

Chad Ossman Solitude and silence

I've been thinking a great deal recently about solitude and its role in my life. I spend a great deal of my time alone by choice, and I wonder if I am strange by behaving so.

I have seen people go through stress-induced conniptions just trying to find someone to go to the Commons with them, calling up even the slightest acquaintance. Also, an awful lot of people genuinely don't seem to mind sharing space with someone else. But to me, my time and space are exactly that: mine.

I had vowed not to come back to Davidson this year unless I could live in a single. If asked why I felt so strongly about such an ultimatum, I can't think of a simple answer. Sure, sharing space with another human being for a few months can try anyone's self-restraint, but I still can't pinpoint exactly why I felt my own airspace was necessary to my mental well-being.

I like to have control over things, especially my environment. Silence is very important to me. With a collection of ambient music at my disposal and the surprisingly-comfortable glow of Christmas lights, my room functions as a decompression chamber. A day's worth of tensions throwing a party in my stiff neck get carded and have to go away. (It is thus unfortunate for me that my next-door neighbors have recently purchased a high-powered stereo system. I fully support their right to enjoy whatever they desire, but perhaps the bass lines of the same two or three songs repeatedly rattling anything not bolted down—not to mention my nerves—is somewhat intrusive.)

An environment of solitude and silence is a semiprecious commodity, and must be experienced with relish. With this in mind, I try to remind myself every day that I am extremely fortunate to have a place to go to where I can ask the world to step outside and leave me alone for a little while. And if I want, I can exercise at any time my option to rejoin the kind and friendly Davidson atmosphere.

I leave you with the recipe for an experiment. If possible, wait until your roommate has a class and make yourself comfortable in your room.

Light some candles or even some incense (be careful ... people may think you're doing drugs). Turn off your telephone (there's a little button on the side of most electronic models—don't worry, voice mail will do its job). Turn off the TV and just ... breathe.

Meditate. Nap. Do a jigsaw puzzle. Read a trashy novel. Talk to yourself. Stare at the wall. Or, if hard pressed, study. Just be good to yourself and enjoy any quiet moments you can squeeze out of one of the few crazy days we have left in life.

A common thread is woven in the fabric of every human life, entwined among the other colors and designs, tying its tint to every clashing shade. We sense its acute sheen most clearly in the clenching of a fist, in the thorns that won't leave our side. This tie that binds us together is a lack, a need, a hunger in the center of the chest; the occasional hunger pains we suffer are only a fractional indication of a greater, world-wide deprivation.

Like infants groping in the night for the touch of a caring hand, we scan the Earth for satiation, only to find ourselves more hungry than when we started. Our aching, hollow hearts thirst for water to quench the ethereal dryness. Sometimes we taste imitations, but we always choke on these bitter substitutes. We are like runners after a long race, needing water but pouring vinegar down our blistering throats. What will finally quiet our growling appetites and soothe our tepid thirst?

By the time we have reached college, all of us have probably learned that nothing in the world makes us completely and eternally

Kimberly Kreiling Beyond the seven story mountain

happy, yet we still desire complete satisfaction. No creation desires after something that does not exist. Satisfaction, therefore, must exist, or we wouldn't want it. We should learn, then, from the facts that we are spiritually hungry and that nothing completely satisfies this hunger—except God, greater than the world, who can.

When we seek God, we will find Him. Consider the example of Job when he finds God after enduring undue suffering. Hear in his words the sound of victory: "My ears had heard of you," he says to the Lord. "But now my eyes have seen you." If we are to become imitators of Job, practicing faith, patience, and endurance, how should we also interpret the rest of Chapter 42, "The Lord made him prosperous again, and gave him twice as much as he had before." The message here is one of joy in the sight of God. Christ is the living water, and we are empty glasses, waiting to be filled. When

God awaits to soothe us like cool, running water on a sweltering day, I wonder why we keep subjecting ourselves to sour milk.

Another example is found in Dante's *Purgatorio*, in which the Italian writer summarizes the Roman Catholic belief in the seven story mountain in Purgatory. Purgatory reminds us of our need for spiritual cleansing, which is believing in Christ's atonement, which is seeing God, which is coming to grasp with Divine Love. Traveling through Purgatory, the soul encounters and absolves its sin so that it may enter into the holy place of Heaven. The soul achieves victory to the extent that it has faced its sin and is there able to behold the Beatific Vision of the Divine. Like the characters who share in this experience, we will also see the glory of God when we acknowledge our guilt and accept forgiveness through Christ.

These two allegories, Dante's *Purgatorio* and the book of Job,

reveal the joy and grace that pour into us when we come into the presence of God. Knowing God's willingness to forgive and desire to reveal Himself in us, how can we have access to these gifts? Jesus gives us an example in Mark 1:35: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." We will then understand Thomas Merton's definition of contemplation as "the perfection of love."

In the quiet times, we will find that to follow Christ is not to suppress our passions but to experience a greater passion than any other imitation yields. We cannot, however, always stay on the mountain; we have lives to live here. In fact, we would be incomplete to arrive at God and not to let His compassion overflow into other areas of our lives, or not to want to carry to other people the joy found in that place. For this reason, the same God that we see in that holy place, where we taste of the living water, abides with us through the Holy Spirit when we return to the dryness of the valley below.

This country seems to thrive on making African-Americans angry.

Why from page 8

were the first civilized people on Earth? Why weren't we told that the pyramids in Egypt were built by dark-skinned people? Why was it never said that there is a distinct possibility that Jesus Christ was black, considering the fact that ancient Hebrews were dark-skinned? I guess that shows us just how important we are in this country.

Why did it take a full-scale riot to force the criminal justice system to convict the officers in the Rodney King beating, and why did they get such light sentences? Was it meant to suggest that African-American life is somehow less important? I often wonder how

long it would have taken a jury to convict if the four officers were African-American and Rodney King was white.

This country seems to thrive on making African-Americans angry. Then it condemns them for speaking out against the many wrong doings. It seems that if we don't speak out about the wrongs in this society we are killed off slowly and collectively. And at the same time, if we show any anger or express our dislikes towards this apparent oppression we are killed off quickly and individually. But, regardless of how you look at it, it is pretty obvious that there is a force trying to kill us off.

What seems simply amazing is the fact that we are not yet de-

stroyed. It is amazing to realize that of the African-Americans in the work force, 65% are in managerial, supervisory, or entrepreneurial positions. It is amazing that the African-American middle-class is growing at twice the rate of the white middle-class. It is amazing that African-Americans have over 500 billion hours of formal education, even though they have to get them in an educational system which says nothing positive about them. Isn't it just amazing that great writers such as Maya Angelou and Ralph Ellison are African-American? And it is almost inconceivable that an African-American could be the number-one rated surgeon in this country, even though one is.

In a weird way, it all makes sense. I was told that God never gives anyone more than they can handle. So, what we must realize is that these people did not accomplish great things in spite of being African-American, but *because* they are African-American. What other group could have endured slavery, and lived to tell about it? What other group could have turned the worst part of the pig into a delicacy? What other group could turn their hard times into entertainment as powerful as "the blues" and slave narratives? What other group could take the word "nigger" and use it as a call of affection amongst their peers? Whether you want to see it or not, success does run in our race.

Attackers of the Confederate flag are often uninformed.

Disagree from page 8

equal to the South in the Senate, had some success in raising the tariff and acquiring federally-funded internal improvements in the early 1800s, none of these successes were of the magnitude it desired. The only solution was for it to achieve a superiority in the Senate. Thus came the Northern demand, in the 1840s and 50s, that no new slave states be admitted to the Union. "As many Northern states and territories had laws preventing blacks from settling within their borders [As late as 1834, Massachusetts law prescribed a public whipping for any black entering and remaining in the state for two months], it is unbelievable and hypocritical to argue the North's motivation in keeping slave states out of the Union was based on moral principles (Kennedy)."

But the Northern scheme worked, and by early 1860 the North had achieved a majority of three states in the Senate and was about to admit seven other free states, giving it an irresistible majority in both houses of Congress (Bledsoe). Overwhelmed in Congress, the Southern states began to

secede when Lincoln was elected on a platform promising everything they opposed: a higher tariff, federally-funded internal improvements, and the means to perpetuate the South's inability to resist such legislation, namely the prohibition of slavery from the territories, thus preventing the formation of new slave states.

Initially, many Northern newspapers supported the South's right to secede. But then the Northern economy, with its 18.8% tariff, began to suffer against the low 10% tariff of the Confederacy. Then Northern opinion began to change and war was demanded, not to free the slaves, but to save the Northern economy.

On March 30, 1861, *The New York Times* concluded an editorial railing against the destruction that surely faced the Northern economy if it allowed the Confederate tariff to remain in existence: "We were divided and confused [as to what to do with the seceded Southern states] till our pockets were touched" (Kennedy).

Nor did Lincoln argue that the abolishment of slavery was his reason for attacking the South. When asked why he didn't just let the

South go, he replied, "Let the South go! Where, then shall we get our revenue?" (Bledsoe). When asked by Virginia officials to delay his attempt to resupply Fort Sumter, the event that started the War, Lincoln asked "What is to become of my revenue in New York if there is a ten percent tariff at Charleston?" (McGuire).

We will never know the answer to Mr. Lincoln's questions. Under Lincoln, the Confederacy was defeated, and the North succeeded in enacting its long desired economic policies: the tariff was raised from 18.8% to 47.5%, massive amounts of Federal money were spent on internal improvements, and the spirit of the national bank enacted with the Legal Tender and National Bank Acts.

I hope that this will inspire Mr. Bailey and the majority of Americans who share his view to reconsider their belief that slavery was the central issue of the Civil War; historical fact will not support this view. Furthermore, Mr. Bailey and others should consider that both *free* and enslaved blacks fought for the Confederacy and spoke proudly of their service for the rest of their lives.

Finally, Mr. Bailey should consider that the man at the head of the armies fighting under the Confederate flag, General Robert E. Lee, was an enemy of slavery. The men and women, black and white, who sacrificed, suffered, and died for the Confederacy did not rally to the Confederate flag to preserve slavery. Rather, they rallied to it in defense of the principles of the Constitution before it was perverted by an avaricious, industrialized North, in defense of state sovereignty and of their homes.

It is the KKK and similar white supremacist groups that use the Confederate flag for their mindless, hateful activities, that have most fully adopted the myth that the South fought to preserve slavery. These ignoramuses simply do not know the true meaning and history of the flag they use. To decry the Confederate flag as racist because the dregs of society have associated it with their hateful cause, is not only to judge all decent supporters of the flag by the lowest common denominator, but is also to display a disregard for history nearly as appalling as that shown by the KKK when it waves the Confederate flag.