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Jesus is relevant to all aspects of our lives and the world around us. God has always cared about injustice, pain and oppression, and works against it through his people until Jesus returns at the end of time and puts all things right.

It is the age old answer to the emptiness and futility that people experience when they do not know God as a friend and a father for themselves.

***New Age Promise: Age Old Problem?* in attractive format is available from Evangelical Alliance, London. See Journal Information. Here is it slightly edited and without illustrations. p. 135**

The Reincarnation of the Soul

Vishal Mangalwadi

Reprinted with permission from The Seer, April and October 1990, this part of a chapter in the author's forthcoming book In Search of Self: A Journey Beyond the New Age

If the claim of opinion polls is true, that 27 British adults in every hundred now believe in reincarnation, then the Christian Church must re-centre its evangelistic message if it is going to meet effectively this apologetic challenge. This forceful article by a credible Indian Christian apologist unmasks much of the sentimentality and wishful thinking about reincarnation. The biblical doctrine of the final resurrection of all human beings is good news to those who trust in the resurrected Christ for their salvation but bad news for those whose hope is only in reincarnation. Neither a crass materialistic resurrection, as in Islam, nor a spiritualized reincarnation as in Hinduism can satisfy the human longing for peace and justice now and eternally. The resurrection of Jesus Christ holds the key to our understanding of the solution to the present political, economic and ecological crises, and the meaning of death and life beyond death.

Editor

Millions of people all over the world are getting excited about the doctrine of transmigration or reincarnation of the soul. This doctrine, technically called *metempsychosis*, teaches that human souls do not die at physical death but are reborn into different bodies many more times.

It is true that scientists never did disprove the existence of the soul, and that their efforts to reduce mind and self-consciousness to the biological brain never did succeed. As neurologist Wilder Penfield said in his paper for the Conference of Brain Researchers held at the Vatican in 1966: 'If we are good scientists, we cannot claim that science has already explained the mind.' In other words, man has a solid core to his personality from which his decisions emanate; a core which, Penfield says, 'controls his thinking and directs the search-light of his attention'.

Yet it is equally true that the scientists who assumed that the material world was the only reality did succeed in persuading several generations to accept their belief that the soul and the supernatural were all that there was to reality.

Dr. Raymond A. Moody, whose book *Life After Life* sold over 3 p. 136 million copies, studies 300 cases of people who either had close encounters with death or who were actually pronounced clinically dead by doctors, but revived. These people claimed, in remarkably similar ways, that during their experience of death, they left their bodies, they saw and heard the doctors who were trying to revive them and they met dead relatives, other spirits and a Being of light.

Dr. Moody admits, 'Not one of the cases I have looked into is in any way indicative to me that reincarnation occurs.' But he adds, 'However, it is important to bear in mind that not one of them rules out reincarnation either' (*Life After Life*, Bantam Books, 1988, page 141).

Hollywood actress and entertainer Shirley MacLaine, for example, describes experiences in Peru when her soul left her body lying by the Mantaro riverside, and flew around for a while. (*Out on a Limb*, Bantam Books, 1984, pages 327–329).

We can discuss the empirical strengths and weaknesses of research in parapsychology, as well as the scientific integrity of the researchers, to assess whether or not their conclusions about the existence of the mind or soul as distinct from the brain are valid. But this is not the relevant point here. The simple fact is that millions of people have attested to direct experiences of the spirit world—faith, healing, mediums (channels), spirits, possession, and exorcism. Their faith in the reality of the soul is strengthened by the research in parapsychology, but it does not rest upon it. They know the soul and the supernatural reality from their own first-hand experience. And they are simply not willing to accept a view that reduces them to the level of monkeys or machines.

THE CASE FOR REINCARNATION

We need to realize that for those who believe in reincarnation, the weakness of empirical evidence is compensated for by the pragmatic advantages of their belief. It is worthwhile summarizing some of these.

1. *The doctrine of reincarnation gives a plausible explanation to inexplicable suffering and inequalities.*

Why is a child born lame, poor, blind, 'unwanted female' or an 'untouchable'? When the disciples of Jesus saw a beggar who was born blind they asked, 'Master, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' ([John 9:2](#)).

The belief that the good or bad actions (*karma*) of one life determine the future incarnations gives a plausible explanation of undeserved suffering in a previous life. In 1860 the Unitarian clergyman Rev. W. R. Alger wrote in his monumental work *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* that the 'theory of the transmigration of souls p. 137 is marvellously adapted to explain the seeming chaos of moral inequality, injustice, and manifold evil presented in the world of human life'.

2. *The doctrine of reincarnation gives basis for hope to imperfect, ignorant humans.*

One short life of 60–80 years is simply not enough for anyone to become perfect, to realize one's ambitions and achieve one's goals including the desire to know the truth. If man has to find the truth and become perfect, he just has to have many lives. If this one life is all that one has, in which to find truth, then there is no hope. But faith in reincarnation gives hope that through experiences and information received in millions of lives one can get to know the truth and become perfect.

3. *The belief in reincarnation seems to give respect for all life.*

If animals and plants also have souls, and if there is a possibility that I may be reborn as an animal or a plant one day, then I ought to treat all life with respect and develop ecologically responsible behaviour.

4. The belief in reincarnation puts one in the company of great sages.

In *Kathopanishad*, which is considered to be the backbone of philosophical Hinduism, Yama, the lord of death, himself teaches what happens to the soul after death:

Well then, O Gautama, I will explain the mysterious and ancient *Brahman*, and also what happens to the soul after death. Some souls enter the womb to have a body, others to the plants according to their work and according to their knowledge (*section V, 6 & 7*).

Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, built his entire religious system on the cornerstone of the doctrine of reincarnation, even though he does not seem to have believed in an unchanging, substantial soul itself. According to Buddhism the individual, as such, ceases to exist at death, but his *karma* survives and passes on in the form of "germ of consciousness" (*viññāna*) to the womb of another, there to grow into a new individual.

Even though the belief in reincarnation as central doctrine has been confirmed mainly to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism for the past three millennia, it is indeed a very ancient idea that existed in many creeds throughout the world. The ancient Egyptians practised embalming the dead to prevent or delay reincarnation. The Greek Philosopher Plato accepted the Orphico-Pythagorean views that the soul is immortal, the number of souls is fixed and that reincarnation occurs regularly. The Tibetan Book of the Dead (edited by W. Y. Evans Wentz p. 138 and published by the Oxford University Press in New York in 1957) has exerted much influence in our day to inspire belief in reincarnation.

5. The belief in reincarnation helps those who are dying.

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, at least in the early part of her career, effectively promoted the use of belief in reincarnation to comfort terminally ill patients. In a recent book, *Death—the Final Stage of Growth* (Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster Inc., New York, 1975) she does not seem to be promoting that any more. Perhaps this is due to a recognition that the doctrine is at best a double edged sword. If it comforts some dying patients, it can add to the guilt of others, about their unknown *karma* of the previous lives which produced the present illness. It can also create anxiety about what the *karma* of this life will produce in the next life. In those who pursue the logic of reincarnation more rigorously it can breed a hatred of life itself, as it has in the Indian sub-continent.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna used the belief in reincarnation to inspire Arjuna to kill his cousins. Thus, if the doctrine helps some to accept death by trivializing it, it can inspire others to kill, on the same grounds that death is after all unreal.

THE CASE AGAINST REINCARNATION

1. Reincarnation does not Guarantee a Memory of a Previous Life.

The believers in reincarnation often argue that an eight-year-old child can display great mathematical, linguistic or musical genius because of the skills acquired in previous lives. But Tertullian, an early church father, asked, 'Why is it that an adult soul is always reborn as an infant?' For every child who claims to remember his previous life, there are several million who do not remember. Therefore, the basic question that the reincarnationists need to answer is not 'What makes a soul a child prodigy?' or 'What accounts for love-at-first-sight?' but 'Why don't all souls reincarnate with experiences or memories of previous lives?' If they did, they would know why they have the sufferings and joys of their present lives. Such memories will also help them 'evolve' faster.

If 'love-at-first-sight' is a result of a relationship in a previous life, then why does it happen only after puberty? If child prodigies are to be explained by a faith in

reincarnation, then does it mean that we are not to study their brain structure or learning environment?

2. Reincarnation Precludes Responsibility and Repentance.

The fact that most people have no memory of previous existence implies that the explanation of evil and suffering offered by the [p. 139](#) doctrine of reincarnation is very weak. If I am unfortunate enough to be born an 'untouchable', black, a woman, or blind as a punishment for a deed that I did in a previous life which I do not remember, then how can I repent for it or reform and perfect myself? How can I take responsibility for what I don't remember? If I am a bonded labourer or a slave today because of my previous *karma* (deeds), then how can my owner be considered immoral or unjust? Punishment is just and meaningful only when I know the evil for which I am being punished.

3. Reincarnation hinders the Motive to Relieve Suffering.

Not only is the explanation for suffering and evil in the doctrine of reincarnation very weak; it actually hinders our commitment to alleviate suffering. If a man is starving in this life because of his evil in a previous life, why should we interfere? If a person is suffering because of his *karma* in a previous life, then any effort to alleviate his suffering amounts to interfering with the cosmic justice of the law of *karma*. It is like breaking into a jail to free a criminal, who has been judicially awarded life-imprisonment for a gruesome murder.

When Christ's disciples wondered out loud if the congenial blindness of the beggar was due to his sins committed prior to the present birth, the Lord Jesus rejected their speculative theory ([John 9:1-7](#)) because Jesus considered it to be his disciples' and his own duty and privilege to care for the blind beggar. He therefore healed the blind man. When this beggar became a victim of social ostracism ([John 9:34](#)), Jesus must have welcomed him into his community as he did the other blind beggars whose eyes he opened and who stopped begging ([Mark 10:46-52](#)).

In contrast, a professor of Hindu at Delhi University said that acts of compassion on behalf of those suffering were foolish: if we did succeed in cutting short someone's suffering, he would still have to be reborn to complete his due term of suffering; so what is the use of interfering with the law of *karma*? It is because of this doctrine of *karma* and reincarnation that, in spite of the Buddha's teaching on compassion (*karuna*), India never developed a tradition of compassionate social service.

In contrast to Hinduism, which exalted the violence of animal and human sacrifice and one's *dharma* to kill, Buddha put great emphasis on *karuna* (compassion) and *metteya* (the sentiment of friendliness). 'The righteous monk is sympathetic and merciful, and strives with friendly feeling for the good of all living things.' But, as Richard Lannoy concludes in his classic work, *The Speaking Tree*, 'by this compassion and friendliness Buddha does not imply active love, for active love feeds attachment to earthly cares; and though Buddhism is [p. 140](#) an ethic of inner perfection like the teachings of Christ, it does not promote *active* compassion. The Christian idea that evil in the world can be transformed into good is not to be found in the teaching of Buddha, who is silent on the question of redemption of the world' (Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 330).

Buddha sees life as suffering: birth is suffering, old age is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with what one loves not is suffering, to be separated from what one loves is suffering, not to attain one's desires is suffering! Desires lead us from birth to rebirth. Therefore desires have to be eliminated.

'The perfect man' for Buddha is one 'who cares not for others, who has no relations'. To a father who has lost his only son Buddha says, 'What one loves brings woe and

lamentation.’ In order to attain liberation from the cycles of births and deaths, Buddha abandoned his own wife and child; how then can he teach commitment to others who need our love and care? His is an ethic of compassion without enduring commitment. This is the best that belief in reincarnation can give.

4. Reincarnation leads to a Selfish Asceticism.

In *Katha Upanishad*, the god of death, Lord Yama, says that attachment to the material world is the cause of repeated (births and) deaths: ‘Fools, swelling in the very midst of ignorance, by fancying themselves as wise and learned, go round and round staggering to and fro, like the blind led by the blind. The truth of the Hereafter does not shine before that child (childish person) who is ineffective and can be fooled by the delusion of wealth. “This world (seen by the senses) is, and there is no other”; thinking thus, he falls into my [death’s] clutches again and again.’

The history of the Indian sub-continent shows that besides undercutting our commitment to other human beings, the belief in reincarnation also leads to asceticism that is a negation of life itself—at least in our attitudes. Rebirth is considered necessary for us to take the good and bad consequences of our karma. If we want salvation or deliverance from the cycle of repeated births and deaths, we have to come to a state of mind where we act or do our duty without desire for rewards. All desires have to be killed, and it has to be duty for duty’s sake. Krishna calls this attitude *Nishkama Karma* in the *Bhagvad Gita*. Asceticism implies detachment from body, life, relationships, and the world. In Jainism, religious austerities necessary to prevent reincarnation go as far as to renounce clothes and eventually food itself. To starve oneself to death becomes the ultimate spirituality. Buddha taught that those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain. p. 141 Therefore, far from making us ecologically responsible citizens, the doctrine of reincarnation has all but turned India into a desert by making us detached from the world, utterly self centred, concerned more for our own soul’s progress than for the people and the world around us.

5. Reincarnation Justifies Racism and Sexism.

It is true that a person like Shirley MacLaine finds it a comfort to know that a soul is born sometimes as a male and other times as a female. Reincarnation to her, therefore, implies the equality of sexes. Ironically, however, it is the doctrine of transmigration which has traditionally sustained racism and sexism in Indian society. As Romila Thapar says in *A History of India* (Penguin Books, 1975, p. 46), ‘The doctrine of *karma* also provided a philosophical justification for caste. One’s birth into a lower or higher caste was also dependent on one’s actions in a previous life.’ The logic of reincarnation has been, ‘You are born an untouchable or a woman to serve me because of your past karma’. The doctrine was formulated to justify inequalities and suffering, not the equality of all people. Giving religious justification to untouchability (racism) and oppression of women (sexism) is one of the most inhuman consequences of this belief.

6. Both early Hinduism and Christianity Repudiate Reincarnation.

Before we consider the most important aspects of the case against reincarnation it should perhaps be pointed out that by no means all or most saints and seers have espoused this doctrine. Within India, for example, the teaching of the most ancient and authoritative scriptures, the *Vedas*, states that departed spirits lived in a shadowy world called *Pitri Loka* (a world of ancestors), which is comparable to the abode of Hades for the Greeks. As Nirad Chaudhuri points out in his authoritative book, *Hinduism*, Hindu mortuary rites,

which continue to this day, are meant to secure the entry of departed souls 'into the world and after that to provide for their sustenance there ...' (B.I. Publications, New Delhi 1979), page 152.) This original Vedic understanding ruled out reincarnation. The Encyclopedia Britannica says, 'The first formulation of the doctrine of transmigration is found in the early Upanishads (c. 600 BC)', i.e. at least half a millennium after the *Vedas* were composed.

Many later Hindu scriptures have elaborate teaching on heavens and hells where the departed souls live, instead of reincarnating. Traditionally Islamic and Judeo-Christian prophets have also rejected the doctrine of reincarnation. The Old Testament saint, Job, who experienced much 'inexplicable' suffering, did not see it as a result of *karma* in a past life. He understood death as going 'to the place of no p. 142 return' ([Job 10:21](#)). As we have already seen, Jesus firmly repudiated the view of his disciples that the man may have been born blind because of his sin prior to this birth ([John 9:3](#)). The Lord Jesus taught that after death there is judgement and then the wicked 'will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life' ([Matthew 25:46](#), see also John: [5:28-29](#)). The claim of many New Age writers is that Jesus taught reincarnation, which was later removed from doctrinal statements. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, 'Within the Christian Church it [the belief in reincarnation] was held by isolated gnostic sects during the first centuries and by the Manichaeans in the 4th and 5th centuries, but was invariably repudiated by the orthodox theologians.' (See article on *Metempsychosis*). The belief was rejected by the church as heresy first of all because after his death Jesus was not reincarnated in another body, but resurrected in the same. His tomb was empty and his disciples saw his nail-pierced hands. But reincarnation was also rejected because it goes against the basic teachings of the Bible, such as these:

a. *This world*, even though under a curse, is essentially good and not a place of punishment, where souls are sent to be in bondage of the body to take the consequences of their *karma* ([Genesis 1:31](#)).

b. *The human body*, though subject to decay and death due to original sin, is essentially good and to be enjoyed. It is redeemable and will be saved by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ ([1 Cor. 15](#)).

c. *Our individuality*, though finite, is good and eternal. We are meant to live forever as God's children, not lose our individuality by merging into an impersonal universal consciousness ([John 3:16](#)).

d. Even though we must deny ourselves to follow Christ and to serve others, we are not to espouse asceticism or practice austerities for earning merit. The New Testament says that asceticism is a diabolical teaching:

The (Holy) Spirit dearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons ... they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving ... For everything God created is good ([1 Timothy 4:1-5](#)).

e. *The judgement of our sin* is essentially a future event at the end of this age. We are accountable before a personal and holy God, not an impersonal law of *karma*. When our accounts are open we will know the sins we are being punished for ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

f. *Salvation* is not by the human effort in millions of lives but by God's grace shown in Christ. Therefore through repentance for sin and p. 143 faith in Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness, we can be saved in this life itself ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

7. Reincarnation Undercuts Philosophical Foundations of Morality.

In her book *Out On A Limb* Shirley MacLaine uses reincarnation to justify:

(i) Homosexuality—A soul which was female in its previous life and is male now is working out the residual *karma* in this life with the soul which was its husband than (p. 199).

(ii) Adultery—MacLaine's politician boyfriend Gerry and she are working out the *karmas* of a previous life; therefore his wife should not look upon it as unfaithfulness to her (p. 201). At one point MacLaine even suggests, albeit guardedly, that even the 60 million Jews killed in Hitler's Germany were simply working out their collective *karma* from previous lives. Such blatant justification of immorality becomes possible because the Law of Karma is ultimately viewed as an amoral, unknowable law—'a cosmic joke' (p. 363).

The theory of *karma* which lies behind the belief in reincarnation undercuts the foundations of morality, because it views morality as a mechanical cause and effect system.

A friend of mine, a believer in *karma* and reincarnation, was raging and fuming because a cook had cheated him of Rs. 150. He wanted my sympathy and support. But I said, 'Don't you think that he did it because you had taken Rs. 150 from him in a previous life?' My friend became quiet and said 'Maybe not in a past life, but I cheated someone of Rs. 150 in this life.'

He grasped in an instant that a belief in *karma* and reincarnation does not permit us to say that *anything* is morally wrong.

This is so because the Law of Karma is viewed as a mechanical law of cause and effect. 'If you cheat someone of Rs. 150 you will get the identical result'. But in reality the logical connection between an ethical choice and its consequence is a personal one. When a mother says to her child, 'If you are mean to your sister, then you will not go with us to the picnic', there is no mechanical cause and effect relationship between meanness and picnic. Their logical connection is a personal one—the decision of a person in authority, in this case the mother. The term 'personal' here does not mean 'private'. It implies that the sense of morals is a characteristic of personality but not of machines; moral laws are laws of persons. Moral laws of human persons are temporary. Moral laws of the divine 'person' (God) are eternal. There are consequences of breaking moral laws, but they are not cause and effect consequences; they are decisions of the person in authority whose law we have broken. p. 144

This perspective makes forgiveness of sin possible, in contrast to the mechanical perspective which rules out the possibility of forgiveness. If the child says, 'I am sorry Mummy' and 'I am sorry, sister, I will not do it again; please forgive me', he can go on the picnic.

Likewise, when we break God's law, we can find forgiveness if we come to him with repentance and brokenness of heart. But this possibility is ruled out when the moral law is conceived of as mechanical—if you put your hand in the fire, it must burn.

8. Reincarnation Negates Our Individual Identity and Significance.

One of the most tragic and ironic consequences of belief in reincarnation is that it implies the opposite of what its modern adherents seek. That is, instead of affirming our value as individuals it negates it. Instead of offering immortality it offers eternal death, the extinction of our individuality, as our salvation. If Shobha Ram becomes Jasbir, then Nirmala and then a lizard in my garden, then do any of these individual personalities have any uniqueness or significance? Within India, where the logic of reincarnation has been better understood than in the West, individuality has been acknowledged as illusory. The corollary of the idea of reincarnation is that 'an unchanging reality subsists beneath all apparent change'. There is nothing comparable in India, though, to the western idea of

unrepeatable events, unique historical *avtaras*, or messiahs, an exclusive God, and exclusive true religion or a standard of constant value. And since empirical reality is subject to the law of *karma* and rebirth, there is no eternal individual soul' (Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*, p. 284). In simple words, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, your belief that you exist as an individual is your bondage. Liberation means to be freed from this illusory experience of individuality.

The doctrine of reincarnation not only negates the significance and uniqueness of your individuality; it opens the door to murder by trivializing death.

9. Reincarnation Trivializes Death.

Sri Krishna teaches in the *Bhagvad Gita* that death is like changing clothes; just as you discard worn-out clothes, so does a soul discard one body to adopt a new one. The soul is never really born and never dies. Krishna says to Arjuna, 'Thou dost feel pity where pity has no place, wise men feel no pity either for what dies or what lives. There never was a time when I and thou were not in existence, and all these princes too, nor will the day ever, hereafter, when all of us shall cease to be ...' This is why Shirley MacLaine says that 'our belief in death was the gravest unreality of all' (*Out on a Limb*, p. 437). In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna propounded this view of death to motivate Arjuna to kill his p. 145 cousins, whom he was hesitating to kill. One can accept the moral justification of a righteous war and see it as one's sad duty. But this trivialization of death had disastrous consequences. In India it has justified the widespread practice of widow and leper burning, infant drowning and human sacrifice.

The lepers, for example, were not loved and cared for but buried and burnt alive, on the grounds that a violent end purifies the body and ensures transmigration in a healthy new existence, while natural death by disease results in four successive births and the fifth as a leper. This belief was resisted and care for lepers began only when William Carey, the first English missionary in India, began to challenge it, and opened an asylum for lepers. Carey also opposed the drowning of infants in the holy river Ganges and had infanticide declared illegal. This was followed by an anti-*sati* campaign which lasted a quarter of a century.

The whole widespread tradition of human sacrifice in India was sanctified by belief in reincarnation. Out of all the better developed religious systems in the world, only Hinduism put man as the prime sacrificial animal. Men and animals have the same souls; but as Nirad Chaudhuri says, 'In Hindu rituals he was the first among animals' (*Hinduism*, p. 75). A neighbour of ours who killed his unwanted infant daughter rationalized it on the grounds that 'death is unreal; she can come back next year as a boy. What is the use of her suffering now and making the life of the rest of the family miserable?'

Many believers in reincarnation in the West justify abortion on exactly the same grounds.

10. Reincarnation mocks our aspiration for immortality.

In India the doctrine of reincarnation has bred a fear of life itself, and an ambivalence towards a concern for its welfare. Even in Egypt where the doctrine is assumed to have originated, the embalming of the dead was done to prevent or delay reincarnation.

Swami Ranganathananda, an outstanding Hindu scholar and preacher, confesses in his book *The Message of the Upanishads* (Bombay, Bharitya Vidhaya Bhawan, 1971):

Two sentiments that are more often associated with the idea of salvation in India are disgust for the world and fear of rebirth ... [our] religious books are heavy with these two sentiments. And our people in general have sought in religion only one blessing, a

cessation from rebirth. This fear of life, this hope of salvation, this intense desire to escape from rebirth, have gone so far as to throw into the shade the problems and prospects of the brief spell of human life on earth. This helped to develop a negative attitude which, in its extreme forms, illustrated the sentiments in the lines of a [p. 146](#) German poet:

Sweet is sleep; death is better
But it is best never to have been born.

This negative attitude has been digging deep into the Indian mind during the last thousand years.

Shirley MacLaine's silence on the question 'Are souls reborn as animals and plants?' suggests that beneath all the excitement about the doctrine of reincarnation in the New Age movement, may be a lurking fear that after all it is not a very pleasant doctrine. Because Hinduism assumes that the whole universe is Divine the Hindu scriptures, such as *Manusmriti*, go into great detail specifying which deeds will lead to what kind of animal birth. It is all very well to assume that evolution is a pre-determined fact, therefore through endless cycles of births and death a soul will finally and inevitably attain liberation. But on what grounds do you base optimism? Within the Hindu scriptures it has been understood that very few and rare souls in fact do attain salvation. As Lannoy summarizes, 'There is no kingdom of heaven on earth in Hinduism; unity is either atemporal, mystical, private or temporal, cyclical and collective. Overarching the entire system is the Cycle of Brahma. The inexorable law of eternal renewal, within which the cosmos and man are successively born, degenerate and die; at the most a few rare souls dissolve into the inexhaustible plenitude of the divine substratum, while the collective fitfully attains partial enlightenment on the wheel of rebirth until another year of Brahma ends. A cosmic holocaust ensures that the whole process begins again' (*The Speaking Tree*, p. 212).

Logically, belief in evolution and *karma* just cannot be held together. If *karma* determines the state of the next life then bad *karma* necessarily means devolution in the next birth. According to the Hindu seers, the majority of souls never attain enlightenment; that is why the cycle continues. But what about those rare souls who do attain it? What do they get? Not immortality, but cessation of existence as an individual soul, eternal death. Life is bondage; death is salvation.

RESURRECTION—AN ALTERNATIVE

The biblical concept of the resurrection offers genuine immortality to the individual. The Bible teaches that the human being is not eternal and infinite. He is a creature who had a beginning and he will always remain a creature. Yet God breathed his own immortal life into man at creation ([Genesis 1:7](#)). Death came as a result of man's sin of rebellion against good in trying to be God ([Genesis 3](#)). [P. 147](#)

Death, therefore, is abnormal in the sense that it is not part of the original intention of God in creation. Death is an enemy, something to be resisted. The basic problem is not ignorance—that man is infinite God, but has forgotten it. Man's problem is sin. Man has rebelled against God, and therefore lost God's Spirit and become subject to decay and death.

Because man's problem is his disobedience to God, he does not need millions of lives to earn his salvation and the knowledge of his infinity. He can repent of his sin and find forgiveness and reconciliation with his Father in a moment. Salvation does not depend on man's efforts but on God's grace. Therefore one life is more than sufficient to find truth

and salvation—a salvation which includes the gift of the immortal spirit of God and eternal life in fellowship with God.

Resurrection affirms that man is more than a material body, but it does not minimize the body. The material universe, being God's creation, is good ([Genesis 1](#)). Man who was made with the dust of the earth was declared to be 'very good' by his Creator ([Genesis 1:31](#)). Resurrection does not mean my becoming something or someone else in the next life, but the same me, in the same body, being raised to life and being glorified just as the crucified body of Christ was raised to life. Resurrection offers hope and meaning, not simply for my life and for my body, but for my world as well. Because man was meant to be the Governor of the earth, his sin has subjected his planet also to decay and death. But as he finds forgiveness and salvation, the earth itself will be delivered from its bondage and renewed to become the dwelling place of God ([Romans 8:18–22](#)). Therefore my efforts to care for this world and make it beautiful have meaning and significance.

Belief in resurrection means that I do not have to fight against my individuality or be ashamed of my finiteness. I do not have to become detached from this world, my life and history. Eternal life is not a negation of what I am, but my fulfilment as a child of God.

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Genetic Engineering: Catastrophe or Utopia?

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For those with limited scientific background this article demands careful reading and re-reading. The ethical issues that are raised by genetic engineering may prove as critical in the 1990s as those raised by nuclear fission since the 1940s. The theological issues of the distinction between human and animal life is already high on the agenda. Our Christian stewardship of the earth's resources calls for clear biblical thinking and a courageous stand for ethical responses to those who are exploiting this new scientific knowledge for selfish ends and the illegal preparation of biological weapons for germ warfare. We cannot ignore the challenge of 'genetic engineering, catastrophe or utopia?' The author calls for a balance between our creativity and caution.

Editor

Genetics strikes a deep chord as it involves changing ourselves and controlling the future generation of life. We have gained the ability to adapt our environment to our genes, and are now learning how to adapt our genes to the environment.

We are called to be stewards of the earth ([Gen. 1:26](#), [28](#), [2:19](#); [Ps. 8:6–8](#), [24:1](#)). Stewardship is the proper use of human resources to change ourselves and the world and