



## The Loneliness of “Adam” An Attempt at Symbolic Interpretation

Adam Świeżyński

Volume 72, numéro 2, juin 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039299ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039299ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

### ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Świeżyński, A. (2016). The Loneliness of “Adam”: An Attempt at Symbolic Interpretation. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 72(2), 285–297.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1039299ar>

### Résumé de l'article

L'expérience de la solitude est souvent perçue comme un aspect négatif de l'existence humaine, nécessitant d'être surmonté. Il convient cependant d'essayer de se libérer de cette perception figée de la solitude, selon laquelle celle-ci est réduite immédiatement à l'une des sources fondamentales du malheur humain, et d'essayer de revisiter le sens qu'elle a l'égard de la vie humaine. Pour ceci, il est nécessaire dans un premier lieu de considérer l'être de la solitude (ontologie de la solitude) pour ensuite analyser son statut axiologique (axiologie de la solitude). La dimension axiologique et ontologique de la question évoquée devraient ensemble permettre de construire une conception de la solitude considérant son aspect extérieur (phénoménal) et intérieur (essentiel). L'objet de cet écrit est de proposer une esquisse de la conception de la solitude qui en partant des précisions sur son être a pour objectif de définir son caractère axiologique. L'image de la solitude humaine telle que présentée dans la Genèse (2,4b-24) sera prise comme point de départ.

# THE LONELINESS OF “ADAM”

## AN ATTEMPT AT SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

Adam Świeżyński

Faculty of Christian Philosophy  
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

*RÉSUMÉ : L'expérience de la solitude est souvent perçue comme un aspect négatif de l'existence humaine, nécessitant d'être surmonté. Il convient cependant d'essayer de se libérer de cette perception figée de la solitude, selon laquelle celle-ci est réduite immédiatement à l'une des sources fondamentales du malheur humain, et d'essayer de revisiter le sens qu'elle a l'égard de la vie humaine. Pour ceci, il est nécessaire dans un premier lieu de considérer l'être de la solitude (ontologie de la solitude) pour ensuite analyser son statut axiologique (axiologie de la solitude). La dimension axiologique et ontologique de la question évoquée devraient ensemble permettre de construire une conception de la solitude considérant son aspect extérieur (phénoménal) et intérieur (essentiel). L'objet de cet écrit est de proposer une esquisse de la conception de la solitude qui en partant des précisions sur son être a pour objectif de définir son caractère axiologique. L'image de la solitude humaine telle que présentée dans la Genèse (2,4b-24) sera prise comme point de départ.*

*ABSTRACT : The experience of loneliness is usually seen as a negative aspect of human existence and something to overcome. However, it is worth trying to break free, if only on a trial basis, from the established traditional perception of loneliness, and strive to reduce it immediately from being one of the main sources of human affliction and to rethink its importance in human life. In order to do this, we must first consider the question of the essence of loneliness (ontology of loneliness), and then examine the question of its axiological status, i.e. its value (axiology of loneliness). The ontological dimension and the axiological dimension of the issue should include the opportunity to construct the concept of human loneliness, by taking into account its internal (phenomenological) and external (essential) aspect. The purpose of this paper is to propose an outline concept of loneliness, which, on the basis of findings on its essence, seeks to determine its axiological nature. The designated point of departure is the biblical image of human loneliness presented in Genesis (Gen. 2:4b-24).*

---

### INTRODUCTION

A Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, said that “man is alone, because he is a man”.<sup>1</sup> This fundamental observation may seem difficult to accept by those who regard the experience of loneliness only as a negative side of human existence and something to overcome. However, it is worth trying to break free, if only on a

---

1. P. TILLICH, *The Eternal Now*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963, p. 9.

trial basis, from the established traditional perception of loneliness, and strive to reduce it immediately from being one of the main sources of human affliction and to rethink its importance in human life. To do this, we must first consider the question of the essence of loneliness (ontology of loneliness), and then examine the question of its axiological status, i.e. its value (axiology of loneliness). The ontological dimension and the axiological dimension of the issue should include the opportunity to construct the concept of human loneliness, taking into account its internal (phenomenological) and external (essential) aspect.

Among the various types and shades of what is referred to as “loneliness”, we can distinguish a phenomenological “layer” (a phenomenon of loneliness), which in individual cases, depending on its specificity, adopts a concrete form, such as loneliness as seclusion, loneliness as isolation, loneliness as exile, loneliness as rejection, loneliness as self-reliance, and loneliness as solitude, etc. Faced with so many different contexts and definitions of loneliness, a question arises as to their common basis, which would explicitly authorize the treatment of different types of human aloneness as loneliness. Reaching this “common denominator” and its definition would make it possible to capture its essence and to determine the point of departure aiming to propose a concept of loneliness including both the multiplicity of its manifestations and its common roots in human existence.

On the other hand, determining the axiological status of loneliness requires deciding whether it should be seen as a value or as an anti-value. Therefore, the question arises whether loneliness is (or at least could be) good for us and how should we understand that “goodness” of loneliness. The proposed solution to treat it as part of the overall concept of loneliness should result from earlier findings on the essence of loneliness, in accordance with the belief that the sphere of axiology is based on the accepted ontology defining the nature of existence.

The purpose of this paper is to propose an outline concept of loneliness, which, on the basis of findings on its essence, seeks to determine its axiological nature. The designated point of departure is the biblical image of human loneliness presented in Genesis (Gen. 2:4b-24). The reason for such a choice is the fact that the said biblical passage, due to the circumstances of its creation, can be seen as a specific, original and paradigmatic answer to the question of the origins of human loneliness.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the symbolic and multifaceted nature of the said text allows us to consider the problem of human loneliness from an essential point of view and then to return to references of existential expressions in order to make modifications to the modern perception of the value of human existential loneliness.

---

2. The background of this biblical fragment includes the so-called Babylonian captivity, an extremely tragic period in the history of the ancient Israelites. It is worth empathizing with their situation, and realizing that as a result of the invasion, the conquest, the murder, and the abduction of a large part of the population, they lost their family ties, their social and religious structures, and, in particular, the centre of worship in the temple of Jerusalem; and were faced with the threat of losing their national and religious identity. All these devastating and dramatic circumstances were a powerful shock to the religious awareness of the surviving Israelites, who had to deal with the basic question of presence and power (or rather lack of) of God in times of national disaster, and to respond to a dramatic question: “Has God really left us all alone?”

## I. INTERPRETATION OF LONELINESS ACCORDING TO GENESIS

The fundamental premise of analyses presented in further parts of this paper is a belief that human loneliness spoken of by the biblical author is treated symbolically. The used symbolism requires creative interpretation to reveal its meaning and enable correct understanding. Another fundamental premise is treating the biblical "Adam" as both the first and every human being ; that is, regarding him as a universal image of a human being, whom all people, regardless of time and place in life or individual experiences, can see and recognize as themselves.

The key statement of the interpreted fragment of Genesis is a sentence spoken by God : "It is not good for the man to be alone [...]" (Gen. 2:18).<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, these words and the subsequent events (God asking the man to give names to animals ; man falling asleep ; God creating the woman from a rib removed from the man and bringing her to him) are understood as an explanation of human sexuality, mutual attraction of men and women and the meaning of marriage. However, stepping away from the literal reading of this passage and treating it as a deeply symbolic message, we might suggest another interpretation of that biblical statement (complementary to the abovementioned), and not narrowed to interpersonal relations.

The interpretation of Genesis 2:4b-24 should begin by explaining the nature of the place in which the man is placed after God had "formed the man from the dust of the ground, breathed life into his lungs, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). This place is the "garden" made of all kinds of plants and fruit trees. Because the "garden" is described as natural, rich and perfect for human life, and was given to the man in order to "work" it and "guard" it, I suggest understanding it as an axiological space of human existence.<sup>4</sup> The reason for reading the symbol of the "garden" in this way is that "fruit" growing on the trees in the garden can be regarded as symbols of values and the "trees" themselves as symbols of a specific access to these values. This approach seems consistent with the observation of the nature of human existence, in which the contact with values and the capability of experiencing them, of making choices, and of one's own stand in relation to them, is an essential, and the most distinctive and evident proof of a human way of being. People not only live in a world of values, but also "feed" on them and live as people thanks to them. Values and entering into contact with them are intrinsic and it is difficult to imagine any real human existence without them. This state of affairs, presented by the biblical author in the language of symbols, gives us feedback on the character of our nature and the laws regulating our world : we are axiological beings, sensitive to values, which enable us to shape ourselves and find our way in the world.

---

3. It is worth noting here that the statement : "it is not good [...]" is not equal to : "it is bad [...]" According to the biblical author, loneliness is not good (for people) in the sense that it is (and always should be) temporary. Moreover, it is not intrinsically morally evil (though it may be a result of moral evil).

4. Cf. M. GRABOWSKI, *Historia upadku. Ku antropologii adekwatnej*, Kraków, WAM, 2006, p. 25-55.

It seems significant that immediately after putting the man in the “garden”, God gives him an “order” worded in the form of a ban on the consumption of “fruit” from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”. Apart from the content of the prohibition, which has no further relevance here (though it is, of course, important from another point of view), it is worth noting that these are the first words uttered by God to the man. The very fact that God speaks to His own creation can be thought of as a form of God’s revelation to the man. Thanks to this, the man becomes aware of the existence and the presence of God in the reality around him. At the same time, due to the fact that God is an ideal being (an absolute) and someone completely different from all creatures, this awareness makes the man react in the form of delight and desire to bond with Him.<sup>5</sup> “Hearing” the voice of God, the man is fascinated with God, “falls in love”, and consequently orients himself and his activities to fulfil a desire to communicate and be with Him. At this moment, we come across the first mention of human loneliness, which is visible to God Himself. Although the man wants to bond with the object of his fascination and delight, he immediately discovers his own inadequacies. He notes that there is no suitable equipment that would allow him to fulfil his desire ; i.e. to bridge an ontological gap between him and God. Discovering this impotence and inability, the man stumbles upon a particular, primal experience of his own : loneliness — loneliness before God. It is loneliness of the insufficiency of human existence, a manifestation of his natural limitations, and a testament to his incompleteness. What is significant for this kind of loneliness is that it appears regardless of human will and it is a direct consequence of the nature of human existence : the nature of the man created. Thus, the man becomes lonely not because he has lost or abandoned someone (or has been abandoned), but because he is a man, and as such he cannot fulfil the deepest desire he finally discovers, i.e. to bond with a personal value he considers absolute and the most precious among all the “trees” and “fruit” in the “garden”.

Loneliness becomes even more acute when God “brings animals” to the man. As part of a symbolic reading, this passage should be understood as an experience of one’s own otherness from other creatures, particularly animated beings which are akin to the man in terms of biological equipment. The man responds to this experience : “I am lonely because I am different ; I am different because I am a man.” The man calls animals “living beings”, but they do not seem to help him ease his experience of loneliness before God. The man discovers that despite their similarities, there is something qualitatively different, which makes it impossible for him to satisfy his

---

5. The biblical author does not mention it explicitly but it should be assumed — in the course of interpretation — that the first contact of the man with God is marked by the aforementioned experience. A known equivalent of this state is a mystical experience, described by mystics of different religions and faiths. An ambivalence in experiencing the closeness and remoteness of God is a recurring theme in their statements : on the one hand, an overwhelming desire for closeness as a result of admiration and love, and on the other hand, a sense of unworthiness and inability to overcome the distance that accompanies attempts to enter into union with the divine.

longing and that although they are “alive”, like him, their life is a life of a different kind : a life which is akin but not equal to his.<sup>6</sup>

Both stages of encountering and experiencing loneliness (discovering one’s insufficiency and realizing one’s otherness) can be defined respectively as loneliness according to Genesis<sup>7</sup> of the first and the second degree. Together, they constitute the original human loneliness in its essential and phenomenological aspect. However, both varieties of this loneliness are not target states of human nature but something to overcome, confirmed by God himself when he says “I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18). In response to God’s act (which the biblical author symbolically describes as putting the man to sleep, creating a woman from Adam’s rib, and then bringing her to him), the man expresses his delight and admiration of the newcomer, the “woman” (Gen. 2:23). Should we decide that the woman is to be understood literally as a cure for Adam’s (the man’s) loneliness, it is possible to read the “woman” as a symbol of what has become an effective “tool” to reduce human loneliness before God, i.e. loneliness according to Genesis. God is a spiritual being ; therefore, human loneliness before God can be overcome only by obtaining access to the spiritual world. This access is provided by equipping nature with a spiritual aspect : the emergence of the “woman” understood as a human spirit. A human spirit is a place of mediation between the man and God, a “space” for this contact, which consequently enables human nature to realize the desire of God. The symbol of the “woman” (as the emergence of a human spirit) was selected by the biblical author very accurately, because as the woman becomes a complement to the man in various aspects of his human-male life and in exploration of his own identity, also a human spirit successfully complements human nature, giving it an extra over-material and over-psychological dimension.<sup>8</sup> Symbols of “sleeping” and “awakening” complete the whole description, pointing to the initially incomplete and unaware state of the man’s existence, who fully recognizes himself only after “waking up”, and to the discovery of a genuine and comprehensive structure of human life. The delight “Adam” expresses upon seeing the “woman” is the delight of the man over himself, over the magnificence of his equipment and the possibilities of existence, activity and further development. The delight becomes both a sign of recognition of one’s identity and an expression of self-love, which has nothing to do with any form of selfishness or narcissism, but is a full acceptance of one’s own nature — created in this particular way — and an overall acceptance of the consequent way of existence, also taking into account all its deficiencies and limitations. Therefore, as a result of overcoming the original loneliness according to Genesis, the man discovers his own value and consequently performs the proper correlation and prioritization in relation to the value of

---

6. At this point, we tend to think of a common situation where lonely people try to compensate for the unpleasant experience of loneliness by means of owning e.g. a dog or a cat ; a pet that becomes a member of the family and treated in a typically human way, i.e. as if it were (almost) human.

7. Genesis takes its name from the first words : “In the beginning [...]” — gr. *Γένεσις* (Genesis).

8. Again, we should appreciate the relevance of the symbolism used by the biblical author, taking into account that sexuality of a woman and a man expresses desire and provides a way to unity and overcoming loneliness by conveying human spirit through the body (sexuality).

God and the values encountered in the world — “the garden”. The subsequent concern for the shape of one’s own spirit becomes a concern for what unites the man with God and, at the same time, reduces loneliness.

## II. CONCEPT OF HUMAN LONELINESS ACCORDING TO GENESIS

The above interpretation of the biblical passage about human loneliness according to Genesis entitles us to formulate a few basic conclusions characterizing its understanding of the essence of this phenomenon.

First of all, loneliness is the original state and a human experience. It does not appear as a result of isolation from other people but derives from human nature, which turns out to be insufficient in terms of the axiological orientation of the man towards God. Therefore, the essence of loneliness remains in an axiological space of an inability to reduce one’s separation from God as the supreme value. Simultaneously, loneliness appears in the form of otherness, which the man experiences in contact with other beings created. The man turns out to be doubly alone : before God and before the world (other creatures), but the latter is genetically rooted in the former.

Secondly, loneliness is not a condition in which the man has to remain. According to God’s plan, expressed in His actions towards the man after discovering human loneliness, it is overcome by showing the man the extent of his equipment, i.e. the structure of his being and its spiritual dimension in particular. The emergence of human spirit and its recognition by the man has the effect of reducing loneliness before God and consequently reducing the feeling of loneliness in the world as the man begins to accept and love himself, seeing his own undeniable value, even if he remains alone and experiences various dimensions of that loneliness. Therefore, the ultimate way to overcome loneliness is an appropriately celebrated self-love as a consequence of recognition of one’s own specific value.

Thirdly, human loneliness according to Genesis turns out to be good, because its experience enables the man to discover his own subjectivity and identity. It does not reduce the annoying and unpleasant nature of loneliness, but it ultimately turns out to be a creative pain of existence, which withdraws upon the appearance and the recognition of human spirit. From this point on, one can remain alone, and even experience isolation from other creatures or solitude, but it is no longer a disruptive factor, because such an experience produces even more space for the activity of human spirit towards God, enhancing one’s self esteem and self-love.

On the basis of this interpretation of human loneliness, and the conclusions presented above, we can propose an outline of the concept of loneliness according to Genesis. The structure of this concept is composed of two basic components : the essence of loneliness and the phenomenon of loneliness. Each of them, as part of human experience, is the point of departure for the process of reducing (overcoming) loneliness both in terms of its nature and its external manifestations. Therefore, the

essence of the original loneliness, understood as insufficiency (incompleteness, imperfection) of human nature is the foundation and the source of the phenomenon of loneliness, i.e. the secondary loneliness, experienced as otherness (dissimilarity and disparity) of other creatures. Overcoming loneliness as insufficiency is achieved through the creation of human spirit. Its appearance and recognition by the man is equivalent to a proper and full recognition of his own identity and can reduce phenomenological loneliness, because the man discovers his similarity to other people on the spiritual plane, that is, in the most basic and deepest realm of similarities that exists between people. As a result, the man loves himself, thus affirming his own value, and loves other people, affirming their value due to the presence of human spirit, which he had first recognized in himself. Thanks to the achieved inner unity, the man becomes united with others and loves them.<sup>9</sup>

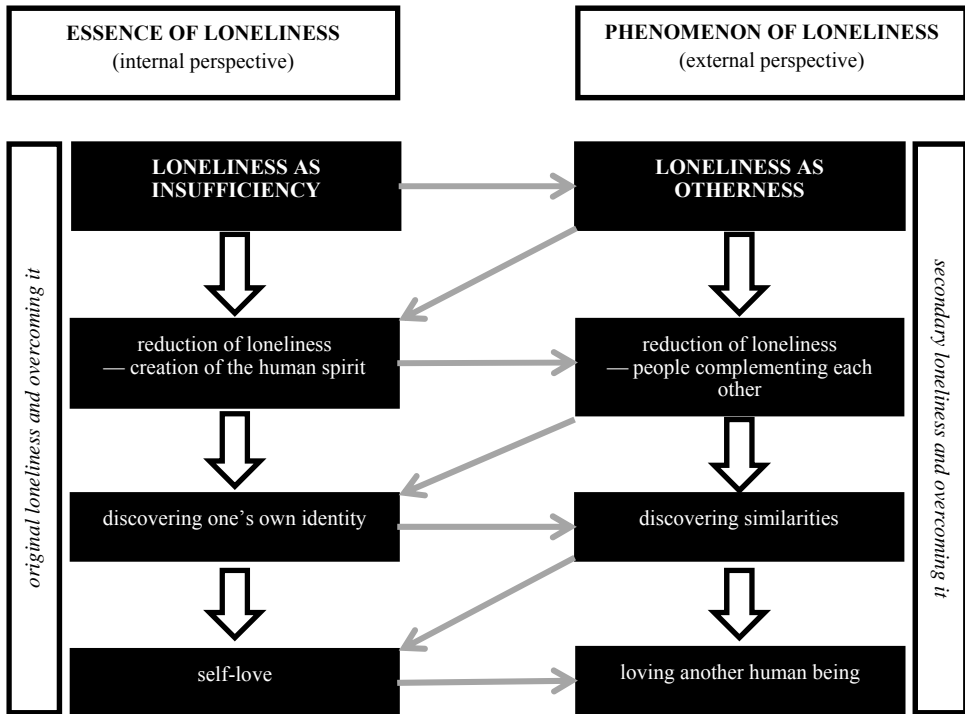


Fig. 1 : Diagram of the structure of the concept of human loneliness according to Genesis

9. Using this key to interpret the final words of the analysed fragment of Genesis (Gen. 2:24), we can better see the deeper meaning of the message on the conjugal union between people and its indissolubility. It should be noted that the initial requirement for incorporation of that unity would be an internal human unity. Moreover, as a constant challenge and goal in efforts towards spiritual self-improvement, it determines the inseparable nature of marriage. In other words, we can say that indissolubility of marriage stems from indissolubility of the inner nature of an individual. This relationship can be ruptured if someone deliberately acts to the detriment of one's own spirit and reduces its activity. It inevitably initiates the process of breaking unity between people, including the conjugal union.



### III. APPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN LONELINESS ACCORDING TO GENESIS

After interpreting the passage from the biblical Book of Genesis describing the “loneliness of Adam” and the moment of overcoming it, as well as presenting an outline of the concept of human loneliness according to Genesis, we should propose possible applications of that concept. It seems that they could cover both the understanding of the essence of existential loneliness, currently experienced by people, and a way to overcome its phenomenological aspect, that is, the specific manifestations of loneliness.<sup>10</sup>

In order to properly define the two applications of the concept of loneliness according to Genesis, we must first introduce a crucial distinction, found in the biblical tale about the origins of the world and man (Gen. 1-3) : the human condition “before the fall” and “after the fall.” The “fall”, which is what happened under the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”, introduces a fundamental change in the man’s consciousness in terms of God and himself. The biblical author describes this shift by describing the man’s behaviour after eating the fruit : “I heard Your voice in the garden [...] and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid from You” (Gen. 3:10). The man’s reaction, which is discussed here, happens when he hears God “walking in the garden.” What is notable is the contrast between the man “hiding” from God and the earlier desire to stay in His proximity. Therefore, the reaction can be interpreted as a result of the “fall”, which has caused a profound transformation of the human soul, of human axiological consciousness, and consequently, has changed the man’s attitude to God and to himself. This transformation is also reflected in understanding and experiencing human loneliness “after the fall”.

First of all, after eating “the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil”, the man discovers his “nakedness”. The symbol of nudity refers to human weaknesses, limitations and imperfections of human nature, both on a physical and a spiritual level. Nudity, which is a manifold human weakness, was present “before the fall” (in this respect, the “fall” has not changed anything) as an involuntary weakness, experienced in a state of innocence and not troublesome due to a full acceptance of the human condition. After the “fall”, the man loses self-acceptance and objects to the imperfections and limitations of his own nature. Consequently, the man is not able to recognize his core values stemming from the relationship with God and the spiritual dimension of his existence. Lack of self-esteem — “I was afraid because I was naked...” — means that the man becomes alone, i.e. a stranger to himself, because he no longer sees himself as a valuable being. As a result, the man becomes internally isolated and wants to change his way of living — he no longer accepts himself (he

---

10. The distinction between “loneliness” and “solitude” indicates two separate, but interrelated, aspects of loneliness : being alone and feeling alone. See more : J.G. MCGRAW, “Loneliness, its Nature and Forms : An Existential Perspective”, *Man and World*, 28(1995), p. 46-63 ; M.G. DAVIES, “Solitude and Loneliness : An Integrative Model”, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 24, 1 (1996), p. 3-12 ; K. DAHLBERG, “The Enigmatic Phenomenon of Loneliness”, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 2 (2007), p. 195-207.

would like to be someone else). The lack of self-esteem in turn directs the man towards self-destruction as a result of the deepening lack of self-acceptance. The man becomes an internally divided being, lacking unity between the desired self-image and the actual human condition. This situation results in a deep sense of inner loneliness, acquired in the course of the "fall".

This loneliness manifests itself by "hiding" from God, i.e. by a conscious separation from God on a spiritual level. We could say that the man loses contact with his own spirit, and thus with God. The resulting state is a consequence of a conscious choice and, therefore, he is culpable. In the context of loneliness, it seems that this lack of contact results not so much in an inability to hear God (the man still hears Him and talks with Him), but rather is a result of a deliberate internal rejection of His voice. This state of affairs is in turn an expression of the disappearance of the previous desire for and fascination with God, which had led to the emergence and the discovery of one's own spirit.

Both presented consequences of the "fall", revealed in the experience of human loneliness, cause the emergence of existential loneliness, which is an important component of solitude — absent "before the fall". The essence and the source of solitude are the lack of self-esteem and the lack of agreement on the actual shape of human nature, burdened with weakness. At the same time, existential loneliness is a reduced human understanding of loneliness itself, as it remains cut off from the essence of loneliness according to Genesis, i.e. loneliness before God. The man no longer feels lonely before God, for he has lost a spiritual desire for God by transforming his own axiological awareness. However, it has not reduced human loneliness and at the same time it has strengthened its painful experience in the phenomenological sphere. Indeed, the phenomenological dimension of human loneliness has remained in the form of a sense of otherness according to Genesis. By detaching the latter from the essence of loneliness according to Genesis, human loneliness "after the fall" is experienced as an existential emptiness, isolation, misunderstanding, alienation, etc., or as various types of solitude, from an acute and disturbing sense of being alone in a physical sense, to destructive experiences of being misunderstood and abandoned in relationships. Therefore, solitude is the essence of existential loneliness and its manifestations form a wide range of human states marked by a painful sensation of isolation from others.

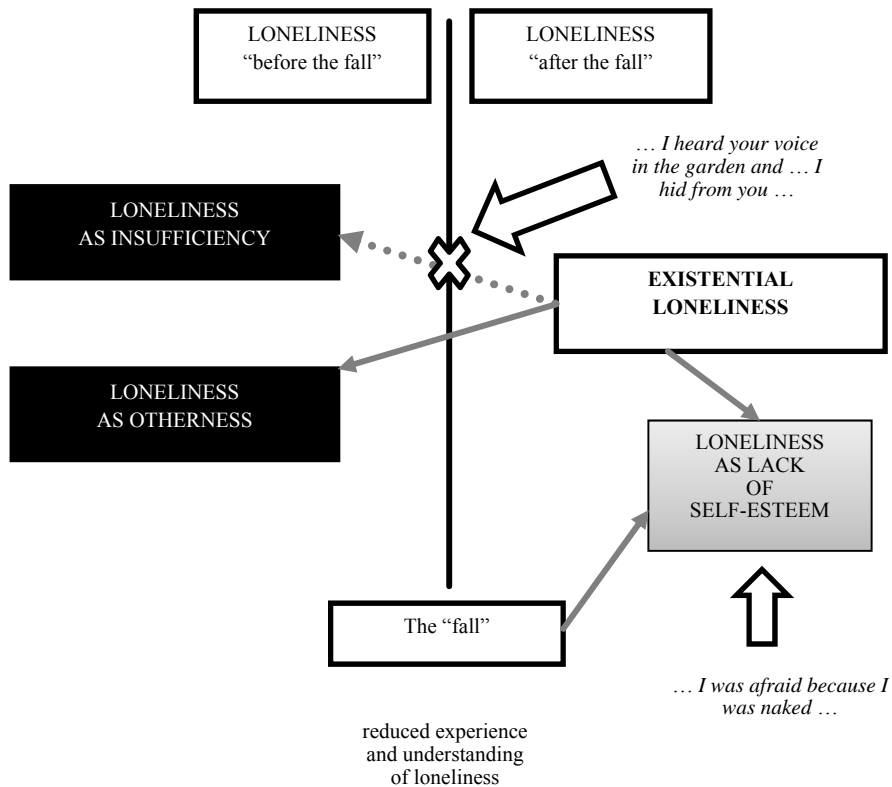


Fig. 2 : The concept of human loneliness according to Genesis applied to existential loneliness

The second option of applying the concept of human loneliness according to Genesis is to define ways of overcoming the aforementioned solitude. Most attempts to overcome solitude constitute a variety of measures to increase self-esteem, for example, by professional success, obtaining flattering opinions from other people, or establishing new and interesting relationships, etc. However, in accordance with the presented concept of loneliness and existential loneliness, such actions only weaken and temporarily mute the feeling of loneliness, but cannot reduce it completely. The result of this state of affairs is that the only effective way to overcome loneliness is in the discovery and recognition of one's value in the present shape of one's limited nature. Such self-acceptance is rooted in self-esteem, possible to obtain permanently only through a kind of re-living the experience of transition, initiated by the biblical "Adam", i.e. by the discovery of one's own spirit and falling in love with it. Therefore, we should put ourselves in the position of "Adam" — the man who "hears the voice of God" and remains open to His message. Human life requires some form of mediation for the presence of God, through which an "order of God" can again reach human consciousness, becoming a moment of genuine revelation of God and therefore an opportunity to rediscover one's own spirit ("the woman"). This means that

people, in order to overcome the essence of existential loneliness (solitude), should first, as it were, immerse themselves in the original loneliness according to Genesis (a sense of insufficiency before God), to attain full awareness of their own nature, in particular the awareness of human spirit as a dimension of their existence, followed by overcoming loneliness according to Genesis.<sup>11</sup>

The insufficiency of human (not to mention non-human) relationships in overcoming loneliness does not mean that they are irrelevant. The need to produce some form of mediation for the presence (the "order") of God means that the "place" of mediation may be found in another human being. It can be illustrated by a scene of a conversation between a grandmother and her grandson from the movie *Dekalog (Decalogue): One*, directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski. At the mention of the existence of God, a little boy, raised by his scientist father away from the issues of faith and God, asks his grandmother: "Who is He?" In response, the grandmother hugs her grandson and asks: "What are you feeling now?" "I love you!" the boy responds immediately. "That's where He is", says the grandmother. We can assume that a similar role of mediation for the "order of God" can be provided by a variety of other life circumstances, not necessarily associated with the presence of other people, although it seems that the special natural similarity between people gives this case a privilege. We can, however, imagine other favourable circumstances, e.g. a physicist or a cosmologist making a momentous scientific discovery as a result of many years of solitary research; a tourist coming into contact with the stunning beauty of nature during a solitary journey; someone noticing a sequence of coincidences, invisible to others, etc. In each case, the crucial thing is an opportunity "to hear", which is equivalent to the "order" given to the biblical "Adam". It is worth noting, that it does not necessarily have to happen only in the traditionally understood religious dimension of human life, within a particular religion, faith, or community.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of circumstances, realizing the calling of that "order" is the process of entering into loneliness according to Genesis, i.e. recovering this kind of loneliness and overcoming it, which finally leads to self-love in the present shape of human nature. Paradoxically, it is the experience of loneliness (according to Genesis) which enables us to overcome existential loneliness understood as painful solitude. Loneliness is the cure for the disease of loneliness.

## CONCLUSION

Władysław Tatarkiewicz, famous Polish historian of philosophy, an outstanding expert in the history of human thought, is the author of the often used quote on the definition of loneliness: "Loneliness is pleasure for those who desire it and torture for those who are forced to it". In the light of this statement, it seems that the issue of the value of loneliness boils down primarily to the issue of human will versus exis-

---

11. Cf. R.L. PLUMMER, "Are the Spiritual Disciplines of 'Silence and Solitude' Really Biblical?", *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 2, 1 (2009), p. 101-112.

12. Human loneliness according to Genesis is prior to any religious community and religious practices.

tential experience of loneliness — a matter of consent or refusal. We can also draw a conclusion that loneliness, at least for some people, can be (and in fact is) a value.<sup>13</sup>

The above analyses strongly point to the image of loneliness as a value. It turns out that even existential loneliness, if properly dealt with, can become an important and valuable experience. It can be observed in the case of loneliness as a product of a desire and a conscious decision. For example, a hermit who voluntarily decides to limit his relationship with the outside world obtains a space of loneliness which enables a deeper experience of manifestations of God and a fuller recognition of his self-esteem. For such a person, loneliness becomes a useful means to achieve a goal of being particularly close to God.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, loneliness is an important value in the mind of a recluse, who considers it primarily in its beneficial aspect. It is worth noting that this does not exclude him from experiencing painful states of loneliness, as he is not free, being a man living “after the fall”, from existential loneliness, including its important element of solitude. Therefore, he finds himself in a situation of someone who has admittedly found and chosen the path of fruitful solitude but who must continuously, as it were, accept and repeatedly overcome the solitude he is still exposed to.

This state of affairs allows us to look at and assess the value of solitude in the lives of people who are lonely against their will. For example, a person who has been abandoned by someone close and is struggling with acute loneliness arising from an undermined sense of self-worth will assess negatively the value of the unwanted and unplanned loneliness experienced. However, just as in the case of hermits, whether that loneliness turns out to be a value or an anti-value depends to a large extent on that person. The crucial factor is always the personal attitude to the experience of loneliness. Experience of loneliness is intrinsically neither good nor bad. It becomes good or bad to an individual, and it is this individual who has the option to provisionally deny or accept it. However, the unexpectedly suffered loneliness is characterized by a particular dynamic and always entails some sort of balancing on the border between acceptance and rejection, and between a sense of value and the lack of value. In both examples, existential loneliness is (at least potentially) a value, which means it is not condemned in advance, clearly and irrevocably to be eventually recognized as an anti-value. Whether it actually proves to be a value in a particular human life is an open question and depends on the way it is experienced. The concept of loneliness according to Genesis, together with existential human loneliness “after the fall”, enables calling the experience of loneliness, at least provisionally, valuable — by giving it a specific role in human life. We should therefore slightly modify the cited statement about loneliness, coined by the Polish historian of philosophy: “Loneliness is

---

13. See : O.J. MORGAN, “Music for the Dance : Some Meanings of Solitude”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 25, 1 (1986), p. 18-28 ; L.H. TOLEDO-PEREYRA, “The Extraordinary Value of Solitude in the Surgeon’s Life”, *Journal of Investigative Surgery*, 16 (2003), p. 241-242.

14. See as an example : R. FARICY, “Thomas Merton : Solitude and the True of Life”, *Science et Esprit*, 30, 2 (1979), p. 191-198.

pleasure for those who desire it” — when they still desire it — “and torture for those who are forced to it” — when they are still forced to it.