

July 5, 1985

Dear Attreya Rishi Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories unto Srila Prabhupada.

I would like to make some comments about your recent questionnaire concerning Srila Prabhupada's style of management that was distributed during the Temple Presidents' meeting at the end of June. I became very enlivened when Kuladri Prabhu showed me your paper.

In the cover letter you note two distinct management concepts which exist within our society. You suggest that these two concepts, "as presently implemented, appear to be in opposition to one another." I feel that your characterization and conclusion nicely summarizes the major problem which exists within our society today. I would like to add to this discussion by speaking at little about the historical nature of the problem.

The difficult affairs which exist at the present time within our society center around authority and organization. May I suggest that there are very clear historical reasons why our society is experiencing these problems. There are indeed no easy solutions to the immediate problems, but an increased awareness of the historical nature of the problem will hopefully promote a better solution. Recent studies into the life of Bhaktivinoda Thakura give a hint concerning the nature of these current problems within ISKCON.

You describe two organizational models that are currently in debate within our society. The first organization is standard corporate management which is a highly institutionalized and disciplined organizational form. Corporate organizations are very powerful because they unify resources and promote specialization. This form of organization, being highly ingrained in the Western mind is presently an integral part of Western culture. The military, financial, industrial, educational and religious organizations which are the corner stones of Western civilization are examples of corporate organizations.

The other form of organization which you have described is non-corporate management, which is an individual-based system as opposed to an institutional-based system. Non-corporate organizations consist of small autonomous groups linked together by a common value or resource system.

In Western culture the traditional family unit, entrepreneurial business and traditional agriculture are examples of non-corporate structures. Both forms of organization have their strengths and weaknesses. Corporate management is very powerful, but tends to stifle individual creativity. Non-corporate management put emphasis upon individual development but lacks quick directive power.

Let us now look specifically at religious management. It is obvious that Judeo-Christian religious organizations are corporate organizations. The concept of "Church" is corporate, the Roman Catholic Church being the best example. Vedic culture has no such entity as a "Church". Can anyone point to the Hindu Church in the same way that we easily refer to the Roman Catholic Church? Can we even point to the Vaisnava Church? No, in Vedic culture, religious knowledge is held in schools of thought (sampradayas), not in institutions. Emanating from the various sampradayas are religious teachers (gurus) who preach and minister to groups of followers. The collective body of these autonomist leaders along with their followers comprises the sampradaya. In no place is there any central organization controlling the flow of resources. The reason why general Vedic culture and Vedic religious culture in particular is non-corporate, I submit, is due to the nature of the varnashrama system. The division of the society into varnas and ashramas promotes the development of decentralized social and economic units.

We therefore conclude that Vedic religious organization is non-corporate in nature. When we say that any given religious culture is non-corporate the point to note is that the internal dynamics of the tradition are adjusted to a particular format. This is significant because one cannot assume that a particular religious tradition which is intrinsically non-corporate, when placed into a corporate setting, will behave in the same manner as a religious tradition which is corporate by nature.

I am of course referring to our own Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition. Do we realise that Gaudiya Vaisnavism originally is a product of Vedic religious culture, which is to say, its internal dynamics are non-corporate. Gaudiya Vaisnavism has only recently assumed a corporate nature due to the mercy of Thakura Bhaktivinoda.

Thakura Bhaktivinoda is an extremely important personality within our tradition because his influence directly relates to the controversy that we are facing today in our society. We often hear the word revivalist used to describe Thakura Bhaktivinoda. In one sense, what this term means is that Bhaktivinoda took Vedic non-corporate religious structure and adjusted it in such a way that it could fit into a corporate mould. In other words he

revived the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition by fusing it to Western corporate structure. The corporate model was of course necessary for Gaudiya Vaisnavism to become presentable in the West.

Thakura Bhaktivinoda himself stands as a trans-cultural figure. His roots were of course Indian, but his education and career were Western. Gaudiya Vaisnavism coming in the line from Bhaktivinoda Thakura contains a mixture of both Vedic and Western dynamic structure. When we understand this point, then we can understand why our movement seems to legitimately find expression in both the corporate and non-corporate forms of management. Both forms are a part of our heritage.

The institution of G.B.C. represents corporate organization, whereas the position of the Guru represents non-corporate structure. The real question then is, "Did Srila Prabhupada intend that ISKCON become a full-fledged western corporate organization or did he intend that it operate as a traditional Vedic non-corporate organization; or did he intend that the two forms co-exist?" If the G.B.C. becomes the sole authority within our society, ISKCON may become a Gaudiya Vaisnava Church and the position of the guru will become a type of figure head. If the guru becomes the prime authority within our society then the G.B.C. may cease to exist because it will cease to have any relevance.

At this point I will end my discussion. I do not know how Srila Prabhupada intended this movement to develop. There are devotees far more qualified than myself to answer this question. If I have provided even a little insight in this matter then I feel I have done my duty. I thank you very much for your time and trouble. Hare Krsna.

Your servant,

Shukavak dasa