious sources, and Islamic history, he believes one could develop a more tolerant view.

“For example, in the Quran, the people of Lot were condemned for exactly what? Yes, they were homosexuals, but they are also sexual aggressors. Would they not be condemned if they were heterosexual aggressors?”

On the question of insulting Islam, Akyol said Muslims should ask why they were always easily insulted in the modern era.

He contrasted present-day attitudes to “the confident dignity and compassion one finds in the life of Prophet Muhammad and exemplary Muslims of the classical age.”

He believes that deep down there is an insecurity about “our faith, our morals, our values”.

“And this leads to the wrong and often counterproductive reaction of trying to protect them by crude dictates,” he said.