

True Companionship: Solitude and Belonging



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A recent study published by *The Guardian* highlighted a significant "happiness recession" in Europe, with the UK ranking the lowest in life satisfaction among teenagers. As emerged in our previous edition of *Convergence*, **an epidemic of loneliness pervades British society, accompanied by a cry for true friendships, relationships, and belonging.**

The emphasis on "true" is crucial: surrogate forms of belonging—such as nationalism and cancel culture—can be dangerous, turning isolation into violence, both individual and collective, as seen in recent terrorist attacks and the summer riots in the UK.

This epidemic of loneliness is indeed closely tied to a deepening polarisation in culture and society, and a rejection of otherness.

As Pankaj Mishra warned, the inevitable outcome of an individualistic conception of life is war. In an increasingly heated world, both literally and figuratively, there is an urgent need to challenge this mindset.

Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Patriarch of the small and diverse Catholic community in Israel, recently stated that **we need "not close ourselves within our narratives, but raise our gaze, recognise the other, and engage with them."**

No man is an island, and no community is an island either, as Pizzaballa reminded us, echoing Rabbi Abraham Heschel.

The aim of *Convergence 2025* is to examine this epidemic of loneliness—both individual and collective—and **identify its effects, from climate change to economic inequality and body stigmatization.**

The title alludes to two key antidotes: first, the recognition that loneliness is, in fact, an illusion, **since even the deepest solitude can be discovered as a place of meaningful companionship within ourselves** – a solitude more precious than life, to quote the Muslim poet Rumi.

Second, the need to create (or rather discover) **spaces where individuals are loved—not idolised or erased**—and where different narratives develop and converge into a communion, without excluding each other.

Our goal is not just to discuss these ideas theoretically, but to explore real-life experiences where they are already being lived, even in germinal form, and **where light begins to glimmer in the darkness.**

These germs and glimmers can be found everywhere, but they can only grow and flourish **through true encounters with other individuals** and other narratives, and dynamic, inclusive forms of belonging.