

DEATH AND RESURRECTION: A PSYCHOLOGICAL READING

Rev. Fr. Cornelius Uche Okeke, Ph.D*

ABSTRACT

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ reconciled each human being and the whole of humanity to God. Death and resurrection are not simply events in the life of Jesus Christ. They represent a deep and unified psychological principle of human development. This principle is the common thread that runs through most developmental theories, whose trajectories depict an expected movement away from self-preoccupation to other-centeredness as a condition for development to proceed to full maturity. It is through dying to egoic narcissism that the individual grows into a full and mature adult capable of engaging other mature adults in civic responsibility. This work employs theories of human development by Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg to drive home this all important message. This idea is further backed by the concept of self-transcendence as the philosophical and theological grounding of human development.

Keywords: Death, Resurrection, psychology, human development

INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christianity. If Christ has not risen from the dead, Paul wrote, our faith and preaching would have been in vain (1 Cor 15:17). Resurrection stands out as the hinge upon which Christian preaching turns. But there would have been no resurrection if Jesus Christ had not truly died in the flesh. His definitive death on the cross is also linked to his incarnation. As St. Paul explains in the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), Jesus took flesh by emptying himself, by not clinging to his divinity and equality with God. He took flesh in obedience to the Father. His fundamental disposition to obey the Father started from incarnation and took him to the cross because he himself said that his food is to do the will of he who sent him (Jn 4:34). Therefore, the incarnation, passion, and death are events that show Jesus' total and radical self-gift in love and obedience to the Father. The resurrection is the vindication of Jesus' teaching and lifestyle. "God raised him and gave him a name which is above every name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." (Phil 2:9-11).

As central as the resurrection event is to Christianity and Christian life, it should never be separated from the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself linked his resurrection or glorification to his suffering and death. "Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). The only way to his glory is through suffering and death. In this way, he affirms that the abundant fruits to be realized at his resurrection would be the result of his suffering and dying. Farmers know that grains planted in the ground must die first to yield new fruits in abundance.

The intrinsic link between death and resurrection that is outlined in the life of Jesus Christ appears to be a universal principle at the heart of life itself. Beyond the redemption that Jesus Christ brought to humanity through his suffering, death, and resurrection, he also traced in his life the only valid way of living fully as a human being, namely, dying to the self! Theories of human development corroborate this principle. They trace the trajectory of how human beings grow to fullness of maturity from self-referential thinking and acting to other-directed thinking and acting. In other words, human beings mature as they grow from egocentric life to self-transcendence. For Bernard Lonergan (1972), it is the constant attention to this thrust toward self-transcendence that guarantees human fulfillment, a better human society, and human cooperation. In part 1 of this article, I will examine the developmental theories of Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg to illustrate how this principle of death and resurrection is the undercurrent that runs through the developmental stages outlined in their theories. The choice of these two theories is arbitrary. Any other developmental theory would serve the same purpose. Drawing from the philosophical and theological insights of Bernard Lonergan, I will, in part 2, demonstrate how the intentional living out of death and resurrection as an imperative of human development leads to better and fulfilled human life for individuals and societies.

PART I: FROM SELF TO OTHERS: INSIGHTS FROM THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Erik Erikson: Psychosocial Development

Erikson's psychosocial development has its roots in Freudian psychodynamic theory. But unlike Freud, who sees development happening through the exchange of intrapsychic forces rooted in biological instincts, Erikson understands human development as taking place in the interactional exchange between the self and the *other*. Now, this *other* is society, which includes other individuals and social institutions. Individuals grow and mature through a series of crises generated from personal needs clashing with the needs of *others*. The resolution of the challenges and crises of each stage prepares one for the challenges and crises of the next one. It is always a relationship between the self and the other, and always involves the management of one's personal needs and those of others and society. At each stage, the self is challenged to appropriate itself more in order to be open for a deeper and freer interaction with the *other* to be encountered in the next stage. If the self fails to appropriate itself at each stage, it leaves a residue of unfinished business, which is carried over to the next stage. The more these unresolved developmental issues accumulate over time, the deeper the struggles of the individual in dealing with the challenges of life posed by the ever-present *other*.

Erikson (1963) sets this psychosocial development in eight stages. The eight stages can be divided themselves into two levels. The first level, which can be described as infancy or childhood, embraces the first four stages. During this period of development, the child intensely struggles with the challenge of its biological and psychic organization, and all, in relation to the world. These are the challenges of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. The achievement of these virtues during these four stages provides the child with a sense of trust

in others and hope in the world, personal purpose, and competence in its ability to manage things and persons it encounters for its own benefit. These virtues give the child a sense of worthiness and self-confidence in both managing his biological and psychic life as well as the tools of survival in the world of work. “With the establishment of a good initial relationship to the world of skills and tools, and with the advent of puberty, childhood proper comes to an end. Youth begins.” (Erikson, 1963, p. 261).

The second level begins at stage five, with the arrival of puberty and its sexual turmoil. Stage five is a crucial stage because the adolescent is no longer a child but not yet a fully developed adult. He is in between childhood and adulthood. For this reason, Erikson describes the mind of an adolescent as the *moratorium*, a kind of waiting period where the adolescent struggles to reconcile the learned morality of childhood and the ethics to be learned as an adult (p. 263). It is a stage in which the adolescent faces the crisis of constructing a solid identity through relationships, appropriation of sexual identity, as well as a sense of career identity. If these aspects of identities are well managed and appropriated, the adolescent establishes a sense of sameness and continuity that prepares her to enter and succeed in the adult world. If not, she suffers identity confusion, which could affect her sexual and occupational identities. Adolescents with confused identity tend to “temporarily overidentify, to the point of apparent complete loss of identity with the heroes of cliques and crowds” (p. 262). That is why cults and gangs are attractive to adolescents because it makes them feel a sense of belonging and togetherness as individuals.

With the establishment of a healthy self-identity, the growing individual has a good foundation for the rest of her life. From stages six through eight, the individual grows and matures in moving her focus from herself to others. In stage six, she moves out of herself in search of intimacy, which fundamentally calls for the abandonment or forgetfulness of the self in caring for and receiving care from others. It is the stage of Caritas, empathy, and agapeic love for others. Erikson notes that “the avoidance of such experiences because of fear of ego loss may lead to a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption” (p. 264). From now on, the self that has been clearly delineated in the course of development must be ready to let go of itself in relating with others and the world in intimacy and commitments. Without this letting go, this dying to the self, this self-abandonment, the individual ends up in self-absorption. Self-absorption is self-isolation. It leads to all forms of psychopathology or “character problems” (p.266), which in today’s diagnostic terms are called personality disorders. Sometimes, two isolated individuals, form what Erikson calls “an isolation *à deux*” (p. 266), an unhealthy relationship pattern in which two isolated individuals try to create a quasi-relationship but end up in a destructive and unfulfilling co-dependent relationship. Isolated individuals seek love but are incapable of giving or receiving love! To be able to give and receive love, as the purpose of stage six, the individual must be willing to let go of *herself*, which supposedly has been securely achieved in the course of the preceding stages.

As development enters stage seven, the growing adult loses *herself* more in taking care of future generations. It is the stage of *generativity*. The key word here is “care” of others. It is about mentorship and parenting. The whole focus is on the future generations, the future of society, and of peoples! Erikson notes clearly that “the mere fact of having or even wanting children does not achieve generativity” (p. 267). Some parents are not able to care for their children. The reasons why some parents cannot care for their children are the same reasons

why some adults are unable to mentor future generations. These reasons are to be found “in excessive self-love based on a too strenuously self-made personality; and in the lack of some faith, some ‘belief in the species,’ which would make a child appear to be a welcome trust of the community” (p. 267). Excessive self-love or self-absorption makes it impossible to give oneself fully to the care of future generations. It is the same self-centeredness that makes it difficult for the individual to love and care for children as the carriers of tradition and the future of the community. Again, if the *self* does not die, it will be difficult to be generative as one matures. The result of this absence is stagnation and personal impoverishment. Individuals in this situation often “begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own – or one another’s – one and only child; and where conditions favor it early invalidism, physical or psychological, becomes the vehicle of self-concern” (p. 267). With this excessive attention to the self in disregard for others, the individual, though an adult, feels and acts like an only child that needs all the attention and care. Whenever the individual cares for others, it is not freely given; there must be an underlying motive to return the care back to herself. The self is at the center; a self that has refused to die. But because it has refused to die, it is a stagnated self, devoid of life irrespective of all the care and concern it receives.

“Only in him who in some way has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being, the originator of others or the generator of products and ideas – only in him may gradually ripen the fruit of these seven stages” (p. 268). This is how Erikson introduces the eighth stage of integrity. An individual who has matured at this stage of integrity does not fear death because, over the years, he has given himself fully to life, to the care of others, and for the keeping of the human community. *Herself* was poured out in care, productivity, and agapeic love for the human race and future generations. Erikson notes that it is “a post-narcissistic love of the human ego as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for” (p. 268). It is in dying to itself in self-giving to others that the *self* reclaims itself fully. “The style of integrity developed by his culture or civilization thus becomes ‘the patrimony of his soul,’ the seal of his moral paternity of himself. In such final consolidation, death loses its sting” (p. 268). On the other hand, holding on to the self, and refusing to let go of it in care for others and the world, results in a sense of despair as one grows older. “Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity” (p. 269).

Despair is regret; it is the final sense of failure for having lived an egocentric life. It is the result of self-absorption, a failure of the human project in an individual to bear the fruits of self-giving in intimacy with others and the world. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it falls and dies, it will bear abundant fruit (John 12:23-24). There is no resurrection without death to the self. And nothing is so pitiable than the sight of an old and dying man immersed in the despair of un-lived life, locked in the soliloquy of the self! Erikson makes the point that human life grows and matures through the progressive surrender of the self. It has to be a consistent weaning of the self from narcissistic attachments for the experience of freedom to love, care and giving of oneself fully for the world and future generations. As the individual enters into intimacy with others and with the world, she discovers the depth of herself in and through those encounters. It is this progressive self-discovery in relationship with others that liberates the self from the prison of excessive narcissism and returns a healthy *self* back to the individual. This healthy self grows

and matures to the extent that it leaves its abode in the care of others. The inability of Narcissus to leave himself is a serious dilemma in human development. As Louis Lavelle (1973) beautifully describes this dilemma: "He shuts himself up, alone with himself, to keep company with himself: but in this total self-sufficiency on which he pins his hopes, he discovers his own impotence" (p. 34). It is this impotence that underlies despair and an existential sense of failure as one enters the final stage of one's life in this world. It is the active rejection of the principle of death and resurrection that undermines meaningful human existence.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg's theory should better be described as a theory of moral reasoning rather than moral development because he is interested in the reasoning behind moral decisions and not just moral conduct. His theory derived from his findings about how children of various ages resolved a moral dilemma: a woman who was near death could potentially be cured by a drug developed by a pharmacist in the neighbourhood. The pharmacist wanted 10 times more than it cost him to make the drug and more than the sick woman's husband, Heinz, could afford. Despite desperate pleas and appeals to consider the woman's condition, the pharmacist refused to sell the drug for anything less than the price he wanted. Heinz considered breaking into the pharmacy and stealing the drug to save his wife. Kohlberg asked the respondents to comment on Heinz's potential decision to steal the drug and give reasons for their comments. From the analysis of the responses, Kohlberg proposed that individuals pass through three broad levels of moral development (reasoning) – pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each level has two stages. As individuals progress from level one to level three, their moral reasoning becomes more complex, encompassing, comprehensive, and differentiated.

A closer look at the three levels and the stages shows a clear progression from self-referential moral reasoning at the pre-conventional level through conventional morality to post-conventional reasoning that is based more on broad and abstract principles that ground social contracts and personal ethics.

At the first level, which includes stages one and two, the individual's moral reasoning is largely based on reward and punishment. Something is wrong if it is punishable, and good if it is rewarded. The reason for moral reasoning and conduct is to avoid punishment and to be rewarded. That is why it is rooted in self-interest. At this level, the individual does not think of others at all except as a source of punishment or reward. It is moral narcissism. No objective grounds for right or wrong conduct. As Kail, R.V. & Cavanaugh J.C. (2004) summarize: "Stage 2 individuals are nice to others because they expect the favor to be returned in the future. Someone at this stage could justify stealing the drug because Heinz's wife might do something nice for Heinz in return. Or they might argue that Heinz shouldn't steal the drug because it will create more problems for him if his wife remains bedridden and he is burdened with caring for her." (p. 322). The morality of Level One individuals is transactional: good is to be done not because it is good in itself but because it will benefit oneself. Morality is about self-preservation or self-promotion.

Individuals at the second level, have made progress from the excessive self-referential morality of the preceding level to an appreciation of the importance of social norms that hold societies together and create social order. The self can still be preserved by living according

to conventional laws, without question. The good of the individual is promoted through the promotion of the good of everyone as guaranteed by social norms and laws. For this reason, it is important to maintain the social norms, social expectations, and roles prescribed by the particular group, society, or tradition. “Stage 4 individuals might reason that Heinz shouldn’t steal the drug, even though his wife might die, because it is illegal and no one is above the law. Alternatively, they might claim that he should steal it to live up to his marriage vow of protecting his wife, even though he will face negative consequences for his theft” (p. 322). In either reasoning, what is decisive is obedience to the social norms. The preoccupation of the individual is the preservation of social order or convention because it ensures the preservation of the individual. It is a significant progress from the earlier self-referential morality. Here, the individual seeks to protect his group because the survival of his group implies his own survival and unquestionable obedience to the traditions also provides him with a secure grounding in the group. It is an advanced form of self-interest because it recognizes the importance of others and groups through which the individual survives.

At the post-conventional level, moral reasoning finds its grounding no longer in self-preservation or group preservation but in principles that transcend individual and group morality. Moral codes seek to promote the welfare of everyone in the group with whom people have entered the social contract. And if any of the laws no longer promotes the welfare of the members, they become invalid and non-functional. This is the basis for social agitations that call for constitutional reforms. Stage 5 individuals might reason that “Heinz should steal the drug because social rules about property rights no longer benefit individuals’ welfare” (p. 323). What distinguishes this level from the conventional level is the implicit possibility of questioning and revising the conventional laws. At the conventional level, conventions and traditions become sacrosanct, for they keep everyone in line. “Authority is internalized but not questioned” (McLeod, S. 2023). At the post-conventional level, social contractual laws are obeyed as long as they support and promote the welfare of everyone. At the sixth stage, individuals ground their moral reasoning and conduct on a more personal ethical code, which include the abstract values of justice, compassion, and equality of all men and women. The self has become freed from self-preoccupation and has given itself to the pursuit of universal good for all men and women. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi, and Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta are historical examples of people who lived at this level of moral reasoning and moral action. In pursuit of these transcendental values, these individuals might get into conflict with society’s rules and expectations. “Stage 6 individuals might argue that Heinz should steal the drug because saving a life takes precedence over everything, including the law. Or they might claim that Heinz’s wife has a right to die and that he should not force his views on her by stealing and administering the drug” (p. 323).

While moral reasoning does not necessarily translate into moral action, it is believed that people who live at the post-conventional level generally reason and act in accordance with their moral reasoning. It is a progressive development from moral reasoning and action based on self-preservation to one that is based on principles that could lead to the surrender of the self in suffering and death. It is the reasoning that permitted Nelson Mandela to suffer for the people of South Africa and to work for the reconciliation of whites and blacks in that country; it is the reasoning, grounded in the self-giving love of Jesus Christ, that impelled Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta to take care of children and the elderly of every social status and religion in India. It is the goal of full human development that the *self* gradually dies so that

better life, better society, and better human cooperation could be realized. In the next part of this article, we shall demonstrate how this fact of human development underpins the evolution of human consciousness.

PART II: HUMAN MATURITY AS THE RESULT OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Developmental theorists, as we examined in Part 1, have shown that human beings progress to full human maturity through a consistent and simultaneous diminishment of self-interest and openness to life beyond personal desires and interests. On his own part, which occupies us in this Part 2, Bernard Lonergan provides a philosophical and theological grounding to the efforts of developmental psychologists. He does this by delineating the structure of human consciousness, and how progressive obedience to this structure leads the individual to self-transcendence.

Lonergan (1972) notes that human beings have the capacity for self-transcendence which is “the achievement of conscious intentionality” (p.35). Conscious intentionality of the human being arises from a pure desire to know. The cognitive acts of knowing are conscious and intentional: conscious for the individual is aware of his awareness of his cognitive acts; intentional because he intends this knowledge in a disinterested, detached, and unrestricted manner. It is in his conscious intending toward the true and the good that he transcends himself. It is through this self-transcendence that human beings become truly authentic. Human development is, therefore, a continuous project one is engaged in as long as one “is not locked up in oneself” (p. 99). This freedom from being “locked up in oneself” occurs through living consciously with intentionality. There are four levels of conscious intentionality – the empirical, the intellectual, the rational, and the responsible levels. The empirical level is the level, “on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak, move.” At the intellectual level “we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression,” and at the rational level, “we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgement on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement.” The responsible level is the level “on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide, and carry out decisions.” (p.13).

The operations at these four levels are both conscious and intentional. Our consciousness expands as we move to understand what we experience at the empirical level. We not only seek to understand what we experience, but we also reflect on them and then arrive at what is true or false. After making judgements on the fact, whether true or false, then consciousness moves to the fourth level to deliberate on what to do about them. “On all four levels, we are aware of ourselves but, as we mount from level to level, it is a fuller self of which we are aware, and the awareness itself is different.” (p.13). Through a detached and disinterested search for truth or falsity of our experiences, the human being “gives himself over to criteria of truth and certitude, makes his sole concern the determination of what is or is not so, and now, ... the self, so also the awareness of self, resides in that incarnation, that self-surrender, that single-minded concern for truth.” (p.14). What is achieved through this disinterested search for truth is intellectual self-transcendence. But knowing the truth does not make anyone a better person nor does it create a sufficient condition for human cooperation. There remains another dimension to being fully mature as human beings, namely, the dimension of

responsibility, which is the dimension of values, which leads the individual to moral self-transcendence.

This insight led Lonergan to make a distinction between judgement of fact and judgements of values. A judgement of fact is arrived at after examining the evidence that the fact is true or false. But judgements of value “affirm or deny that some *x* [*Thing*] is truly or only apparently good” (p. 36). It is the judgement of value that makes us responsible human beings, which means “basing one’s decisions and choices on unbiased evaluation of short-term and long-term costs and benefits to oneself, to one’s group to other groups” (p. 53). When a person grows in being responsible, he not only chooses the good judiciously, but most importantly passes from decision to action which allows us “to know and to do not just what pleases us, but what is truly good, worthwhile” (p. 35). It is in consistently doing that which is truly good and not just that which pleases us that we die to our selfish interests. It is doing the *good-in-itself* that stretches us beyond ourselves. This is moral self-transcendence. It is this moral self-transcendence that creates “the possibility of benevolence and beneficence, of honest collaboration and of true love, of swinging completely out of the habitat of an animal and of becoming a person in human society” (pp. 99-100).

That which is *apparently good* is only *apparently* good but not truly good. It only appears to be good. Because of the possibility of this confusion in judgement, Lonergan insists that the truth or falsity of judgement of value depends on “the authenticity or the lack of authenticity of the subject’s being” (p. 37), for “genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity” (p. 265). The more authentic the individual is, the more objective she will tend to be in her judgement of value, setting aside her own desires and interests. A child was disappointed at his mother for not supporting him in stealing another child’s pencil in school. But his mother insisted that stealing is wrong; it is disrespect for another’s property. That is a judgement of objective value. It is at this level of objective values that “we emerge as persons, meet one another in a common concern for values, seek to abolish the organization of human living on the basis of competing egoisms and to replace it by an organization on the basis of man’s perceptiveness and intelligence, his reasonableness, and his responsible exercise of freedom” (p.14).

The authenticity of the human subject is critical in the discernment and judgement of value as that which is truly or apparently good. Human authenticity is fundamentally “a passage from self-centeredness to self-transcendence” (p. 104). Sustained growth in authenticity is progress that never ends because of the interferences that arise from different biases present in human beings, namely: “the bias of the unconscious motivation which is usually brought out in therapy; the bias of the egoist whose interest is confined to the insights that would enable him to exploit each new situation to his own personal advantage; the bias of group egoism which finds it difficult to see and accept the fact that the group no longer fulfills its once useful function and that it merely clings to power by all the maneuvers that in one way or another block personal development and impede social progress” (Okeke, C.U., 2007, p.35. See also B.J.F. Lonergan, 1957, pp. 244-269; 1972, p. 231; L.M. Rulla, 1986; T. Naickamparambil, 1997). To these three biases, Lonergan adds the bias of common sense which assumes that knowing is the same thing as looking and refuses to ask further questions.

So, there is the unrestricted thrust toward self-transcendence and there is also the downward pull by the biases or egoisms of the human being. Hence, there is a tension, a dialectical

tension experienced by the self as transcended and the self that is transcending. Authenticity is not a once-and-for-all achievement; it is an ongoing process in which one recognizes the precariousness of what has been achieved (the self as transcended) and the necessity for vigilance.

Developing to full human maturity, therefore, requires a constant struggle with the biases or egoisms through consistent and constant attention to the transcendental precepts that emerge from the transcendental notions: be attentive (to experiences), be intelligent (by inquiring and understanding experiences), be reasonable (through reflection and judgment of fact and values) and be responsible (by acting on judgments of value discerned to be truly good). The biases or egoisms must die for the individual to grow to fullness and for a society to experience and maintain genuine progress.

Egoism is “an incomplete development of intelligence” (Lonergan, 1957, p.245), “because the egoist does not see the objective good as such, or, more appropriately, does not want to see the good, except from the point of view of his personal advantage or the advantage of his or her group.” (Okeke, 2007, p. 35). An entrenched egoist, such as a malignant narcissist, sees the world and society as extensions of his or herself. In this sense, it will be difficult for the egoist to cultivate moral character. Examples of the bias of egoism will illustrate this point. A student who gains entrance into the university should be granted admission irrespective of his ethnic or racial group (on the basis of objective merit) or he may be denied admission because he is from a particular ethnic, racial, social, or religious group (group egoism); a State Governor should use the money that belongs to the State to work for the people and pay salaries (objective good) but he uses it to enrich himself (individual egoism); a road contractor should use the necessary materials he is paid for to work on the road (what he should do) but he wants to make more money and so he uses cheap materials that make the work less durable (individual egoism). In its June 2nd publication, the Nigerian *Punch* Newspaper reported that supervisors of the West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C) are the ones who are the main aiders of the ubiquitous examination malpractice in Nigeria. The Head of the National Office of W.A.E.C in Nigeria, Mr. Patrick Areghan, expressed the lamentable situation: “Supervisors are our problems, they make a lot of money from this. These supervisors are teachers given to us by state ministries of education and when they come, they make it a business” (*The Punch*, June 2, 2023). In the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria, it was obvious that the BVAS system developed for a fair election was tampered with as well as the process of transmitting results. All this, just so that the political lords would continue in power. The current war in Sudan that started on April 15, 2023, was a fight between two Army Generals, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the *de facto* leader and Army Chief of Sudan. Both are Sudanese fighting over the control of Sudan and have displaced millions of Sudanese and foreign nationals. It is a fight between two egos entrenched in their self-interest! The cumulative effects of individual life and society lived and organized on the basis of egoism are inauthenticity and social decline. Lonergan (1972) describes the progression:

Corrupt minds have a flair for picking the mistaken solution and insisting that it alone is intelligent, reasonable, good. Imperceptibly corruption spreads from the harsh sphere of material advantage and power to the mass media, the stylish journals, the literary movements, the educational process, the reigning philosophies. A civilization in decline digs its own grave with a relentless consistency. It cannot be argued out of

its self-destructive ways, for argument has a theoretical major premise, theoretical premises are asked to conform to matters of fact, and the facts in the situation produced by decline more and more are the absurdities that proceed from inattention, oversight, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility. (pp. 53-54)

The recovery of our true self as human beings lies in transcending our-*self*. “Man is his true self inasmuch as he is self-transcending. Inversely, man is alienated from his true self inasmuch as he refuses self-transcendence” (p. 356). This leaves its impact on society: “As self-transcendence promotes progress, so the refusal of self-transcendence turns progress into cumulative decline” (p. 55).

But full human maturity does not stop at cognitive and moral self-transcendence. The pure desire to know, expressed in unrestricted questioning, implicitly contains the question of God. If the transcendental notions – questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation – constitute the human being’s capacity for self-transcendence, that capacity “becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one’s being becomes being-in-love.” And once this love blossoms and, as long as it lasts, “it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flow one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s discernment of values, one’s decision and deeds.” (p. 100). There are different kinds of love – between friends, husband and wife, parents and their children – but it is being in love with God that is “the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality” (p.101). This love of God “does not admit of conditions, qualifications, restrictions, or reservations.” (Rulla, 1986, p. 145). When this divine love floods the human heart it permits and energizes the individual to surrender *herself* completely; a total surrender to God in love that fulfils all the questionings of the human mind. The fulfilment experienced is not the result of cognition or moral choice but of the union of a surrendered self and the transcendent beloved. In a real sense, the experience “dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on, and it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will trans-value our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing” (p. 102). In this experience, consciousness has undergone a conversion, broadening, and expanding the horizon of experiencing, understanding, deliberation, and choice. God’s love now “occupies the ground and the root of the fourth and highest level of man’s intentional consciousness. It takes over the peak of the soul, the *apex animae*.” (p. 103). It is God, implicitly present in all the unrestricted questionings, that pulls the human being through divine love, to surrender himself, and through this surrender, reaches the fullness of his humanity. Stated simply, God is the goal and fulfilment of human development. In this theocentric self-transcendence, initiated through religious conversion, loving God fully and totally stretches each human being away from herself onto God and others and the world. It is in this dynamic of divine love that the self, in analogy with the grain of wheat, gradually dies as it surrenders to love’s values and is transformed into abundant fruits of kindness, generosity, care, peace, and joy. (John 12:24)

When someone transcendent is my beloved, he is in my heart, real tome from within me. When that love is the fulfilment of my unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence through intelligence and truth and responsibility, the one that fulfils that thrust must be supreme in intelligence, truth, goodness. Since he chooses to come to me by a gift of love for him, he himself must be love. Since loving him is my transcending myself, it also is a denial of the self to be transcended. Since loving him means loving

attention to him, it is prayer, meditation, contemplation. Since love of him is fruitful, it overflows into love of all those that he loves or might love. (p. 105).

CONCLUSION

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as has been shown in this study, captures the dynamic of authentic psychological maturity. To grow to the fullness of being human, every human being faces the challenge of dying each day to the self in order to grow to maturity. Maturity implies the acquisition of a solid identity that is ready and willing to give itself away for others and for the world. In other words, human maturity does not consist simply in the pursuit of personal happiness. Rather, happiness is the result of giving one's *self* away in service of others and the world; it is the side-effect of engaging fully in self-transcendence. Abraham Maslow popularized the idea of self-realization as the ultimate goal of every human being in his classic book, *Toward a Psychology of Being*. However, at some point in his life, he amended his theory and put transcendence as the apex of human strivings and development. "Transcendence," he says, "refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos". (A.H. Maslow, 1971, p. 269). Placing transcendence at the apex of his hierarchy of needs goes to show that self-realization, as the pursuit of what is important for oneself, does not bring one to the experience of full human development. Rather, it is in self-transcendence that one fully realizes oneself. To paraphrase Jn 12:25, it is in dying to the desires of the self that one gains one's life fully; whoever loses his life will gain it, and whoever loves his life (holds onto his life) will lose it. This is the transposition of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ into the domain of human psychology and a sketch of a way to understand Jesus' invitation to his followers to deny themselves, carry their cross, and follow him. It is only by dying with him that one can rise with him.

***Rev. Fr. Cornelius Uche Okeke, Ph.D**

St. André Bessette Parish Ecorse, MI

Uche511@yahoo.com

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