

June 24, 2023

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Jason Kodish
Director of Research
Thirring Institute
Email: jkodish@thirring.org
URL: <https://thirring.org>

Dear Esteemed Peers,

I write this with great concern as it has come to my attention that the Thirring Institute's Engineering Lead, Joyce Ng, and her friends have been persistently targeted by a malicious actor known as Mercury Jamie Alice since 21 June 2022, exactly a year ago.

I have also been made aware of the involvement of alleged Christian far-right aligned state actors who have been rendering assistance to Mercury; documentation of which has been compiled and recently published by Joyce. I express immense horror at the knowledge that police snipers had been deployed to the premises of Vickreman Harvey Chettiar, a friend of Joyce, regarding 2 strongly-worded Instagram stories.

I now understand that the strong language used in those posts was as a result of deliberate drugging by Mercury and Christian far-right actors, in order to induce unprovoked anger and aggression in Harvey in the wake of the execution of Tanagaraju, whose case I understand is a matter of public contention.

Experimental work on building a low-cost Quantum Key Distribution set-up, as well as other experiments investigating the nature of the gravitational force have been put on hold while Joyce fends these malicious actors. I am aware that this situation has also hindered Joyce from developing her startup business.

Background

Mercury is a serial harasser who has targeted least 17 known victims, including Joyce. Over 50 police reports have been lodged and 4 applications for Protection Orders have been filed against Mercury; for which 3 Expedited Protection Orders have been granted. Mercury has also made a false police report in August 2021 alleging the commission of a terrorist act¹, using the name of another person in order to frame them.

To evade criminal liability, Mercury has approached Christian far-right/fundamentalist organizations and networks, under the pretext of being an "ex-transgender" person being persecuted by "LGBTQ militants" who wish to punish and "cancel" Mercury for de-transitioning. Mercury was subsequently provided with under the table monetary, advisory and legal support from these Christian far-right/fundamentalist networks.

Mercury, with the assistance of Christian far-right actors, is able to commit offenses and enact violence against their victims at an unprecedented scale. Some of these offenses include:

- Persistent harassment and stalking of victims
- Impersonation of law enforcement personnel and judicial officers, including attorneys
- Surreptitious recording and subsequent circulation of revenge pornography in public forums
- Technological surveillance and stalking of victims

Singaporean authorities are not prepared or equipped to deal with the magnitude and scale of the crimes. While the Singapore Police Force are conducting investigations against Mercury, they are expected to take many months to complete.

The Christian far-right considers Mercury a catalyst to destabilize and exert influence on the local government, as well as mobilize their very vocal, albeit minority base into pressuring the local government to concede to their demands, such as advancing anti-LGBTQ policy, opposing comprehensive sex education and imposing their ideological beliefs and way of life on broader society.

The Christian Far-Right Threat & Dominion Theology

In her letter to Singapore's Chief Prosecutor Tan Kiat Pheng, Carissa Cheow lists the following Singaporean churches and organizations² to be connected to Operation High Tide, aimed at taking over the People's Association in order to influence public policy and legislation:

- Focus On The Family, Singapore
- Cornerstone Community Church
- Church Of Our Saviour
- 3:16 Church
- Liberty League

Carissa also lists the following organizations and groups, based in the United States:

- Global Rainbow Crossers' Alliance
- The Witherspoon Institute
- CanaVox

An OpenDemocracy report³ published in October 2020 states that US Christian far-right groups have “spent at least \$280m in ‘dark money’ fuelling campaigns against the rights of women and LGBTIQ people across five continents” and “spent increasing amounts of money globally to influence foreign laws, policies and public opinion in order “to stir a backlash” against sexual and reproductive rights.”

Included in OpenDemocracy's dataset about US Christian far-right spending, Focus on the Family has spent almost \$5 million in Asia from 2008-2018.

A particular theological doctrine known as dominion theology, is described by Frederick Clarkson in his article ‘Dominionism Rising’ as a “theocratic idea that regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called conservative Christians to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions”.⁴

A movement within Dominion Theology known as “Seven Mountains Dominionism” encourages its adherents to take control of "seven pillars" of society, being government, business, education, religion, family, entertainment, and media which once secured, would trigger the “second coming of Christ”.

Belief in the imminent coming of Christ and the “end times” is associated with more extreme views, including opposition of existing social structures, legal norms and democratic systems of governance in order to impose a theocratic state.⁵

Dr Roland Chia, Theological and Research Advisor of the Ethos Institute for Public Christianity, states in “The Dangerous Distortions of Dominion Theology”⁶ that:

It is worth bearing in mind that when dominionists speak about influencing society and politics, they are not referring merely to ensuring that the

Christian voice is heard in the public square. Their project is much more ambitious – it’s nothing short of taking control of the government and institutions.

Indeed, we are seeing these extremist beliefs espoused by public figures and officials. One such figure is US House Representative Lauren Boebert, who has publicly stated⁷ that “churches should direct the government, not the other way around”.

In the Singapore context, I have learned that in 2009, there was an attempt at hostile takeover⁸ of AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research), a Singaporean non-governmental organization which focuses on women’s rights and advocates for gender equality; known colloquially as the AWARE Saga. I note that the then-new president Josie Lau, as well as 5 newly-elected executive committee members were attending at Church of Our Saviour, which is said to be connected with Operation High Tide.

In a paper titled “Who dragged Christianity into the AWARE Saga? Observations on the role of Christians, value pluralism and contestation in public discourse”⁸, Associate Professor Eugene Tan states:

For the new guard Exco, it would appear that wresting control of AWARE would enable it to moderate the apparent excesses and liberal inclinations of AWARE. That in itself would be an important moral victory and facilitate the right-sizing of AWARE to its supposed original purpose. Some Christians also saw society’s moral fibre and norms coming under siege through an increasingly morally lax society.

While ultimately, a vote of no-confidence was eventually passed, leading to the resignation of the then-new executive committee in favor of the ‘old guard’, the AWARE Saga is a prime example of the threat posed by far-right extremism.

Singapore’s Role in Scientific Research

According to a CBRE Research report released in 2021, Singapore “ranks among Top 5 APAC life science hubs”.⁹ Another survey conducted by KPMG ranks Singapore at the top of a “global ranking of leading technology innovation hubs outside of Silicon Valley/San Francisco”.¹⁰

Singapore’s reputation as a “reputable global financial hub” also reinforces its standing as a science and technology hub. I have also noticed with keen interest that in recent years, Singapore’s National Research Foundation (NRF) has announced a testbed initiative called the National Quantum-Safe Network¹¹, which I understand is focused on practical implementations of quantum cryptography, including Quantum Key Distribution networks.

According to a Straits Times article¹² published in 2013, while “Singapore has become more internationally renowned in the sciences since the 1990s”, about “half of A*Star’s (Agency for Science, Technology and Research) research scientists and engineers are Singaporeans, while the other half are foreigners”.

In order to maintain its standing as one of the top-ranking science and technology hubs in the world, good scientific education is required to train its next scientists, researchers and engineers. But what is science, and what are the goals of science?

The Purpose of Science & The Epistemology of Religious Fundamentalism

To quote astronomer and astrophysicist Carl Sagan:

Science is more than a body of knowledge, it’s a way of thinking. A way of skeptically interrogating the universe with a fine understanding of human fallibility. If we are not able to ask skeptical questions, to

interrogate those who tell us that something is true, to be skeptical of those in authority, then we're up for grabs for the next charlatan, political or religious, who comes ambling along.

The scientific method allows us to interrogate the physical world by making hypotheses, performing tests and observing if the data collected supports our understanding of the way the universe works. Science updates its understanding when presented with new data and evidence that challenges knowledge previously understood to be true. So why do we see a rise in right wing extremist and fundamentalist ideology?

The definition of fundamentalism can differ based on angle towards and treatment of the subject. I shall focus on fundamentalism when viewed from an epistemic lens with a particular emphasis on Christian Fundamentalism given the specific context of this discussion.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with knowledge, that is to say, "*What do we believe, how we justify those beliefs, and what beliefs do we know as truth?*"

The term 'fundamentalism' originates from a series of essays published between 1910-1915 titled 'The Fundamentals' which defends orthodox Protestant beliefs and specifies itself as 'a new statement of the fundamentals of Christianity'. Religious Fundamentalism can generally be described by a few beliefs:

1. There exists a fundamental, non-negotiable set of truths that must be believed;
2. That society and public policy be influenced based on these non-negotiable truths, and;
3. Policies and ideas that run contrary to those truths be vigorously opposed.

There are religious fundamentalists that disagree on which set of "truths" are fundamental and non-negotiable. Religious fundamentalism is thus defined less by the substantive content of its beliefs; rather, fundamentalism considers a certain set of beliefs to be absolute, final, complete, factually true and morally correct.¹³

Religious fundamentalists assume epistemic authority, which in turn is used to justify their claim to political and social authority, allowing them to impose their beliefs on all of society. Religious fundamentalists view it their mandate and duty to ensure that society is ordered according to such beliefs that they consider to be universal.

There exists a set of theorems in mathematical logic known as the Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems, which states that there are statements and axioms in mathematics which can neither be proved or disproved.

This fundamentally implies that there are limits to what we can know, and what we can set out as "truth". This is a basic principle of knowledge and inquiry, at the heart of science and research. Religious fundamentalism contradicts logic and the scientific method.

A neurophysiological study has found that "religious fundamentalism is associated with an increased N400 on error-related words compared with people who tolerate uncertainty well". N400 is a brain signal characterized by a negative-going deflection that peaks around 400 milliseconds post-stimulus onset. A higher N400 is associated with reactions to social and emotional conflict.¹⁴

This implies that uncertainty is perceived as conflict, which may explain fundamentalists' need for an absolute and non-negotiable set of "truths" and for said "truths" to be imposed on the rest of society.

Closing Remarks


I am deeply appalled and saddened to learn of the situation unfolding in Singapore, from the sheer number of crimes committed by Mercury, as well as the Christian far-right's attempt at influencing society and public policy. I am aware that three protests have taken place in Singapore, as well as one outside the Singapore High Commission in London about the matter. As Singapore has tight restrictions on protests and public assemblies, I am heartened to know that people are speaking out despite the legal risks.

The rise of religious fundamentalism and extreme right-wing ideology is a global threat which also threatens to undo scientific progress. Measles, for instance, was declared to be eradicated in the United States in the year 2000 due to the success of vaccination efforts; the recent surge in anti-vaccinationist misinformation has led to outbreaks of measles in New York City, Washington and other states in late 2018 and 2019.¹⁵ At the time of writing, 15 states grant vaccination exemptions for children if parents cite philosophical or moral beliefs.¹⁶

If extreme right-wing and fundamentalist ideology is allowed take hold in Singapore, it poses a threat to Singapore's status as a global science and technology hub and the scientific research being conducted on its shores. While I have no objection to any person having their own religious beliefs, nor do I wish to cause enmity among religious groups, I do believe that the religious beliefs of one group should not be allowed to influence the rest of society. I strongly urge Singapore authorities to give all necessary assistance and protection to Joyce and her friends, as well as look into the involvement of the Christian far-right in state institutions.

Sincerely,

Jason Kodish, BSc



Joyce Ng

JOYCE NG

Links to References:

1. <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/youth-charged-false-anthrax-attack-bedok-1907586>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/cari-to-AGC>
3. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed>
4. <https://politicalresearch.org/2016/08/18/dominionism-rising-a-theocratic-movement-hiding-in-plain-sight>
5. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/christian-far-right-extremism-theology-and-typology>
6. <https://ethosinstitute.sg/distortions-of-dominion-theology>
7. <https://www.denverpost.com/2022/06/27/lauren-boebert-church-state-colorado>
8. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ntg7c.7>
9. <https://www.cbre.com.sg/press-releases/occupier-and-investor-demand-for-asia-pacific-life-sciences-real-estate>
10. <https://kpmg.com/sg/en/home/media/press-releases/2021/07/singapore-tops-2021-ranking-for-leading-technology-innovation-hubs-kpmg-survey.html>
11. <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/tech-news/spore-creates-first-quantum-cryptography-testbed-gets-closer-to-building-an-unhackable-internet>
12. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/a-home-for-worlds-best-scientists>
13. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josp.12440>
14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00285>
15. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/anti-vaxxers-face-backlash-as-measles-cases-surge/2019/02/25/e2e986c6-391c-11e9-a06c-3ec8ed509d15_story.html
16. <https://www.ncsl.org/health/states-with-religious-and-philosophical-exemptions-from-school-immunization-requirements>