

Appendix A

THE MANIFESTATION OF A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA AS SWAMI, GURU AND AVATAR

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This paper is concerned with the precise mode of Swami Bhaktivedanta's "avatārhood," or, to phrase it differently, how the swami manifests God. In my estimation, the history of ISKCON in America reveals a three-stage development corresponding to three roles played by the swami.

The beginning period (1966–1967) is characterized by Swami Bhaktivedanta in the role of "swami," that is, "one who is in control of his senses" and his conversion of "freaks" from drugs to Krishna Consciousness. A second period, the organizational (1968–1970), is best understood in terms of Swami Bhaktivedanta's role as "guru" (spiritual teacher) and his training of novice-devotees in Krishna Consciousness. Finally, the missionary period, beginning in 1970, witnesses the spiritual master in the role of "avatār" (God with us) commissioning the full-fledged devotees, now "swamis" themselves, to preach Krishna Consciousness throughout the world. This growth of the spiritual master from "swami" (individual role) to "guru" (social role) to "avatār" (cosmic role) represents

successive stages of revelatory perfection. In the final stage (avatār), the spiritual master is seen as the perfect revealer, the “transparent via medium,” of God (Krishna) on earth. This view of Swami Bhaktivedanta’s life and mission as the progressive manifestation of Krishna is not unique in the Gauḍīya–Vaishnava tradition. Rather, evidence suggests that this model has been paradigmatic for the spiritual masters of the sect since Caitanya, the fifteenth century founder of the movement in Bengal.

Swami Bhaktivedanta (ne Abhay Charan De) was born of a middle class Vaishnava family in Calcutta on September 1, 1896.¹ As an undergraduate at the University of Calcutta, De became an ardent nationalist and follower of Gandhi. Upon graduation, he married and took a position with a chemical company in Calcutta. In 1933, De became an initiated disciple of Swami Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, whose father, Swami Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, was the founder of a modern sect of Bengal Vaishnava–Krishna worshippers inspired by the fifteenth century Bengali saint, Caitanya.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, shortly before his death in 1936, is said to have commissioned De to propagate the teachings of Krishna Consciousness in English and De took a vow to that effect. He began to fulfill his vow in 1944 with the publication of an English language newspaper, called Back to Godhead which he wrote, edited and published himself. When he began to hold devotional meetings at home his wife objected. Further, his wife refused to allow their children to be instructed in Vaishnavism. De’s domestic difficulties were compounded by unavoidable business reverses “and so, in 1959, Śrīla Prabhupāda (an honorific of Swami Bhaktivedanta) took ‘sannyāsa’ and left home, assuming the name ‘Swami Bhaktivedanta.’”² For more than five years, Swami Bhaktivedanta lived and worked alone at the Rādhā–Dāmodara temple in Vṛndāvana. Then, in 1965, he arrived in America as the guest of an Indian friend in Butler, Pennsylvania. By September of the same year, he was in New York chanting the Krishna mantra in Thomkins Square Park.

The semi-official biographies of Swami Bhaktivedanta emphasize that the swami's vow to spread Krishna Consciousness in the English-speaking countries of the West is the pivotal event of his life. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, it is claimed, was referring to Swami Bhaktivedanta when, in 1896, he predicted that "a personality will soon appear to preach the teachings of Lord Caitanya and move unrestrictedly over the whole world with his message."³ Although Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī founded sixty-four Gauḍīya Maṭhas (Caitanya-Vaishnava centers) throughout the world, the one who best fulfills Bhaktivinoda's prophecy, we are told, is Swami Bhaktivedanta. With the death of Bhaktisiddhānta:

"The stage had now been set for that great personage who would actually fulfill the prophecy of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura by expanding the vigorous initial efforts of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and boldly preaching the teachings of Lord Caitanya all over the world."⁴

The Krishna Consciousness movement itself is seen as the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Caitanya "that the chanting of the holy names of God, Hare Krishna, would be carried to every town and village of the world."⁵

THE BEGINNING PERIOD (1966-1967)

The first two years of the Krishna Consciousness movement in America saw Swami Bhaktivedanta functioning in the composite role of missionary-parent-therapist-friend-swami to a score of young Americans disillusioned with "the system" and searching for ultimate experience via drugs. The early devotees' impression of the swami as "ācārya" that is "one who teaches by example" and their subsequent conversion from drugs to Krishna Consciousness is the most significant fact of this period. The elements of the conversion process were invariably the same: (1) an intimate and personal encounter with the swami; (2) the recognition of Bhaktivedanta as "swami-ācārya," that is, as one whose life reflected purpose, peace, self-discipline and truth; and (3) gradual attachment to the

swami and his mission with coincidental detachment from drugs and previous life styles.

The first issue of the American version of Back To Godhead, the movement's magazine, dated October 23, November 6, 1966, reveals the early community as a close-knit family haunted by the spectre of drugs yet struggling to realize a new identity and discover new purpose. Swami Bhaktivedanta is referred to as "A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami" or more affectionately as "swamiji." Krishna Consciousness is presented as a cure for drug addiction as well as the only true "high." The swami recommends thinking of Krishna whenever the mind tempts one to take LSD.⁶ And Hayagrīva dās (ne Howard Wheeler), a devotee and co-editor, explains salvation in terms analogous to the drug experience:

"That final flip has been called liberation by the Hindus, nirvana by the Buddhists, and salvation by the Christians. Though concepts differ as to what the flip is to, the end result seems pretty much the same. There's no return. Or, to use the language of the American LSD 'hippies': 'no more bring-downs.'"⁷

And the simplest way to "flip out without coming down," continues Hayagrīva dās, "is the recitation of the Krishna mantra."⁸

The background and conversion experience of Hayagrīva dās himself illustrates the passage from an aimless life of drugs to a disciplined religious life in Krishna Consciousness. Swami Bhaktivedanta, in his role as "swami-ācārya," is the medium and catalyst. Hayagrīva dās describes his life prior to meeting the swami as follows:

"For the past two or three years, like so many downtown New Yorkers in their twenties, we had been reading books on Eastern philosophy and religion, burning lots of candles and incense and taking ganja, peyote and LSD as aids to meditation. Actually it was more intoxication than meditation; meditation was a euphemism that somehow connected our highs with our readings."⁹

By August of that first year (1966), Hayagrīva dās and some ten other men, including his friend and roommate Kirtanānanda dās (ne Keith Ham), were attending early morning classes at a storefront which the swami had rented on Second Avenue. “None of us had ever gotten up before ten or eleven in the morning,” confesses Hayagrīva dās, “but the magnetism of Śrīla Prabhupāda drew us out of our dark Mott street dens at 6:30.” Hayagrīva dās further relates how, at that early hour, he would walk briskly to the storefront “chanting Hare Krishna and feeling better than ever.”¹⁰ His conversion from drugs, he recalls, took place after a typical evening meeting:

“After the last kirtana (chant), I went up to Śrīla Prabhupāda and began to question him. ‘Have you heard of LSD?’ I asked. ‘No,’ he said.

“‘It’s a psychedelic drug that comes like a pill, and if you take it you can get religious ecstasies. Do you think that that can help my spiritual life?’

“‘You don’t need to take anything for your spiritual life,’ he told me. ‘Your spiritual life is already here.’ I agreed with him immediately.”¹¹

Swami Bhaktivedanta was the perfect therapist. He never rebuked his charges and seemed to have an infinite store of patience. He also functioned as surrogate parent, friend and confidant. Hayagrīva dās recalls that in the beginning: “he (Swami Bhaktivedanta) was a sage, grandfather, spiritual master and favorite uncle all rolled into one.”¹²

It was largely due to Swami Bhaktivedanta’s example, and sense of mission, we are told, that the early devotees were gradually weaned from drugs. Hayagrīva dās claims that for a good part of that first year:

“There were some of us who were still walking around in a marijuana stupor, but he (Śrīla Prabhupāda) had a way of snapping us out of this quickly without ever chastising us. Somehow or other he whipped us into shape without our ever knowing it ... It wasn’t that he simply took away our sex and drugs. This would not have been possible.

Rather, he engaged us in something sublime ... he exhorted us to go out and spread the message of Krishna Consciousness."¹³

NEW VṚNDĀVANA: THE ORGANIZATIONAL PERIOD (1968-1970)

In August, 1968, the Krishna Consciousness movement purchased one hundred and thirty-three acres of farm and woodland near Wheeling, West Virginia and founded New Vṛndāvana.¹⁴ In my view, the creation of New Vṛndāvana is a turning point in the movement's history because it symbolizes the development from an informal, storefront commune to a disciplined, formal, Vaishnava-Gauḍīya Maṭha monastic community.

The beginning period (1966-1968) witnessed individual conversions of freaks in a loosely structured community. Swami Bhaktivedanta was a patient, often indulgent father to sincere but confused converts who readily identified Krishna with Christ and spoke of Vasudeva and Walt Whitman in the same breath.¹⁵ By contrast, the period from 1968 to 1970 saw the transformation from a 'walk-in,' storefront commune to a 'live-in,' Vaishnava temple-monastery with its monastic discipline, Vaishnava ritual, Krishna mythology and certain Bengal cultural mores of food, dress, etc. The freak convert of the earlier period became the novice-devotee. No longer was Swami Bhaktivedanta addressed familiarly as "swamiji." He now assumed the honorific "Śrīla Prabhupāda" reflecting his new, formal role as "guru." Other indications of this process of Indianization included the exclusive use of assumed names as well as Sanskritization.

In my view, this development from storefront to "maṭha" was foreshadowed as early as 1966 in an incident described by Hayagrīva dās. He and several others decided to decorate the storefront on Second Avenue with paintings, rugs and silks he had brought back from India. The decorations included an elevated dais for Swami Bhaktivedanta. Hayagrīva dās describes the sequel as follows:

“That night, when Śrīla Prabhupāda walked in to begin kīrtan, he looked at the newly decorated temple and showed surprise. ‘Ah, you are advancing,’ he said. ‘This is very nice. This is Krishna Consciousness.’ ”

“He then sat up on the dais ... Some of the hypercritical took exception to the dais, to the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda was elevated and some others, being reminded of the Catholic or some other organized church, resented the temple decorations ... These fears were dispelled, however, at ‘kīrtana’ when Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us how to dance.”¹⁶

This incident marked Swami Bhaktivedanta’s elevation from “swami-ācārya” (father and friend) to “guru” and spiritual master. The swami was being elevated above others and some objected. However, the objections ceased once the swami began to function in the formal role of guru, spiritual master and teacher by instructing in the ritual dance.¹⁷

This transformation of the movement at this time is best seen in the swami’s vision of New Vṛndāvana as a model, self-sufficient, “transcendental” community where devotees could live completely divorced from any contact with corruptive, materialistic American society as a whole. Swami Bhaktivedanta described New Vṛndāvana as “the first community in the West dedicated to Krishna consciousness living” and envisioned the emergence of a new people:

“There will be a new growth of superior population. They will not be like cats and dogs, but will actually be demigods. ‘Demigod’ means devotee of Kṛṣṇa, that’s all. And ‘asura’ (demon) means non-devotee ... This demonic civilization is actually killing the human race ... So one of the major advantages of the New Vrindaban is that it is out of contact with the asuric civilization.”¹⁸

Separation from the “asuric” civilization even extended to a prohibition against taking outside jobs as well as employing modern, industrial machinery. “The Vrindaban conception,” explained the swami, “is that of a transcendental village, without any of the botheration of the modern industrial atmosphere.”¹⁹

New Vṛndāvana would be “transcendental” in that it would be a recreation of the Vedic village where Krishna sported with the “gopis” (milkmaid companions of Krishna) five thousand years ago. It would be “a replica of Vrindaban.” People in the bona fide divisions of society, namely “brahmacārīs” (celibate students), “gṛhasthas” (householders), “vānaprasthas” (the retired) and “sannyāsīs” (renounced holy men), “will live independently, completely depending on agricultural produce and milk from the cows.”²⁰ One of the objectives of New Vṛndāvana would be the protection of the cow “primarily as a symbol of man’s yearning for God.”²¹ In the new Vedic community work roles would be assigned according to traditional Vedic injunctions. “The women’s business,” we are told, “will be to take care of the children, to cook, to clean and to churn butter, and, for those who have the knowledge, to help in typing.”²²

More importantly, New Vṛndāvana would stand as a model to the outside world of the true nature of human civilization:

“In New Vrindaban we should live in such an ideal way that people will learn what life and what human civilization actually are.”²³

The role of Swami Bhaktivedanta in the new society is clearly stated in the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Handbook of 1970. Swami Bhaktivedanta is spiritual master and “guru”:

“As spiritual master, Bhaktivedanta Swami is the last recourse and the ultimate standard of Kṛṣṇa consciousness ... He himself resides in no one place, but travels from center to center and regularly lectures. The spiritual master is responsible for his devotees ... his order is to be taken as one’s life and soul ... therefore honor the spiritual master with the honor due to God because the ‘guru’ is the transparent *via media* (sic) or representative of God.”²⁴

Here and throughout the literature of this period, Swami Bhaktivedanta is viewed within the context of the guru–disciple relationship.

New Vṛndāvana, the “guru” role of Swami Bhaktivedanta, the disciple role of the ISKCON devotee—all suggested a novitiate in which the movement sought to train its membership and formalize its discipline in preparation for the world mission. Not surprisingly the 1970 Handbook, in its introduction, emphasizes the training of the membership as its primary goal:

“The goal of the society’s members is to attain love of God by following the principles of bhakti-yoga ... and to spread love of God to all people.”

THE MISSIONARY PERIOD (1971 to present)

Since 1971, the ISKCON movement has gradually moved away from the isolationist position symbolized by New Vṛndāvana to one of engagement and confrontation with the traditional values of American society. Far from replacing the “asuric civilization,” there is a growing tendency to work “within the system.” The world view which characterized the New Vṛndāvana state—namely, the separation of the elect from the larger, demonic culture which, in this age of “Quarrel,” is doomed to destruction—is now seen in tension with a more optimistic view of society’s chances. The new view suggests the possibility of “peace and prosperity of the whole world society should all men become Krishna Conscious.”²⁵ This ideological change is evidenced by certain tensions between the New Vṛndāvana community on the one hand and the city temples on the other.²⁶ In the more recent literature of ISKCON New Vṛndāvana is no longer referred to as the transcendental, Vedic model of an entire civilization but rather more modestly as “the Hare Krishna movement’s model agricultural community established to show that one can live with simply a cow and some land.”²⁷

The focus has now shifted to the city temples which of late have become increasingly involved with the social, political and economic concerns of the society at large. Significantly, the present period has witnessed the development

within ISKCON of specific social programs and business ventures²⁸ as well as a political party.²⁹ Additional indications of such involvement have been the tendency within ISKCON to employ given as well as assumed names, the demythologization of sacred language in favor of current, socio-political rhetoric and most recently the doffing of tradition Indian garb in favor of modern Western dress.

In my view, the changing role of Swami Bhaktivedanta reflects these changes in the movement. As ISKCON has become more cosmopolitan, the role of Swami Bhaktivedanta has expanded to cosmic proportions. No longer is Swami Bhaktivedanta simply another “guru” with a mission restricted to the “English-speaking world.” He is now revealed as “avatār,” that is, as the sole, perfect manifestation of God (Krishna) for our world.

The full manifestation of the swami as “avatār” was presaged as early as 1966 by an incident that took place at a morning lecture. When someone asked Swami Bhaktivedanta about the significance of initiation, the swami answered: “Initiation means you accept a spiritual master and agree to worship him as God.” Hayagrīva dās recalls the devotees’ reaction:

“There was a stunned, thoughtful silence. Śrīla Prabhupāda sat very still ... awaiting further questions. When there were none, he got up and walked out. After he was gone, I turned to Wally. Everyone suddenly started talking at once. Wally shook his head. ‘My mind’s just been blown,’ he said.”³⁰

Later Hayagrīva dās and Wally pursued the matter with the swami:

“‘Does that mean you’re supposed to recognize the spiritual master as God?’ I asked.

“‘That means he is due all the respect of God, being God’s representative,’ he said calmly and simply.

“‘Then he’s not God.’

“‘No,’ he said, ‘God is God. The spiritual master is His representative. As such, he is as good as God because he can deliver God to the sincere disciple.’”³¹

The hesitancy among the 1966 devotees to confess the swami as God stands in sharp contrast to recent unequivocal assertions such as the following:

“We are preaching slavery, divine slavery. Every country of the world has a scheme for enjoyment—communism, socialism, democracy or whatever—but they are all trying to have enjoyment independent of the Supreme Lord. We are preaching that slavery is much more blissful than a false sense of independence. What the ‘guru’ says, we do. But he is perfect. To be a slave of perfection—that is ecstatic life.”³²

In explaining precisely how the swami can be “as good as God” and yet “not god,” ISKCON literature employs the technical term “transparent via medium.” The concept of “transparent via medium” does not mean that the swami is “avatār” understood as a personal incarnation or manifestation of Krishna himself, such as Caitanya was. But, as the swami explains, other forms of manifestation are possible:

“Sometimes he (Krishna) descends personally, and sometimes He sends his bona fide representative in the form of His son, or servant, or Himself in some disguised form.”³³

According to Krishna Consciousness belief, Swami Bhaktivedanta is “avatār” understood as Krishna’s one and only, bona fide representative for our world, “the transparent via medium between the infinite God and the finite soul” with a world mission to arouse Kṛṣṇa Consciousness everywhere.”³⁴

In my view, the term “transparent via medium” reflects the swami’s progressional manifestation in three stages: (1) “medium” indicates the initial “swami” stage of Bhaktivedanta as “sannyasin” and as one in control of his senses; (2) “via” refers to the “guru” stage of the swami as teacher; and (3) “transparent” reflects the present, “avatār” status of the swami as a manifestation of God.

Firstly, the swami mediates God because he has achieved such perfect control of his senses that he is pure “spirit soul” no longer a separate self but rather “part and parcel of the Supreme Person, Kṛṣṇa”³⁵

Secondly, the swami's role as "guru" which is expressed by the term "via" in the formula, indicates a deeper level of manifestation. Swami Bhaktivedanta is not one divine medium among many. He is not simply another guru. He is the guru for our time and as such, the only genuine teacher of God's revelation for our world.³⁶ Swami Bhaktivedanta is the modern teacher of the salvific message revealed by the original guru, Krishna, and faithfully passed down by disciplic succession (guru-paramparā). In effect, there is but one guru, Krishna, and a disciplic line of faithful transmitters, the present transmitter being Swami Bhaktivedanta.³⁷ While Krishna speaks directly through the scriptures (e.g. the Bhagavad-gītā) such teaching can be correctly interpreted only by Swami Bhaktivedanta as the modern disciplic successor.³⁸ Nor is it possible to speak directly to Krishna. "The process," explains the swami, "is that we first surrender to Kṛṣṇa's representative; then we surrender to Kṛṣṇa."³⁹ In effect, there is no salvation for the present generation outside of surrender to Swami Bhaktivedanta as teacher and revealer of Krishna's salvific word. "Surrender" involves an initiation rite in which the disciple vows to obey the orders of the swami.⁴⁰ "There is no difference," explains the swami, "between Kṛṣṇa's instruction and our instruction."⁴¹

But it is imprecise and possibly misleading to speak of "surrender to Swami Bhaktivedanta," for, in the last analysis, one does not surrender to the swami but rather one surrenders to Krishna through the swami. This, I believe, is the import of the term "transparent." In ISKCON belief, Swami Bhaktivedanta is no longer "Swami Bhaktivedanta," an individual entity, but rather, "Prabhupāda," that is, "he who has taken the position of the Lord."⁴² He is a transparency, an instrument, a pure medium. He himself no longer lives but Krishna lives through him. Hence, for the ISKCON devotee, to see Swami Bhaktivedanta is to see Krishna; to hear Swami Bhaktivedanta is to hear Krishna; to please Swami Bhaktivedanta is to please Krishna and to

worship Swami Bhaktivedanta is to worship God.⁴³ In short, “the disciple should accept the spiritual master as God because he is the external manifestation of Kṛṣṇa.”⁴⁴

Thus, the concept of “transparent via medium” defines precisely the mode of Swami Bhaktivedanta’s avatārhood. While NOT the fullness of divinity, he is the only medium of God’s presence and the only source of God’s salvific grace for our world. Swami Bhaktivedanta may not be God but he is the only way to God and as such, “as good as God.”

In sum, this paper has attempted to show the following: (1) that the history of ISKCON in America suggests three stages of development corresponding to three roles played by its founder, Swami Bhaktivedanta, namely, those of “swami,” “guru,” and “avatār”; (2) that these three roles represent a growth process of divine manifestation the mode of which is defined by the term “transparent via medium”; and (3) the term “transparent via medium” means that, although Swami Bhaktivedanta is not God Himself, he is “as good as God” since God chooses to reveal Himself to our world solely through the person and teaching of Swami Bhaktivedanta.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ To date there is no official biography of Swami Bhaktivedanta. The present material has been taken from the semi-official biography in Teachings of Lord Caitanya by Swami Bhaktivedanta, New York: ISKCON Press, 1968, p. xiii, as well as numerous issues of Back To Godhead, the movement’s magazine.

² Back To Godhead, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 11. The name “Bhaktivedanta” means “Perfection of Devotion.” The swami’s disciples refer to him as “Śrīla Prabhupāda,” “Śrīla” meaning “Lord” and “Prabhupāda” meaning “one at whose feet many masters sit” an honorific conferred on the swami by his early disciples (cf. Back To Godhead, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 13)

³ *Ibid.*, No. 68, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 9–10.

⁵ Ibid., No. 29, p. 1.

⁶ Ibid., No. 1, p. 8.

⁷ Ibid., No. 1, p. 19.

⁸ Ibid., No. 1, p. 26. Elsewhere it is explained that “by chanting and by engagement in the service of Krishna, anyone who takes part will experience the state of ‘Samadhi,’ ecstatic absorption in God consciousness, 24 hours a day!” (Ibid., No. 29, p. 1)

⁹ “Ibid., No. 46, p. 14. A similar background is recorded by another early devotee, Satsvarūpa dās: “I graduated from Brooklyn College in 1961, spent two years on an aircraft carrier in the Navy, and subsequently returned to the New York City’s Lower East Side and its LSD, marijuana and ‘free’ sex.” (Ibid., No. 45, p. 16)

¹⁰ Ibid., No. 46, p. 25. Satsvarūpa dās recalls that “morning classes at the storefront began at 6 A.M.” and that he used to go to work chanting on his beads (ibid., No. 45, p. 18)

¹¹ Ibid., No. 46, p. 15.

¹² Ibid., No. 51, p. 11.

¹³ Ibid., No. 47, p. 35. One example of the swami’s exhortation is contained in the first issue of Back To Godhead (p. 13): “A man in Krishna Consciousness does not walk around in a fog but does his work well, and with the touch of an expert.”

¹⁴ Named after Vṛndāvana (also transliterated as “Vrindaban”), a city some ninety miles southeast of New Delhi and, according to Krishna Consciousness, “the place in India where Kṛṣṇa performed his transcendental pastimes when he appeared in the world 5,000 years ago” (ibid., No. 48, p. 14)

¹⁵ The “bhakti-yoga” (devotional) method of “spiritual foods, dancing, singing, chanting the praises of the Supreme Lord, study of the Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīmad Bhāgavatam,” we are told, “boasts such illustrious adherents as Brahmā, Shiva, Luxmi, Kumara, Nārada, Vyāsadeva ... and Swami Bhaktivedanta in the East, and in the West, many of the Christian saints, St. Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Socrates, Plotinus, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, William Blake and Whitman.” (Ibid., No. 1, p. 3)

¹⁶ Ibid., No. 47, p. 32. Equally spontaneous, it appears, was the introduction of deity worship (cf., Back To Godhead, Vol. 10, No. 7, p. 7)

¹⁷ Swami Bhaktivedanta distinguishes this sacred dance from profane dance as follows: “This dancing is not the dancing of dogs; it is a dance

of feeling. Those who are dancing are actually understanding God and feeling their relationship with God. Therefore, their dancing is not ordinary, it is a dance of love of God” (ibid., Vol. 10, No. 7, p. 5)

¹⁸ Ibid., No. 29, p. 14. Another term, “non-Aryan civilization” is often used interchangeably with “asuric civilization” and is defined as “a civilization based on the ideas of bodily sense gratification” (ibid., No. 29, p. 26)

¹⁹ The Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Handbook, Boston, Mass: ISKCON Press, 1970, p. 37. This is not a condemnation of technology per se but rather technology devoid of religion, i.e., Krishna Consciousness. According to the swami, “when there is poverty, when there is scarcity, one should know that it is not due to overpopulation; it is due to godlessness. In India they are thinking that technology will save them. But technology will not save them ... they have killed their own culture of God consciousness.” (Back To Godhead, No. 37, p. 7). Yet there is a definite preference for simple, primitive techniques and equipment over modern machinery (cf. Cintāmani, A Journal of New Vṛndāvana, No. 3, Oct–Nov 1973)

²⁰ Ibid., p. 37. “If there are sufficient grains and sufficient production of milk,” explains the swami, “then the whole economic problem is solved. You do not require any machines, cinemas, hotels, slaughterhouses, brothels, nightclubs—all these modern amenities” (ibid., p. 38)

²¹ Ibid., p. 35. Elsewhere Kīrtanānanda dās explains: “The cow takes what we can’t eat—grass, and gives us the most valuable food, milk. Practically, this milk is necessary for Spiritual Culture. Milk creates finer brain tissue which allows us to think upon self realization” (Cintāmani, A Journal of New Vṛndāvana, No. 3)

²² Back To Godhead, No. 29, p. 14

²³ Ibid., No. 29, p. 14

²⁴ The Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Handbook, Boston, Mass: ISKCON Press, 1970, p. 10

²⁵ Back To Godhead, No. 57, p. 5

²⁶ In the form of an interview, Vahna das questions Kīrtanānanda dās, the president of New Vṛndāvana and raises the following points: (1) the New Vṛndāvana community has been criticized by other devotees for not performing street Sankīrtan (chanting and dancing); (2) the New Vṛndāvana community “has come under some criticism for attracting devotees away from other temples.” Kīrtanānanda dās replies as follows: (1) Swami Bhaktivedanta has two missions. One is door-to-door, street

preaching. But Swami Bhaktivedanta is also “sending us here to Vrindavana to reconstruct the transcendental places of pilgrimage.” Activities such as “sawing wood” and “milking cows” are just as conducive to spiritual advancement as “street” work. “There is nothing inherent in distributing magazines,” contends Kirtanānanda dās, “that is spiritually uplifting”; (2) Kirtanānanda dās does not approve of trying to attract devotees from other temples but should a devotee, for whatever reason, leave another temple and come to New Vr̥ndāvana, he will not be turned away. (Cintāmani. A Journal of New Vr̥ndāvana, No. 3.)

²⁷ Back To Godhead, No. 60, p. 14

²⁸ For specific social programs, cf. the article by Visnujana Swami “portraying major problems in all levels of society and illustrating their solutions through Kṛṣṇa Consciousness” (Back To Godhead, No. 46, p. 9). The major business venture of the movement is an incense factory which manufactures “Spiritual Sky Scented Products.”

²⁹ In 1974 six members of ISKCON met in Nashville, Tennessee and formed a new political party called the “In God We Trust Party.” The first issue of the party’s organ, “The New World Harmonist” (Feb. 16, 1974) stated that the party’s main objective was to provide “purified leadership” for America. Though short-lived the party did manage to enter a devotee-candidate, William Harrison Ogle, in the 1973 Atlanta, Georgia mayoral campaign. Mr. Ogle lost.

³⁰ Back To Godhead, No. 51, p. 11

³¹ *Ibid.*, No. 51, p. 11

³² Thus His Holiness Acyutānanda Swami in Back To Godhead, No. 68 p.19. Devotional poetry addressed to Swami Bhaktivedanta is not uncommon. For example, a poem by Uttara Dāsī reads:

“I therefore offer this humble prayer
That Srila Prabhupada make my faith strong;
He is the sun; illuminating all:
Go back to Godhead, back where you belong.”
(*Ibid.*, No. 29, p. 22)

³³ Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, by Swami Bhaktivedanta, New York: Collier Books, 1972, p. 225.

³⁴ Back To Godhead, No. 37, p. 12. The term “transparent via medium” means “God’s representative” (The Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Handbook, p. 10). “The spiritual master acts as a via medium between ourselves,

who are contaminated by our association with matter, and Kṛṣṇa, God” (*Back To Godhead*, No. 37, p. 12)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 37, p. 14

³⁶ Swami Bhaktivedanta explains the unique nature of his guru-hood as follows: “The ‘Vedas’ enjoin us to seek out a guru; actually, they say to seek out the guru, not just a guru. The guru is one because he comes in disciplic succession. What Vyāsadeva and Kṛṣṇa taught 5,000 years ago is also being taught now. There is no difference between the two instructions” (*ibid.*, Vol. 10, No. 8, pp. 4–5). That Swami Bhaktivedanta is the present successor, an implication of ISKCON belief, has been stated explicitly. For example, Doctor Kapoor’s claims that Swami Bhaktivedanta is “the most prominent spiritual master today” and that “he (Swami Bhaktivedanta) has inherited the mantle of Prabhupāda Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī” are quoted with approval (cf. *ibid.*, No. 48, p. 14).

³⁷ The line of disciplic succession includes the following major figures: Krishna, Vyāsadeva, Nārada, Arjuna, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Caitanya, Swami Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Swami Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and Swami Bhaktivedanta (cf. *Back To Godhead*, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 5)

³⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 63, p. 6. Further, according to the swami, “the spiritual master is confirmed by the scripture and the scripture is exemplified in the life of the saintly person (spiritual master)” *ibid.*, No. 48, p. 14

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 6

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 63, p. 6

⁴¹ Elsewhere the swami explains that “it is not he (the spiritual master) who is speaking. He is just an instrument. The real speaker is the: Supreme Personality of Godhead who is both within and without.” (*The Perfection of Yoga* by Swami Bhaktivedanta, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972, P. 6)

⁴² *Back To Godhead*, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 6. More precisely, in the swami’s view, “God is the worshipable God, and guru is the worshiper God (sevā-bhagavān)” *ibid.*, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 6. Note that the honorific “Prabhupāda,” which earlier meant simply “one at whose feet masters sit” (cf. note 2) now reflects the fullness of the swami’s avatārhood.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, No. 63, p. 5. Regarding worship, the swami maintains that “the disciple’s duty is to offer respect to the guru just as he offers respect to God” (*ibid.*, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 6)

⁴⁴ *The Nectar of Devotion* by Swami Bhaktivedanta, Boston: ISKCON Press, 1970, p. 59. The swami frequently equates the guru with God. For

example, he categorically states: “the guru should be accepted as God. That is the injunction of all ‘śāstra’ ” (Back To Godhead, No. 63, p. 5) and quotes with approval Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 1.7.22 wherein Krishna says:

“My dear Uddhava, the spiritual master must be accepted not only as My representative but as My very Self.”

(The Nectar of Devotion, Boston: ISKCON Press, 1970, p. 59)