

9th December 2020

Dear Sarah, Michael, Vince, Abdu, Sanj, Tanya, Max, Mahlatse, and Amy,

I know it is very unusual for me to write to all of you in this way, but then these are very unusual times we find ourselves in. After much thought and prayer I have felt moved to write to you to share my perspective on the situation we are currently facing and the things I believe would need to happen in order for the wonderful work of this organisation to recover and flourish once again.

I am in a position where my future academic career doesn't depend on my remaining with this organisation, and so I feel I have an added obligation to share with you what's on my heart, and to do so in a way that might be more difficult for others who feel the same way but fear for their jobs (that others feel as I do but believe that expressing their concerns could lead to retaliation is, of course, part of the problem which I wish to raise with you). In that sense, this letter could be read as though it were written by an outsider who knows and loves this ministry deeply. Though I will occasionally refer to what others have experienced, everything in this letter is my own perspective and I take ownership of it all.

Before I go further, let me say that I know that this is a profoundly painful time for each of you. It has been incredibly painful for me, and I haven't known Ravi for decades as some of you have done. The things I am about to say are painful. They were difficult for me to write. But I hope that they are received as wounds from a friend.

The loss of trust

The first thing I felt I needed to write about is why, as it seems to me, a large amount of trust has been lost both internally and externally during the crises of the past three years.

The first time I became aware of the issues around Ravi's academic credentials was on the 22nd November 2016 as a result of receiving an email from Steve Baughman, not long after beginning my role at the OCCA. When I began looking into the credentials issues for myself, as an academic I was concerned by the apparent discrepancies between the true nature of Ravi's credentials and the way in which those credentials were being presented both by Ravi himself and by the ministry. In many ways, though, the thing that was more troubling to me than the problematic claims themselves was our slowness and reluctance to set the public record straight, which finally happened only after a great amount of external pressure was brought to bear on the issue in late 2017 — and even then our public statement on the matter on the 3rd December 2017 was defensive and devoid of taking sufficient responsibility for the misrepresentation on our part. This difficult reality has been a source of embarrassment for me as an academic, and has risked undermining my own credibility in certain academic circles, not least at Oxford University where I am a member of the Faculty of Philosophy.

Considerably more concerning, though, was our handling of the Thompson matter in 2017-18. If I could summarise why I think so much trust was lost over this, I would point to two things: the shifting narratives given to the team, and the withholding of troubling pieces of information. The narrative initially given to us in early August 2017 after the RICO lawsuit was filed was that of Ravi as the pure victim of an extortion attempt. This was the narrative which the senior leadership presented to us in an EMEA staff meeting on the 10th August 2017. We were told at that meeting that the Thompsons were experienced extortionists with a proven track record of such behaviour, and that Ravi had a strong case against them and had the backing of the RZIM board to pursue the Thompsons to the fullest extent through legal channels.

When I read Ravi's RICO lawsuit for myself shortly after this meeting there were aspects of the lawsuit that I found strange even then, such as the claim that Ravi had feared that Lori Anne may have been unstable and yet that he considered her a close friend with whom he wished to communicate via the highly secure medium of BlackBerry Messenger. When the settlement was announced to us in early November 2017 I was perplexed as to why Ravi would take this route if he was innocent. Ravi's explanation that a jury in a #MeToo era would be biased against him struck me as odd, given that his lawyers must have been aware of the #MeToo movement when they originally filed the RICO lawsuit.

This sense of puzzlement turned to serious anxiety when at the start of December 2017 there was a leak of the emails containing the now infamous exchange between Ravi and Lori Anne that had taken place on the 29th October 2016. As far as I could see Ravi must have known that a Canadian woman would interpret his claim that he would "bid this world goodbye" as a suicide threat intended to pressure her into not disclosing their entanglement to her husband. I was deeply reassured, however, when we were told by Michael in an EMEA all-staff update on the 4th December 2017 that both Mark DeMoss and the head of the governance committee of the U.S. board Bill Payne had read all of the correspondence between Ravi and Lori Anne, specifically including every BlackBerry message, and had declared Ravi to be totally innocent ("true blue" was the exact phrase Michael attributed to DeMoss). However, in the subsequent global Skype update on the 8th January 2018 it was made clear by Ravi himself that in fact the BBM correspondence — which according to Ravi's own RICO lawsuit was the medium via which the nude photos of Lori Anne were transmitted to Ravi — had been deleted in 2016 and could not be recovered. Michael also stated in the 4th December 2017 meeting that no money had changed hands between Ravi and the Thompsons. This too turned out to be incorrect.

The worry that there might be more going on than we were being let into was compounded when a further tranche of emails was leaked onto the web in early January 2018, emails in which Ravi had expressed to Lori Anne and Brad Thompson in late 2016 such sentiments as that "the blame is real and inescapable," "I promise to be a better man," that "like Pilgrim of old I felt the burden I had carried, roll down..." and that "I am always in your debt as a gift from God. What happened then will never happen again." Added to this, there were further shortcomings in what the team was told during official briefings as compared with information that I later learned outside of the context of official briefings.

During the global Skype update call with Ravi and Abdu from their hotel in Bangkok on the 8th January 2018, a number of important aspects of the situation were discussed with the intention of reassuring staff that there was a good explanation that favoured Ravi. Ravi specifically reassured us that he had not meant suicide when he told Lori Anne he would "bid this world goodbye," and Abdu backed him up, claiming that an Easterner would have meant it in terms of the death of his public honour. Ravi claimed, moreover, that he had been acting nobly to try to save the Thompsons' marriage, hence why Lori Anne's disclosure of Ravi's identity to her husband would constitute a "betrayal" in his mind. There was no mention at all in this meeting of any monetary settlement or any phone calls between Ravi and Lori Anne — details that I and others would very much have wanted to know about. I was told by a colleague on the 21st September 2018 that there had in fact been several lengthy phone calls between Ravi and Lori Anne from early to mid 2016, for which no explanation was forthcoming. And it wasn't until September 2020 that I learned of the \$250,000 that Ravi had paid the Thompsons as part of the settlement in November 2017.

Against this backdrop, the recent spa allegations and our handling of them has felt like strike three. I understand that prior to the *Christianity Today* article there wasn't a great deal to go on — just an email from Steve Baughman on the 25th August 2020 and a YouTube video from him on the 8th September. Even so, the public statement by the RZIM board on the 25th September declaring the allegations to be false and implicating the whole team in this message was hugely damaging both externally and internally. The publication of the *CT* article on the 29th September raised the allegations to a new level

of credibility because of the number of eyewitnesses, their identities and work histories having been verified by *CT*, the eyewitnesses' apparent lack of interest in money or fame, the corroboration of their stories by a named former manager of the spas in *World* magazine on the 1st October, and the fact that Ravi does appear to have been involved with the Touch of Eden and Jivan Wellness spas in a way that went far beyond being a mere customer.

I should say that I very much appreciated the first Zoom Q&A meeting with Michael and Sarah on the 6th October, and the way in which they affirmed our freedom of conscience and sensitively acknowledged the concerns of the team. I only wish that this posture had been more consistently present in the communications from the senior team. During a subsequent Zoom Q&A call on the 21st October, Michael began by talking at length about the smear campaign against Paul in Acts 17, and I don't think it was uncharitable to interpret this as a tacit suggestion that the allegations against Ravi were of a similar nature. Michael then explicitly described the allegations as "hearsay" — even "double hearsay" — and both Michael and Abdu made comments that gave the impression that the fact that our investigators at that time were having difficulty finding the anonymous spa witnesses meant that those witnesses were not credible, or perhaps didn't exist at all. Michael said that the investigators had described the situation as akin to "chasing ghosts." In response to the legitimate concern of a staff member for the investigators' report to be released in full to the public, Abdu appealed to the issue of attorney-client privilege in a way that evaded this very important question.

During a phone call with me on the 30th October, Michael stated that the investigators believed some of the witnesses were being coached in what to say by Steve Baughman, and that the investigators were saying that Ravi evidently had a lot of integrity. I had the opportunity to talk with the lead investigator Lynsey Barron on the 2nd November and I asked her about this and other things. She was clear that whilst there had been some challenges around interviewing Anurag Sharma, it had never been her view that witnesses were being coached or that the women's anonymity meant that they weren't credible. She also said that she had no recollection whatsoever of saying that Ravi had a lot of integrity, and she emphasised that that would have been a very odd thing for her to say. I don't believe that there was necessarily a deliberate deception on Michael's part here, perhaps wishful confusion or getting the wrong end of the stick, but it was disconcerting, nonetheless.

What's more, despite the affirmation in the 6th October Zoom Q&A of our freedom of conscience, there have continued to be many instances of team members being leaned on by their superiors for expressing doubts or asking difficult questions. For example, there are several independent reports that Abdu has put pressure on team members who openly question Ravi's innocence.

There was a detail from the 6th October Zoom Q&A call which is also somewhat concerning. Michael and Sarah stated in that meeting that a second law firm was being brought in to work alongside the original law firm so as to bolster and speed up the investigation process. However, it was clear when I spoke to Lynsey Barron on the 2nd November that her team was not collaborating with any other law firm at that time. This suggests that the first law firm, Watson Spence, had in fact been abandoned altogether in favour of Miller & Martin — perhaps because of the belated realisation that Watson Spence would be rightly viewed by the public as a bad choice of law firm given that Lucas Andrews, who worked on Ravi's RICO lawsuit, is an attorney at that firm.

One final point worth recalling, again from the 6th October Zoom Q&A call, was the response of Abdu to a sincere concern by a staff member about why we had made a public statement printed in *CT* on the 3rd December 2017 in which Ravi asserted that "I have long made it my practice not to be alone with a woman other than Margie and our daughters — not in a car, a restaurant, or anywhere else." It was pointed out by the member of staff that we know that statement not to have been strictly true, in that Ravi had massages in a room alone with a woman on many occasions. Rather than acknowledge

any problem with the statement, Abdu claimed that the fact that it hadn't even occurred to Ravi to include back massages within the scope of the claim spoke to Ravi's sincerity of mind.

Many more such examples could be given, but the above is a representative sampling. In sum, the pattern here seems to be one of seeking above all to reinforce belief in Ravi's innocence rather than seeking the truth come what may. In the light of all this, here are some of my thoughts about what rebuilding trust both internally and externally would need to involve. These are things without which I would sadly need to leave my role in the organisation.

A step that has been mooted by the senior team in the Zoom Q&A calls is the rebranding of the organisation. This would be an essential step to take. But I believe that the eyes of the world are now upon us, waiting to see whether we will not merely rebrand but repent. I could summarise my thoughts about repentance under four headings upon which I shall elaborate, namely: (1) wholehearted apology, (2) full accountability, (3) meaningful reparations, and (4) cultural overhaul.

Wholehearted apology

I believe that there will need to be a wholehearted public apology for a number of things, not least an apology to the spa women if the investigation should confirm that there is substance to the spa allegations.

I believe there will also need to be an apology to the Thompsons for the way that the ministry has unjustly portrayed them as extortionists, despite the lack of evidence to support the claim that they were deliberately trying to entrap Ravi. The publicly available evidence shows that the pastor whom Brad previously sued, Jim Visser, really did have a track record of offering very misleading financial advice to members of his congregation. Moreover, the counsellors with whom Lori Anne was staying on the 29th October 2016, Jerry and Denise Basel, are able to corroborate her sincere and distraught state of mind when she emailed Ravi on that date.

I believe there will need to be an apology to critics without and concerned team members within for the valid concerns they raised which were ignored, as well as for the way some of these critics were misrepresented, undermined, and even ridiculed. That isn't to say that everything the critics have ever said about us has been factually correct; but it is to say that they were right to be concerned about many matters of substance and that we should have listened to them far earlier than we did.

And above all, I believe there will need to be an apology for our corporate complicity in failing to hold Ravi to account.

Full accountability

Sadly it seems that this ministry has gained a reputation for non-transparency, and not without reason. First let me say that I have been very encouraged by the credibility of the investigative team led by Lynsey Barron and am confident in their ability to get to the truth. I'm encouraged to hear that the report that will be released to the public will be the same as the report seen by the special sub-committee of the board. All of this is a very important step towards restoring trust. An issue that is currently unclear is whether the Thompson matter falls within the scope of the investigation. Including it does seem absolutely essential for bringing clarity and closure. Without it the report will be seriously incomplete.

Another matter that has contributed to our reputation for non-transparency is the anonymity of our U.S. Board of Directors. I do understand some of the reasons why the board desired anonymity, but overall I fear that this anonymity has had serious undesirable consequences in terms of the inability of

our supporters, ministry partners, and the wider public to hold us fully accountable for our governance. Therefore I believe that the only way for trust to be rebuilt in this area is for the board to begin filing IRS Form 990s and thereby cease to be anonymous.

A matter which I understand is not under the direct control of the ministry but is nonetheless a very serious impediment to full accountability is the Non-Disclosure Agreement between the Zacharias Estate and the Thompsons. There is a strong feeling among many of the speakers, one which I wholly share, that our association with this NDA puts a serious dent in our public credibility. I believe it is absolutely essential that, one way or another, this association between the ministry and the NDA is completely severed. I would add that the NDA is now pointless anyway for two reasons: (i) both parties have broken it; (ii) the material contained within the NDA is not likely to be worse for Ravi than the material that will anyway be contained in the forthcoming report by Miller & Martin. I understand that the decision about whether to lift the NDA belongs to the Zacharias family, but I believe that the ministry should publicly call for its lifting.

Meaningful reparations

If the forthcoming report should confirm the credibility of the spa allegations, then I believe that it will be incumbent upon us to provide some form of meaningful reparations to the women involved. This is particularly so if there should be any suggestion in the report that the spas situation is the tip of a larger iceberg. It seems to me that a fitting step would be to engage a victims' support organisation who can put out a call for further potential victims and offer them whatever services they need.

Cultural overhaul

Finally, I believe that a period of intense soul searching will be needed, one in which we ask ourselves what it is about our corporate culture that may well have allowed such things to have occurred in our midst. I think that we already see the outlines of some of the answers to this, in terms of the way that Ravi has been placed on a pedestal that no person besides Jesus Christ is fit to occupy, and the way in which unbridled loyalty and reputation management have too often been allowed to take precedence over truth and transparency. If there is even the faintest hint of a self-preservation or damage control mentality in our response to all of this, not only will that be wholly futile but it will prolong the agony we are enduring. Drastic and deeply humbling steps will be required in order to demonstrate to the world that we are serious about rebuilding our institutional culture from the ground up.

In closing, let me say that although we find ourselves in what looks like a wretched situation, I believe that the God whom we worship is able to bring healing, restoration, and even flourishing out of this extraordinarily painful experience. The reality is that Ravi's reputation is in tatters; but his legacy — this team — need not be. I believe that this ministry actually stands before an incredible opportunity to demonstrate to the world the power of the cross. If we choose to act justly and do the right things, we could become known as the gold standard for how to recover from a tragic situation such as this and move forward in a way that beautifully demonstrates the faith we commend.

Thank you for taking the time to read my perspective. I am praying for each of you daily.

In Christ,
Max Baker-Hytch