

# The Official IRM -GBC Debate

**To read the official IRM-GBC debate, as organised and published by Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg in the book “The Rival Positions in the IRM-GBC Controversy within ISKCON”, please click on either of the following links. Then, after reading the debate, please return to this page to read the rebuttal to the GBC submission given in the above book.**

**This rebuttal is presented below, straight after the links.**

[www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/SAWA/IRM-GBC.pdf](http://www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/SAWA/IRM-GBC.pdf)

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## CONTENTS:

Executive Summary	1
Conclusion	5
Rebuttal of Rest Of GBC Paper	5
The May 28, 1977 Conversation	9
Summary Conclusion	12



# RESPONSE TO THE GBC'S OFFICIAL SUBMISSION

*By Krishnakant*



**Iskcon Revival Movement**

## Executive Summary

This is a response to the GBC submission presented in the book: *"The Rival Positions in the IRM-GBC Controversy within ISKCON"* (IRM = ISKCON Revival Movement; GBC = Governing Body Commission), published by Martin Luther University, Germany. The following points regarding the GBC's submission (henceforward to be referred to as 'the paper'), can be made:

- a) Though the title states we are dealing with the GBC's 'position', the paper does not actually state the GBC's position in regards to how the ISKCON guru system is authorized by Srila Prabhupada. Rather it simply attempts to analyse the IRM's foundational position paper, *"The Final Order"* (TFO), and find weaknesses in it.
- b) The GBC's paper consists of 3 sections, with only the last section dealing with the IRM's position. Consequently over the half the paper is not relevant to the dispute in hand.
- c) And even within the relevant last section, only a few pages are devoted to the conclusion of TFO, and this sub-section is called appropriately enough, *"The Final Order"*.

(It should be noted that though the paper has been authorized and endorsed by the GBC, it has actually been written by one individual, Krishna Kirti Das (Christopher Shannon), who was delegated by the GBC to perform this task).

I shall, therefore, in this Executive Summary be presenting a point-for-point rebuttal only to the section of the paper entitled *"The Final Order"*, since this is the only place in the paper which is germane to the matter at hand. Following this Executive Summary we shall for completeness be presenting a rebuttal of the rest of the paper, even though most of it is irrelevant. Henceforth, throughout this Executive Summary and the rest of the rebuttal, all extracts from the paper shall be enclosed in boxes, with my responses following immediately underneath.

The *ritvik* doctrine is ultimately based on a letter written on July 9, 1977 by Tamal Krishna Goswami and co-signed by Srila Prabhupada. Those who accept the *ritvik* doctrine (and its variations) generally believe his letter to be Srila Prabhupada's "final order" on the matter of gurus and initiations.

It is actually a matter of record that this directive IS Srila Prabhupada's 'final order' on the matter of gurus and initiations. No other direction on this subject from Srila Prabhupada after July 9th, 1977, has to date been presented.

Those who accept the *ritvik* doctrine believe that Srila Prabhupada intended this system to continue after his departure, or passing away, and that he would continue to accept disciples through this procedure. The *ritviks* say that there is no reason to believe that Srila Prabhupada would not continue to accept disciples after his departure because the system, as it was, did not need his personal superintendence (they refer to this as "the system of management").

What TFO actually states is that a directive was given by Srila Prabhupada to be followed in ISKCON. The issue of the system continuing after Srila Prabhupada's departure is raised specifically by the GBC, who **TERMINATED** the directive on Srila Prabhupada's departure. Our position is not related to Srila Prabhupada's departure at all. Our position is that the directive was issued for applicability in ISKCON, and therefore unless another directive was issued terminating the *ritvik* system, it must be followed in ISKCON.

Furthermore, the *ritviks* (specifically the hard *ritviks*, not the soft *ritviks*) consider that the presence of the word "henceforward" in the letter indicates the indefinite future as the time frame for the letter, at least as long as the system itself could continue to function.

We actually state that the word 'henceforward' means 'from now on', and that therefore the system was to be applicable immediately on July 9th, 1977 throughout ISKCON. However, the applicability of the system for ISKCON does not depend on this word, for TFO states:

**"Furthermore the argument that the whole *ritvik* system 'hangs' on one word - henceforward - is untenable, since even if we take the word out of the letter, nothing has changed. One still has a system set up by Srila Prabhupada four months before his departure, with no subsequent instruction to terminate it. Without such a counter instruction, this letter must be seen as Srila Prabhupada's final instruction on initiation, and should therefore be followed."**

(TFO, Page 4)

But because this subtopic is not an essential determining factor in the validity or non-validity of the *ritvik* doctrine, we will not deal with it here. (85 DASA, Krishna-kirti 2001 treats this subject in detail).

The paper refers here to the subtopic of the 'system of management' and another paper written by the same author of the GBC paper under discussion here. This previous paper was comprehensively rebutted at the time, as can be seen for oneself at the following location online at [http://www.iskconirm.com/Krishna\\_Kirti.htm](http://www.iskconirm.com/Krishna_Kirti.htm). The author has not subsequently attempted to make any counter-rebuttal to this.

The word “henceforward” as found in this letter, and as defended in *The Final Order*, deserves scrutiny because several key arguments in TFO depend on it.

As we will see however, not a single ‘**key argument**’ from TFO which depends on this word is presented by the paper. Rather, TFO merely states continually that one cannot infer from this word that the July 9th directive must be terminated on Srila Prabhupada’s departure, which is the action the GBC took.

At the same time, TFO has denied that it is relevant to their interpretation of the July 9, 1977 letter (**KRISHNAKANT 2002: 4**):

**Furthermore the argument that the whole *ritvik* system ‘hangs’ on one word — ‘henceforward’ — is untenable, since even if we take the word out of the letter, nothing has changed.**

The above statement seems to be more of an afterthought rather than an original part of the TFO. One reason for its existence could be that not long after TFO was first published, opposing arguments demonstrated that the word “henceforward”, as Srila Prabhupada has used it, can be implicitly limited by other circumstances or instructions previously given.

- This argument is illogical since the statement from TFO referred to was **IN TFO** when it was ‘**first published**’, so how can opposing arguments which emerged **after** TFO was published have any relevance?

In addition, this is an implied straw-man argument (**a straw-man argument refers to an argument which we have not actually made, and therefore the paper defeating such an argument is irrelevant to the debate at hand**), since TFO does not state anywhere that the word ‘henceforward’ can **NOT** be “**implicitly limited by other circumstances or instructions previously given.**”

Thus the word “henceforward” is not exempt from being understood within the context of Srila Prabhupada’s other instructions:

And neither does TFO ever state that it is so exempt. **Another straw-man argument.**

If we consider “henceforward” means “from now onwards” and must be taken literally, without consideration of other instructions,

TFO never states that other instructions cannot be considered. The whole of TFO after the first few pages is actually devoted to considering the possibility of such other instructions. TFO does however find that such other instructions which would lead to the termination of the directive do not exist. Yet **Another straw-man argument.**

As we can see, the *ritviks* over-reliance on the use of the word “henceforward” in determining the time-frame intended for the July 9, 1977 letter became problematic for them.

As we can see, the paper’s over-reliance on the use of the word ‘**henceforward**’ in constructing straw-man arguments, has become problematic for it.

The paper then proceeds to quote statements from TFO in which we refer to the word ‘**henceforward**’ as used in the July 9th directive, and concludes:

In all of the above places, where the word “henceforward” is used, it is enclosed in quotation marks, with some of the references specifying that this is the word as it appears in the letter and is what justifies an indefinite time-frame. Even If the word “henceforward,” as it appears in the letter, is irrelevant to the meaning of the letter, it certainly is indispensable to the *ritvik* doctrine.

In all of the places quoted by the paper we refer to the fact that Srila Prabhupada gave a directive which was to be followed in ISKCON ‘**from that moment onwards**’ (or *henceforward*, with ‘**that moment onwards**’ simply being the definition of ‘*henceforward*’), **RATHER** than being terminated on his departure. The ‘**ritvik doctrine**’ therefore does not depend on the word ‘*henceforward*’, but on the fact that a directive given by Srila Prabhupada to be applied within ISKCON was not subsequently terminated by Srila Prabhupada, and therefore still needs to be applied in ISKCON. Thus even if the word ‘*henceforward*’ was not in the letter, the conclusion of TFO is not affected.

- How then can the word be ‘*indispensable*’ to TFO’s conclusion?

**Another straw-man argument.**

One popular variation of the *ritvik* doctrine is “soft *ritvik*,” or the idea that Srila Prabhupada intended the *ritvik* system to continue after his departure until one or more of his descendants become fully liberated, topmost devotees. When such devotees manifest, they may accept disciples just as Srila Prabhupada himself did. This view assumes that lack of qualification is the only thing that prevents someone from accepting disciples. This is TFO’s response to “soft *ritvik*”:

**All such concerns melt away once we read *The Final Order*. There is simply no mention of the ‘soft’ *ritvik* injunction. The letter just says ‘henceforward’.**

But if the word “henceforward” is considered to be irrelevant, then soft *ritvik*” becomes a possible alternative.

The quote from TFO again refers to the fact that the letter only states it should be applied in ISKCON 'from now onwards' **RATHER** than stating that the system can be replaced by the emergence of a qualified Guru. Each time, the word 'henceforward' is used in TFO as 'short-hand' to refer to this whole argument – that the letter only states a system should be applied in ISKCON (from now onwards) **RATHER** than be terminated on Srila Prabhupada's departure, and this argument remains even if the actual word 'henceforward' is removed. **Another straw-man argument.**

Since the word "henceforward", by itself, is subject to limitation by other authorised instructions, the time-frame for the letter cannot be determined without reference to Srila Prabhupada's other works or works of the *acaryas* in our disciplic succession.

Since the time-frame of the letter does **NOT** depend on the word 'henceforward', the above is **Another straw-man argument.** As already explained, the time-frame of the letter is for ISKCON, and this time-frame will remain unaltered if other instructions from Srila Prabhupada, which could affect this time-frame, do not exist. Most of TFO is dedicated to considering if such instructions exist, and finds that they do not.

At the heart of this debate is the question of the intended time- frame for the *ritvik* system Srila Prabhupada established, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, what the minimal qualifications required for one to accept disciples are. The remainder of this section will take a look at evidence with regard to the time-frame.

The paper admits that the issue of the time-frame is what this debate is all about. Yet in the 'remainder of this section' in which it will now examine this critical subject, the paper devotes only 2 pages out of its 62 page submission. This alone gives some indication of the paucity of the GBC's arguments. The minimal qualifications required to accept disciples are not at **ALL** relevant to the current debate, since these qualifications will not at all impact on the time-frame for which the directive is applicable.

There were no explicit instructions from Srila Prabhupada that confirmed he would continue to accept disciples after his departure. The *ritviks* claim that the July 9, 1977 letter itself is an explicit order. But since it was shown that the word "henceforward" and other related words were still liable to interpretation from Srila Prabhupada's other instructions, the time-frame for the letter could not be assumed from the letter alone.

This straw-man argument was covered earlier. The time-frame of the directive does not depend on the word 'henceforward', but on the fact that Srila Prabhupada has issued a directive to be followed by ISKCON. Therefore the time-frame of the directive is tied to that of ISKCON. This time-frame **CAN** be subject to alteration from Srila Prabhupada's other instructions, but such instructions do not exist.

Remarks such as

At the same time, I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next. **98**  
continue to be problematic for the hard *ritviks*.

There is nothing problematic about this remark, since such a remark has been demonstrated as being applicable to **ALL** Srila Prabhupada's disciples becoming *siksa* not *diksa* gurus. The paper's argument in regards to the quote above (given in an earlier section), that why would Srila Prabhupada request his disciples to do something they were already doing (acting as *siksa* gurus), is negated by the fact that in the same remark above, **not** quoted by the paper, Srila Prabhupada also states:

**"At the same time, I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next. And what is their duty? Whatever you are hearing from me, whatever you are learning from me, you have to distribute the same in toto without any addition or alteration. Then all of you become the spiritual master."**

Clearly the same disciples were also **ALREADY** distributing what they were learning – as this is the definition of '*preaching*'. Thus we see that Srila Prabhupada is indeed asking his disciples to continue doing what they were already doing in his presence – which was acting as *siksa* gurus.

Being without the support of explicit statements, the *ritviks* were forced to substantiate their claim of an indefinite time-frame for the *ritvik* system by arguing from ignorance (**KRISHNAKANT 2002: 4; bolding in the original**):

There is **no** mention in the letter that the system should stop on Srila Prabhupada's departure, neither does it state that the system was to **only** be operational during his presence.

But when the truth of a claim is substantiated on the basis of absent evidence, other statements, which are often contradictory, must similarly be taken as true.

**Another straw-man argument.** Our argument is substantiated by the fact that we have a directive issued to ISKCON to be applied within ISKCON. Therefore we say it must continue to be applied in ISKCON. Indeed this is **ALL** our argument is. It is the GBC's **OBJECTION** to this argument, that actually the directive should be terminated on the departure of Srila Prabhupada, **which** we are defeating whenever we state the fact there is **NO** such mention of this termination either in the directive, or elsewhere for that matter.

It is also truthful to say:

There is no mention in the letter that the system should continue after Srila Prabhupada's departure, neither does it state that the system was to be operational after his departure.

It is a fact that the July 9, 1977 letter does not state either of the two remarks above. Since we are faced with two conclusions that are mutually contradictory, we can conclude that the time-frame is not conclusively described in the July 9 letter.

There is no instruction from Srila Prabhupada which specifically states that it should be applied after his departure, since **ALL** his instructions, where issued for ISKCON, are for application within ISKCON, **UNLESS** stated otherwise. Otherwise the whole canon of Srila Prabhupada's teachings would need to have been extinguished upon Srila Prabhupada's departure, and this debate becomes meaningless as there would be no instructions at all for ISKCON to currently apply, and therefore ISKCON would effectively have ceased to exist. ISKCON operates today due to accepting that all the instructions which they received from Srila Prabhupada were automatically applicable for ISKCON rather than only for whilst Srila Prabhupada was physically present, unless there are other limiting/modifying instructions, or the instruction itself automatically terminates at some point.

And the July 9th directive **IS** issued for application in ISKCON. Here is the evidence:

- a) **The directive is issued to all of ISKCON to follow by being sent to all the managers who run ISKCON – the GBC and all ISKCON Temple Presidents.**
- b) **The directive is issued for the purpose of satisfying a generic ISKCON-related need – the need for initiations.**
- c) **The directive is issued for implementation by ISKCON entities – Temples - to fulfill a need of the temple – inducting new recruits.**

Therefore the time-frame for the directive is that it is to be applied in ISKCON, as long as ISKCON temples exist, managed by Temple Presidents and GBCs, and ISKCON requires to offer new recruits initiations. And if there exist other counter-instructions which could limit the application of this directive for ISKCON, then of course the directive would need to be thus modified. But such counter-instructions do not exist.

Other references from Srila Prabhupada's works further discredit the idea that the time-frame for the July 9 letter is absolutely indefinite. For example:

*Acarya* means one who has become a rigid disciple of his *Acarya*. Just like a critical student under a professor, he becomes a first-class professor, similarly, a person who is a very rigid student of bona fide *acarya*, he becomes next *acarya*. 99

One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master. And one cannot be a bona fide and authorized spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master. 100

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of your Spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him, and in his absence or disappearance you can accept disciples without any limitation. This is the law of disciplic succession. I want to see my disciples become bona fide Spiritual Master and spread Krishna consciousness very widely, that will make me and Krishna very happy. 101

The first reference states the qualification to become the next *acarya*. The second reference states the principle that the disciplic succession is continued by a disciple. Neither of these instructions are incompatible with the fact that Srila Prabhupada issued a *ritvik* directive for ISKCON, since neither reference states a time-limit shorter than the life-span of ISKCON by which a disciple **MUST** become the next *acarya*. And without such a time-limit, nothing restricts the *Ritvik* directive being operational for the next few thousand years, whilst ISKCON exists.

The last reference has been rejected by the GBC since they do not accept that the above '**law of disciplic succession**' is indeed a law, having declared both that not only was this '**law**' never practiced historically, but also that they themselves have decided to break it.

- One is puzzled therefore as to how the GBC can make an argument which relies on utilizing this '**law**' when they themselves do not agree with it?

Ultimately, it would be futile to argue that none of Srila Prabhupada's spiritual descendants would ever become qualified enough to accept disciples. If no one could become a topmost devotee in Srila Prabhupada's line, then it would be a declaration that somehow no one would ever make significant spiritual advancement, no matter what they did.

TFO definitely does not argue this, so this is yet **another implied straw-man argument**.

To substantiate the hard *ritvik* doctrine and accommodate the possibility of devotees qualified to accept disciples appearing in ISKCON, the *ritviks* present two final arguments against allowing future *diksa*-gurus in ISKCON other than Srila Prabhupada: one must have attained the platform of a *maha-bhagavata* (topmost devotee), and one must receive an explicit order to accept disciples.

The latter is used by TFO as an argument that one cannot be a *diksa* guru in ISKCON unless so ordered. Without this order, the issue of the qualification of a *diksa* guru is irrelevant.

## Conclusion

Thus ends the rebuttal of the section of the paper which the paper itself admits actually deals with the issue before us – the applicability or otherwise of the July 9th directive to ISKCON. As we have seen, the paper has been able to do nothing more than cobble together a bunch of straw-man arguments to try and argue that the July 9th directive was not for general application in ISKCON. But there has been presented absolutely nothing of substance which may make one even pause to consider that the July 9th directive was not meant for general application within ISKCON

We will now for completeness rebut the arguments from the rest of the paper which have not been covered above, even though this is not strictly necessary, since these other sections of the paper do not even attempt to directly address the actual issue before us – the applicability of the July 9th directive to ISKCON.

## Rebuttal of Rest Of GBC Paper

There is no doubt that both ISKCON's leadership and the IRM have acted and are acting to establish what each considers the correct theological conclusion with regard to the affairs of gurus and disciples.

This is an interesting statement from the GBC, since it is putting the motivation of the IRM on par with the GBC, in that it is admitted that both are acting only with sincere theological considerations. This is a departure from the normal demonisation of the IRM as a movement which exists only to either destroy or takeover ISKCON etc.

Briefly, there are two main complaints made by the adherents of the *ritvik* position: (1) moral and spiritual deficiency of ISKCON's leadership, and (2) that Srila Prabhupada's orders regarding gurus and initiations in his absence were disobeyed by this leadership. Of these two claims, the second is considerably more prominent.

TFO only deals with (2). Indeed, the existence of (2) is what we claim is itself the chief moral and spiritual deficiency. So (1) is a **straw-man argument**.

This has led to a degree of confidence among many in ISKCON and weakens the *ritvik* argument that moral weakness indicates some theological misunderstanding. (Their second complaint will be dealt with at length later in this paper.)

Again **another straw-man argument**, since nowhere does TFO claim that moral weakness is the proof of theological misunderstanding.

Discussion about *ritvik* (for and against) among ISKCON's rank-and-file can hardly be found either in public forums or smaller discussion groups — either online or off the internet. These facts seem to indicate that the IRM's influence on ISKCON is waning.

The GBC author, however, has himself stated the exact opposite in his own online journal, regarding the influence of *ritvik* on ISKCON today:

**"For ISKCON's incumbent leaders, they need to be more introspective about the reasons for the rise of the *ritvik* ideology and, more importantly, why it continues to persist [...] Even though the IRM and other non-IRM *ritvikists* have arrived at an incorrect explanation for the pervasive problem of fallen leaders, it is still an explanation. The IRM has one, ISKCON doesn't. *Ritvikist* explanations thus continue to fill ISKCON's explanatory vacuum. That is why *ritvikism* still persists within ISKCON and not simply outside of it in organizations like the IRM."** –

**(Krishna Kirti Das, 'Hare Krishna Cultural Journal', April 9th 2006)**

The author also noted the following regarding Alachua, which is ISKCON's largest community outside India:

**"Another devotee asked a question about *ritvikism* and how Maharaja's statement related to it. A self-identified granddisciple of Srila Prabhupada expressed some open doubt as to the standard order of *pranama mantras* one must recite when required to do so. At the very least, it can be said that issues regarding the discipic succession are very much at the front of the thoughts of devotees in Alachua."**

**(Krishna Kirti Das, Report on Alachua Bhagavatam Class, 'Hare Krishna Cultural Journal', August 18th, 2006).**

One of the fundamental premises of the *ritvik* doctrine is that the *diksa*-guru (initiating spiritual master) is superior to the *siksa*-guru (instructing spiritual master).

No. **Another straw-man argument**. Such a concept is not stated in TFO.



There are currently many of Srila Prabhupada's grand-disciples having deep and meaningful relationships with their spiritual masters, who are disciples of Srila Prabhupada.

It is ironic to note, therefore, that the very author of this paper is not one of these persons, since he claims his own spiritual master, HH Hridayananda Das Goswami, does not even understand such a basic point as what constitutes 'illicit sex', the prohibition of which is one of the fundamental regulative principles of Krishna consciousness; and furthermore has something of a dysfunctional relationship with both himself and the GBC:

"HH Hridayananda Goswami) gives a decidedly different definition of illicit sex than what can reasonably be considered Srila Prabhupada's view of illicit sex [...] Certainly, Maharaja's essay greatly augments the confusion that the GBC attempted to dispel [...] H.H. Hridayananda das Goswami Acaryadeva is the spiritual master of the author of this article. While on the vast majority of issues in Krishna Consciousness we are in complete agreement, the author of this article, Krishna-kirti das, is nevertheless opposed to some of the ideas he expresses in his essay referred to herein. The author of this article offers his obeisances at the feet of Srila Acaryadeva and hopes that one day their disagreement on these issues will be amicably settled."

(Krishna Kirti Das, 'Hare Krishna Cultural Journal', June 16th, 2006)

If this constitutes a "deep and meaningful relationship" with his guru, we'd hate to think what a discordant relationship would look like!

The following excerpts from the paper known as *The Final Order* (TFO) summarise the position of the *ritviks* — specifically that of the IRM:

On July 9th 1977, four months before his physical departure, Srila Prabhupada set up a system of initiations employing the use of *ritviks*, or representatives of the *acarya*. Srila Prabhupada instructed that this 'officiating *acarya*' system was to be instituted immediately, and run from that time onwards, or 'henceforward' — (please see Appendices, p. 108). [...] Without such a counter instruction, this letter must be seen as Srila Prabhupada's final instruction on initiation and should therefore be followed. 52

To summarise the *ritvik* position, they consider that (1) no one was qualified at the time of Srila Prabhupada's departure to accept disciples, (2) Srila Prabhupada was aware of this fact and therefore set up a managerial system whereby he would continue to accept disciples even after his passing away,

Points (1) and (2) are amazing '**straw man**' arguments since the paper even quotes a passage from TFO, but this does not state anything even remotely like what the paper claims the TFO states! Hence, since the paper takes as its base this completely false summary of the TFO, it is not surprising as we have seen and will see, the paper misrepresents TFO's position all the way through.

The proponents of the *ritvik* movement have devoted the main part of their energies to developing the doctrine of what they call Srila Prabhupada's continued status as a *diksa*-guru. This doctrine can be subdivided into arguments that establish Srila Prabhupada's physical presence, establish his ability to continue to accept disciples in spite of his passing away, and establish the institutional infrastructure necessary to implement this doctrine. The *ritvik* doctrine also describes at length what its proponents consider the overall lack of qualification of those currently acting as gurus. Even though the subject of qualification is considered irrelevant to the *ritvik* doctrine, the IRM's supporters have nonetheless devoted to it considerable time and public promotion.

Another miasma of **straw-man arguments**. We do not argue that Srila Prabhupada is physically present. In TFO we actually state that Srila Prabhupada is physically **ABSENT**, not physically present!:

"It is accepted that many thousands of Srila Prabhupada's disciples are still benefiting from the process of *diksa* (even though their guru has been physically absent for nearly two decades)."

(TFO, Page 54, emphasis added)

For the record, TFO does not describe '**at length**' that the current ISKCON gurus are not qualified. Indeed, in TFO we do not even touch on this subject. It is the GBC who routinely announce that their gurus are falling and therefore unqualified to occupy this post.

Some of Srila Prabhupada's correspondence has been offered as counter-evidence for the idea that Srila Prabhupada's spiritual descendants may never accept disciples, and the *ritviks* have gone to great lengths to render them inadmissible. The *ritviks* disregard these letters because they consider them to be personal instruction meant for a particular individual which, hence, cannot be used to advocate a broad conclusion. In one letter, Srila Prabhupada has written:

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. 53

On the contrary, it is the GBC who have now claimed that this letter does not give a broad conclusion. For as mentioned previously, the quote above comes from a letter mentioning the '**law of disciplic succession**', which the GBC have said is not a '**law**' at all since it was never followed before Srila Prabhupada, nor will it be followed by the GBC now after Srila Prabhupada. Thus it

is the GBC who are implying that therefore this 'law' was invoked by Srila Prabhupada as a one-off only for the benefit of certain individuals! And as we will see later, it is the paper itself which is happy to consider certain instructions of Srila Prabhupada as not always advocating 'broad conclusions', but actually 'circumstantial' instructions only meant for 'individuals':

"Although the *ritviks* regard this to be an absolute instruction, it is in fact circumstantial. At the various times Srila Prabhupada gave this and similar instructions, it was to disciples who were not much inclined to study his books:"

**(GBC Submission, Next Section)**

Finally, the *ritviks* themselves often refer to letters to validate their conclusions. Here is a partial list of letters they have used in substantiating their thesis: Letter to Janardana (April 26, 1968), Letter (January 19, 1967), Letter to Dinesh (October 31, 1969), Letter to Tamal Krishna (August 19, 1968), Letter to Rupanuga (April 28, 1974), Letter to Madhudvisa (August 4, 1975), Letter to Dayananda (April 12, 1968), Letter to Pradyumna (February 17, 1968), Letter to Tamala Krsna (June 21, 1970), etc. 57

The *ritviks* certainly have no issues with citing Srila Prabhupada's letters when they believe them to support their claims.

**We have never offered a private letter to one individual as evidence of an instruction to the whole society meant to overrule a directive which was sent to the whole society.** And in TFO we never concede that Srila Prabhupada states something in a private letter which proves the GBC's case, and therefore must be ignored. On the contrary, we show that none of the letters cited as evidence by the GBC actually give any evidence for terminating the *ritvik* system on Srila Prabhupada's departure, which is what the GBC actually did.

ISKCON's leaders in dealing with the crisis of spiritual masters falling down consulted the writings of previous *acaryas* wherein it is explicitly described what one should do if his or her spiritual master deviates. The *ritviks*, however, believe it is wrong to consult the writings of previous *acaryas* wherever these writings cannot be corroborated with something Srila Prabhupada himself has said.

The GBC itself states the same as 'the *ritviks*' in one of their publications:

"...we must see the previous *acaryas* through Prabhupada. We cannot jump over Prabhupada and then look back at him through the eyes of previous *acaryas*."

**(Our Original Position, p. 163, GBC Press)**

The paper then devotees considerable time to trying to demonstrate that we should consult the works of the previous *acaryas*, which is an irrelevant subject since the debate is about whether or not Srila Prabhupada gave instructions for the termination of the *ritvik* system in ISKCON. This undue emphasis on writings other than those of Srila Prabhupada, is another sign that the GBC actually have no evidence from Srila Prabhupada to put forward to terminate the *ritvik* system as set up by Srila Prabhupada.

By rejecting the authority of statements from Srila Narahari Thakura and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, 69 the *ritviks* imply that the teachings of prior *acaryas* contradict the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, or that Srila Prabhupada's teachings contradict the teachings of previous *acaryas*.

**Another straw-man argument.** We have never rejected the authority of the previous *acaryas*. We have rather stated that Srila Prabhupada represents the previous *acaryas* and, therefore, whatever is stated by Srila Prabhupada is sufficient to conduct our spiritual lives, and it is not required to 'jump over' Srila Prabhupada to try and understand what he is saying via the previous *acaryas*, as the GBC statement quoted above also states.

But if we accept the *ritvik* line of thought, then we could not say that Srila Prabhupada passed away. There couldn't be any disappearance day ceremonies (since there was never any disappearance).

This is the conclusion to a section which again tries to argue that we are denying that Srila Prabhupada is physically absent, but as we stated earlier, TFO does accept that Srila Prabhupada is physically absent, and this section of the paper is therefore just **one big straw-man argument**. Rather, in TFO we actually quote Srila Prabhupada stating that physical presence is immaterial, and not that Srila Prabhupada himself has not left the planet:

**"Physical presence is not important."**

**(SP Room conversation, 6/10/77, Vrindavan)**

**"Physical presence is immaterial."**

**(SP Letter, 19/1/67)**

We do, of course, state the fact that Srila Prabhupada did leave physical by-products such as his books etc. But we do not state that therefore Srila Prabhupada never physically departed, as is implied by the paper. Rather, these physical by-products continue to assist us even though Srila Prabhupada is not physically present.

The *ritviks* consistently underline and highlight words to convey understandings ordinarily not warranted by reading the same text in its original, unmarked form. Though a minor issue, typographical emphasis can still mislead the unwary.

Here the paper devotes a whole section to what it admits is only a 'minor issue' of 'typographical emphasis'. That is, it cannot in any way, shape or form have any bearing whatsoever on the actual debate before us, which is the applicability of the July 9th directive to ISKCON. Clearly, the author of the paper was desperate to simply find something to say to fill up space, rather than tackle the issue head-on. We, however, shall not be uselessly filling up space arguing over whether a not a word should have been in **bold** or underlined!

Orders may be direct or indirect. For example, if one is ordered to cook food, it is understood that one must use a stove, or fire. The order to cook a meal includes the order to use a stove.

The paper here accepts that IF a **DIRECT** order to cook food is given, this **DIRECT** order could *include* an indirect order to use a stove. But this is accepting that in order to know **WHAT** needs to be done (cook), a **DIRECT** order for this action must be given. Similarly, we are stating that in order to know what to do – stop Srila Prabhupada from acting as the *diksa* guru of ISKCON – we need a direct order to this effect.

Excluded portions of the reference cited by TFO highlighted by bolding and underlining:

...sometimes, if a spiritual master is not properly authorized and only on his own initiative becomes a spiritual master, he may be carried away by an accumulation of wealth and large numbers of disciples. **His is not a very high grade of devotional service. If a person is carried away by such achievements, then his devotional service becomes slackened. One should therefore strictly adhere to the principles of disciplic succession.** 82

By reading the reference as cited in TFO, one could conclude that being unauthorised to accept disciples is the only cause of falling down for a guru. TFO refers to this to support the idea that one must have some sort of explicit instruction to accept disciples — qualification alone is insufficient. But the excluded portion never mentions receiving an explicit order.

This argument about Srila Prabhupada not explicitly stating that an '**explicit order**' is required, is very similar to the argument made by the paper earlier regarding the July 9th directive not explicitly stating that it shall apply for '**after Srila Prabhupada's departure**'. And just as we explained in relation to this argument that all of Srila Prabhupada's directives for ISKCON are predicated on the assumption that they are for ISKCON unless stated otherwise, similarly authority from the spiritual master is predicated on the assumption that such authority is communicated via a direct order. Otherwise, again ISKCON's whole basis of claiming that all which it says or does is authoritative **BECAUSE** they have an order from Srila Prabhupada justifying it, collapses. Because if authority from Srila Prabhupada to do something did not require an order directly stating that authority, anything is possible.

If the GBC wish to state that:

Only where Srila Prabhupada explicitly accompanies an order with the words "**will apply after my departure**", will the order be applicable in ISKCON today; **(1)**

And Srila Prabhupada's authority for any action does **NOT** require an explicit order to that effect unless Srila Prabhupada explicitly states there must be an '**explicit order**'; **(2)**

Then by **(1)** ISKCON today would never get off the ground on any level, and by **(2)** any action could be justified as being authoritative, since one would never need to produce a direct order to that effect.

Therefore it is the height of hypocrisy that though the GBC would never even dream of invoking **(1)** and **(2)** as general principles to be followed as the correct means to obey Srila Prabhupada, they will happily invoke them only in one situation which just coincidentally allows them to replace Srila Prabhupada as '**good-as-God**' gurus!

Although the *ritviks* stress the words "ordered" and "when" and try to convey to the reader that somewhere at some time there must be some explicit order (to accept disciples), none of these over-emphasised words and phrases rule out the possibility of the order being indirect.

- **But from where does this 'indirect order' thesis come from?**

The term '**indirect order**' is never used by Srila Prabhupada. The paper would need to **FIRST** establish that to follow the guru in an authorised manner means being able to follow the guru via means of '**indirect orders**'. Only after such a thesis is established by the paper, can we think about even considering these arguments. For example, we consider chanting 16 rounds a day in ISKCON as being an authorised course of action, because we have a **DIRECT** order to this effect. Srila Prabhupada does not only tell us to '**chant some mantra**', and allows us to fill in the rest, but he tells us to exactly what should be chanted and how much. Indeed, nowhere as far as we can see, is any activity in ISKCON claimed to be authorised on the basis of an '**indirect**' order except in the most crucial and important matter of Guru succession!

How convenient!

So if Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura (Srila Prabhupada's spiritual master) did not select any *acarya* from his disciples before his passing away, then how is it that Srila Prabhupada himself came to accept disciples? [...]

**He never asked anybody to become *acarya*.** He asked that "You form a governing body of twelve men and go on preaching, and Kunja Babu may be allowed to remain manager during his lifetime." He never said that Kunja Babu should be *acarya*. None, none of them were advised by Guru Maharaja to become *acarya*. His idea was "Let them manage; then whoever will be actual qualified for becoming *acarya*, they will elect. Why I should enforce upon them?" **That was his plan. "Let them manage by strong governing body, as it is going on. Then *acarya* will come by his qualifications."** 119

Not only do we see that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura never asked anybody to become *acarya*, we also find that the *acarya* will come "by his qualifications". Even if we accepted that no one except the *acarya* (who would later manifest according to his qualifications) could accept disciples, the *acarya* himself, like them, would have had no previous explicit instruction to do so. Thus qualification is the main consideration in whether or not someone is fit to accept disciples.

Yes, in the case of the Gaudiya Matha, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta specifically gave an order that the next *acarya* of the Gaudiya Matha was not to be nominated, but that actually he will be 'self-effulgent':

**"He said openly you make a GBC and conduct the mission. So his idea was amongst the members of GBC who would come out successful and self effulgent *acarya* would be automatically selected."**

(Letter to Rupunga, 28/4/74)

Therefore we can conclude:

- a) Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura definitely did not nominate any *acharya* to succeed him as the head of the Gaudiya Matha. But Srila Bhaktisiddhanta **DID** give an explicit order by which he wanted the next *acarya* to be chosen – not nomination, but self-effulgence. But for ISKCON Srila Prabhupada did not state any 'self-effulgence' system for succession. Rather he did not state **any** system for being succeeded. On the contrary, he explicitly gave a system for **NOT** being succeeded – the July 9th directive establishing the *ritvik* system.
- b) The root of ISKCON's guru system is not in any case based on self-effulgence, but nomination, since the GBC have not repudiated the principle that the first 11 gurus **WERE** selected by Srila Prabhupada to take up this position. They have only stated that guruhship should not be **LIMITED** to them (the zonal *acharya* system).

Additionally, Srila Prabhupada considered discipleship itself to be the other essential aspect of authorisation.

**Journalist:** Is there in India a licensing body by the state for people to preach or to . . . How in the heck would you say it here?

**Prabhupada:** It was not there because in India there are so many churches, and they're supposed to be very saintly person. So simply to become a disciple of a saintly person is sufficient certificate.

This refers specifically to the authorization required to **PREACH**. Srila Prabhupada answers that discipleship is sufficient for this. But this has no relevance to the subject at hand, which is whether an order is required to succeed one's Guru and become a *diksa* guru oneself. Yet **another irrelevant argument** from the paper.

## The May 28, 1977 Conversation

The length to which he dispenses with grammar and reason in his analysis seems sufficient reason for him to wish the May 28 conversation would just go away.

Yet the paper does not give a single argument to show how 'grammar and reason' has been dispensed with.

There is much added to the conversation to make it work the way he wants it to, with the modified statements coming off as gibberish.

Again the paper does not offer a single argument to demonstrate how and why the statements of TFO in this section are 'gibberish'.

That the hermeneutics employed here were indeed creative is something admitted to by TFO's author himself (**KRISHNAKANT 2002: 42**):

The accusation may be made that we are in some way twisting Srila Prabhupada's words by taking third person to be first person statements. However we feel our interpretation is consistent with the function Srila Prabhupada assigned to his *ritviks*.

There is no admission that TFO uses ‘hermeneutics’ in a ‘creative’ fashion. We simply state here that **OTHERS** accuse us of this (like the paper has done here). Therefore, TFO simply stating that others accuse TFO of being ‘creative’ is not itself evidence that TFO is actually admitting that it is creative. And even a GBC transcript, which was ‘checked and edited’ by ISKCON’s current chief editor of all of Srila Prabhupada’s books, HH Jayadvaita Swami, has Srila Prabhupada speaking in the 3rd person.

So this was yet just another ‘space-filling’ exercise from the paper, where a whole of bunch accusations were made without any attempt to substantiate them.

So it would seem that one must first become a *maha-bhagavata* before one may accept disciples. But Srila Prabhupada has said in other places that although it is preferable that a spiritual master be a *maha-bhagavata*, others who are not on the level of a topmost devotee may also accept disciples (bolding added):

This incident proves that the *siksa-* or *diksa-*guru who has a disciple who strongly executes devotional service like Dhruva Maharaja can be carried by the disciple even though the instructor is not as advanced. [...] The conclusion is that a disciple or an offspring who is a very strong devotee can carry with him to Vaikunthaloka either his father, mother or *siksa-* or *diksa* guru. 104

However, as can be seen, nowhere above does Srila Prabhupada say “**that although it is preferable that a spiritual master be a *maha-bhagavata*, others who are not on the level of a topmost devotee may also accept disciples.**” This concession is not stated above. Rather the paper has had to fabricate this concession to avoid the conclusion that they are actually stating that Srila Prabhupada contradicted himself, having just admitted that Srila Prabhupada **DID** say that the Guru **MUST** be on the topmost level. Therefore if we accept the paper’s conclusion that a *diksa* guru does **NOT** need to be on the topmost level, then we would also need to accept that Srila Prabhupada contradicts himself. This is the only way that the conclusion put forward by the paper here can stand. Fortunately, a literal reading of the above quote allows Srila Prabhupada’s statements to stand without contradiction. For the quote merely states that in theory it is possible for a disciple to carry their guru with them. This theoretical point is not incompatible with the principle that the *diksa* guru should still be a topmost devotee. It is simply emphasizing that a very powerful disciple **CAN** transfer their power to their gurus.

These statements not only affirm that a disciple can become more advanced than his or her guru, but it also strongly implies that a *diksa-*guru may not necessarily be situated on the topmost platform. Note the phrase ‘even though the instructor is not as advanced’.

But the phrase ‘the instructor’ here refers specifically to Suniti, who was Dhruva Maharaja’s ‘instructor’ or *siksa-*guru, not *diksa-*guru, in this ‘incident’:

**“This incident proves that the *siksa-* or *diksa-*guru who has a disciple who strongly executes devotional service like Dhruva Maharaja can be carried by the disciple even though the instructor is not as advanced. Although Suniti was an instructor to Dhruva Maharaja, she could not go to the forest because she was a woman, nor could she execute austerities and penances as Dhruva Maharaja did.”**

There is no need for a disciple to carry his guru if his guru is already a topmost devotee, as Srila Prabhupada affirms:

Still, he was not less obliged to Suniti. There was no question of carrying Narada Muni to Vaikunthaloka, but Dhruva Maharaja thought of his mother.

The fact that it is **POSSIBLE** for something to be done, is not incompatible with the fact that it may not **NEED** to be done. The former merely emphasizes a point, (the power of a disciple), and the latter just states the reality on the ground.

To re-iterate, the above literal reading of the quotes, where nowhere does Srila Prabhupada either say that a non-*maha-bhagavata* *diksa* guru is a permissible concession, or that a *diksa* guru will not be a *maha-bhagavata*, is the only reading possible lest we unnecessarily foist a contradiction on Srila Prabhupada, as the paper attempts to do. Because as the paper has itself conceded, Srila Prabhupada does state that a *diksa* guru must be a *maha-bhagavata*:

**“So it would seem that one must first become a *maha-bhagavata* before one may accept disciples.”**

In addition, the GBC have seriously undermined trying to use this incident involving Suniti and Dhruva to derive some conclusion for application in today’s ISKCON, by accepting the following conclusion regarding another statement from Srila Prabhupada regarding this incident, as follows:

**“The one significant negative statement—“Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja’s *diksa-*guru.” (Bhag. 4.12.32 purport)—can be interpreted differently. One possible interpretation is that women cannot initiate male devotees, but could do so for female devotees. Another could be that women can initiate all others except their own offspring. This second interpretation could be supported by the fact that Lord Nityananda’s second wife, Sri Vasudha Devi, did not initiate her own son, Viracandra, but Sri Jahnavi Devi did so. In any case, Srila Prabhupada is referring to an incident at a specific time in the distant past, and his other statements dealing with the present time (conversations with Professor O’Connell or with Atreya Rsi Dasa), and specifically within ISKCON, are more valuable as *pramanas* in this discussion.”**

Thus when it suits them, the GBC are very happy to relegate the importance of this incident, being not even able to state exactly

what one of the statements mean, and claiming it does not have as much importance as other statements.

This thirteenth item falls within the realm of *sadhana-bhakti*, or a stage of spiritual advancement that is not the topmost platform of devotional service.

**PURPORT** Accepting an unlimited number of devotees or disciples is very risky for one who is not a preacher. According to Srila Jiva Goswami, a preacher has to accept many disciples to expand the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. This is risky because when a spiritual master accepts a disciple, he naturally accepts the disciple's sinful activities and their reactions. Unless he is very powerful, he cannot assimilate all the sinful reactions of his disciples and has to suffer the consequences. Therefore one is generally forbidden to accept many disciples.<sup>108</sup>

Accepting the sinful reactions of disciples happens only through *diksa*, or initiation, not through *siksa*. (See p. 109 above for more detailed information.) The guru referred to here, and in Easy Journey to Other Planets as well, must therefore be a *diksa-guru*.

But *diksa* is defined as accepting ALL the sinful reactions of one's disciples:

**"In other words, the spiritual master awakens the sleeping living entity to his original consciousness so that he can worship Lord Visnu. This is the purpose of *diksa*, or initiation. Initiation means receiving the pure knowledge of spiritual consciousness."**

(C.c. Madhya, 9.61, purport, emphasis added)

**"*Diksa* actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination."**

(C.c. Madhya, 4.111, purport, emphasis added)

**"*Diksa* is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *diksa*."**

(C.c. Madhya, 15.108, purport, emphasis added)

Yet Srila Prabhupada clearly states that these gurus do not accept ALL the sinful reactions of their disciples:

**"Unless he is very powerful, he cannot assimilate all the sinful reactions of his disciples and has to suffer the consequences."**

Note Srila Prabhupada does not state that all the reactions of SOME of the disciples are assimilated. This understanding is supported by the other place where Srila Prabhupada speaks of non-*uttama* *adhikari* gurus taking disciples:

**"One should not become a spiritual master unless he has attained the platform of *uttama-adhikari*. A neophyte Vaisnava or a Vaisnava situated on the intermediate platform can also accept disciples, but such disciples must be on the same platform, and it should be understood that they cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance. Therefore a disciple should be careful to accept an *uttama-adhikari* as a spiritual master."**

(*Nectar of Instruction*, Text 5, Purport)

It is clear that these non-*uttama* gurus cannot give *diksa* to their followers since they cannot reach the ultimate goal of life and receive insufficient guidance. Whereas we have just seen that *diksa* means 'receiving the pure knowledge of spiritual consciousness', not 'insufficient guidance'. Note here Srila Prabhupada does not state that SOME of the disciples advance, and others do not. But rather that NONE of them advance toward the ultimate goal of life, and therefore NONE of them receive *diksa*.

So in conclusion:

- a) Non-*uttama* gurus are not be accepted, nor should a person aspire to become such a guru.
- b) Further such a guru is not able to give *diksa* to their disciples, being unable to assimilate ALL their sinful reactions or give them full knowledge.
- c) Most importantly, this literal acceptance of the words used by Srila Prabhupada is the only possible understanding lest we foist a contradiction on Srila Prabhupada, since as even the paper admits in response to Srila Prabhupada stating that 'only a topmost devotee must be a *diksa* guru':

**"So it would seem that one must first become a *maha-bhagavata* before one may accept disciples."**

And as stated previously, the outcome of the issue of the necessary qualification of the *diksa* guru does not in any case affect the outcome of this debate, which is the time-frame of the July 9th directive. If the time-frame is shown to be the life of ISKCON, then future *diksa* gurus will have no place in ISKCON and therefore their necessary qualification is irrelevant.

## Conclusion

We have shown that arguments presented in defence of the *ritvik* position heavily employ fallacies of equivocation, improper accent, and whimsical interpretations to establish their doctrine.

No, as we have seen the arguments used by the paper were not only false, but were in any case completely irrelevant to the *ritvik* position, which is that Srila Prabhupada is the *diksa* guru of ISKCON. Even if all these arguments the paper gave were true, they would still not directly impact TFO's conclusion that the July 9th directive is applicable to ISKCON.

It has been shown that the *ritvik* viewpoint rejects the fundamental Vaisnava doctrine of *guru-sadhu-sastra* as a means of objectively deciding controversial issues.

Again **another straw-man argument**. We accept this doctrine, and the fact that Srila Prabhupada as the bona fide guru embodies this doctrine, since the guru is automatically always in line with *sadhu* and *sastra*.

With regard to the intended time-frame of the July 9, 1977 letter, we demonstrate two things: that the duration of the *ritvik* initiation system cannot be determined from the July 9, 1977 letter alone, and that the validity of the July 9 letter is limited to the time of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance.

The first assertion has been shown to be false, but the latter assertion is not even **MADE** by the paper! It seems that the author of the paper does not even remember what was written earlier. The paper only tries to argue that the time-frame of the July 9th directive is **NOT 'indefinite'**, but never states that the directive must cease on Srila Prabhupada's departure.

TFO's claim that Srila Prabhupada received an explicit order to accept disciples, separate from the order to preach, is refuted.

The paper only refutes the idea that there was an explicit nomination for the next *acharya* of the Gaudiya Matha, an idea that is neither put forward by TFO nor relevant to what Srila Prabhupada actually did.

## Summary Conclusion

The GBC's paper, as we have seen, is very strange for what is supposedly a scholarly submission. Their paper:

1. Contains arguments using references which they themselves do not accept.
2. Is written by someone who himself does not have full faith in his GBC guru.
3. Is mostly full of straw-man arguments, which is unusual considering that one is expected to at least be aware of the position one is refuting, and this requires no more scholarly ability than that of being able to read.
4. Contains a number of accusations, where there is not even an attempt made at substantiation. Again, bizarre for a scholarly submission whose sole aim was to rebut an opposing position.
5. And finally, we have masses of text devoted to offering arguments, which even if they were correct, would not affect the conclusion of the position which is being rebutted. This one assumes was done simply therefore to fill up space, to try and disguise the sheer paucity of the GBC's arguments. Indeed, the paper even offers 3 pages at the end, offering an admitted '*crystal ball*' speculation as to what could happen in the future. We have ignored this section entirely, not wishing to contribute to such speculation in what is supposed to be a scholarly submission. Indeed, the paper devotes more text to this '*crystal-ball gazing*' section than it does to examining what is admitted as being the core of the debate – **the time-frame of the July 9th directive**.
6. And the only arguments the paper offered, which could possibly have any relevance to the conclusion of TFO, were shown in the Executive Summary to be full of straw-man arguments from beginning to end.

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