

(bright organic piano music)

- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Therefore, let us all offer unto God, our unison prayer of confession, and for pardon. Let us pray. Almighty God. We humbly confess that we are guilty people. We cannot count the sins that we have done, nor can we remember all the evil thoughts of our hearts. We have neglected thy word, and up taken lightly thy mercies. We have not turned away from violence and vanity. We therefore, do not deserve the forgiveness for which we pray, but we ask thee to grant that we may from the heart, be turned to thee, and that we may be reconciled to thee, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. And hear these words of assurance of forgiveness from the Old and the New Testaments. "Who is liken unto God who pardons iniquity, and passes over transgression, because He delights in steadfast love. He will have compassion upon us. He will tread out and equities underfoot. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Jesus said, 'Him that cometh to me, I will not cast out.' Our sins are forgiven for His sake, therefore, be of good courage." (bright organic piano music) (congregation hymning)

- The scripture lesson today, is taken from the fourth chapter of Joshua: 15-24. The context from which this passage comes, is the story of Joshua leading the nation of Israel across the Jordan. The high priests have been holding the Ark of the Covenant in the Jordan River, and holding back the waters of the Jordan, so that the people of Israel could pass through the river. And the Lord said to Joshua, "Command the priests who bear the Ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan. Joshua, therefore commanded the priests, come up out of the Jordan. And when the priest bearing the Ark of the covenant of the Lord came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before. The people came up out of the Jordan on the 10th day of the 1st month. And they encamped in Gilgal on the east borders of Jericho. And those 12 stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel, 'When your children ask their fathers in time to come, what do these stones mean? Then you shall let your children know, Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground, for the Lord, your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over as the Lord, your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over. So, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty.'" (bright organic piano music) (congregation hymning)

- The Lord be with you.

- And be with you also. Let us pray. Let us offer the prayer of Thanksgiving for knowledge and wisdom. Oh God, truth, and beauty, and goodness, we thank thee that thou hast reveal thyself, in the honesty of the mind that will not be content with a lie, in the sensitivity of the heart, that will not be satisfied with the unseemly, and in the courage of the will, that refuses to be reconciled to the mean. Grant us so to seek after truth, to follow after beauty, and to strive after goodness, that we may be sons and daughters of thine, like

thy son, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us offer a Prayer of Intercession for the world in trouble. Oh God, the Father, who has made of one blood all the nations of the earth, we pray that strength and courage abundant be given to all who work for a world of reason, and understanding. We pray that the good which lies in every man's heart, made day by day be magnified. We pray that men will come to see more clearly, not that which divides them, but that which unites them. We pray that each hour may bring us closer to a final victory, not of nation over the nation, but of man over his own evils and weakness. And this, we pray for Jesus Christ, say. And let us offer a Prayer of Supplication for our university. Our mighty and eternal God, who are alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, we commend onto thee the class of 1975, and all who are in this place for the first time, gathered from diverse places, strangers to one another, they're well-known to thee sojourners in our midst, give them confidence without pride, the knowledge that they are a chosen people, yet without arrogance. A sense of entering into worldly heritage, to maintain and to further what is true, and beautiful, and good in the colleges and in the university. So, we consciously bring out a university into thy presence, thou has dean it, God, in the past, continue with us in the days that lie ahead. And now as our savior Christ has taught us, we humbly pray together saying, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

- Before commencing the sermon, let me make an announcement. Those of you who are freshmen, have received a great deal of information in printed form and verbally, about what to expect and not to expect at Duke University. Contrary to one thing you may have read, or have been told, the Sunday morning service in this chapel, important as it is, is certainly not the only time that there is something that is worshipful and something of value that takes place here in this chapel. We will very soon be resuming the daily chapel services, which we had the latter part of the spring. And also, on frequent occasions during the year, there will be important musical services here through which the gospel is communicated as importantly as it is, in such things as this great sermon that you're gonna hear in a little bit. One of those, and the very first one will be today. And I want to emphasize the importance and the greatness of this one today. At four o'clock, here in the chapel, the Ciompi Quartet will play, and will play the music which you have found already, probably on the last page of this morning's chapel bullet. We have, we think a great musical organization in our chapel choir. There is another very great musical organization that is associated with the chapel, and that is the world famous Ciompi Quartet. I urge you to hear them in the chapel at four o'clock today. Well, you good people are about to hear a dialogue sermon. In case you were wondering what two of us are doing standing up here in front, at the moment, the program calls for a sermon.

- Some of you probably wondered when you saw two of us come out. Whether that meant the sermon was going to be twice as long, but we're sure you, that won't be the case.

- Actually, those C.G, all sermons are dialogues sermons. And the chief difference between this one and the others, is that in this dialogue, both sides will be heard.

- Well, what do you mean by that, Champlain?

- Well, I mean that almost always, when one person gets up to preach a sermon all by himself, you know, a filibuster, there is a silent partner who is dialoguing with him. And that silent partner is the man and the pew. The preacher opens his mouth and says, "All of you folks out there in the congregation are sinners. The man out in the pew, doesn't open his mouth, but he's silently thinking, how about that man up in the pulpit? Is he a sinner too?"

- And that's probably true. And I think it is also true that even though you and I are going to be standing up here, engaging in a dialogue between our ourselves, the freshmen sitting there and the pews are going to be second guessing both of us.

- Right you are. Speaking of these freshmen. That's how we got ourselves into this topic, which we were examining today. Earlier in the summer, as chaplain and I sent out a letter to all incoming freshmen, asking them to return a card to me, on which they were to indicate their religious preference, or lack of it. And then I passed along this information to the various denominational chaplains. Well, at the bottom of the cards, was room for a question or a comment. Quite a few wrote questions, which added up to this big question, which we were facing in this dialogue sermon. What is religion all about anyway?

- Chaplain Wilkinson you frightened me when you say that. Do you mean to imply that you and I have a responsibility in sermon to answer that big question?

- Now, look who's scaring who. When you phrase it the way you did, you put panic into me too. So, to comfort both of us, and to avoid misleading our friends there in the pew, let's agree that we're going to chicken out on any pretense to give a full and sufficient answer to the question of what religion is all about. Simply attempt to explore the question, and to hint at some directions in which all of us can move as we seek to find our own answers to this question.

- Yes. I think that's a more realistic posture to take. However, I do think it is possible for us, even in a 25 minute sermon, to identify some of the false notions which some people have regarding this question.

- What do you mean, C.G.?

- Well, I mean that a great many intelligent people seem to have some pretty unintelligent ideas of what religion is all about. And even if we can't say today all of the things religion means, we can begin by bulldozing some of those false notions.

- Like what, for instance?

- We'll like, for example, like the idea that religion is getting guards to see to it, that we beat Florida in football this Saturday. Or that we prayed to God to help us napalm the women and children in Vietnam. Or the idea that God wants black folks to be subservient to the whites. Or the notion that religion consistent entirely of just going to church. Or the thought that a person is religious in proportion to how many verses of the Bible he has memorized. Or the belief that a person is religious, if he claims to believe everything in the

Bible, or the Apostle's Creed. And that he's not religious, if he questions any part of it or-

- Wait a minute. You're going just a little fast for me. Before you add anything else to your catalog of what you call unintelligent ideas. How about my asking you a question about each one of those you've already mentioned?

- Okay.

- All right. Let's start with the first one, the one about getting God on our side in Saturday's game at Tampa, Florida. Are you implying that religion has nothing to do with winning football games?

- Before I tackle that question, (congregation laughing) let me make it perfectly clear, that I am a football player. That I very much prefer winning over losing. And that when I'm in a game, I do everything I know to do, that will help my team to win. Have I made that much clear?

- You have, both by your rhetoric just now, and by your performance on the football team. But what were you gonna add to that?

- Well, I was going to add, that God is intelligent enough to know that the members of the Florida Football team have a keen desire to win also. And God loves them as much as he loves me. Therefore, I'm not going to kid myself into thinking that I can coach God, into giving me an unfair advantage over Florida next Saturday. And by the same token, I'm not afraid that some prayerful player on their team is going to trick God into giving them an unfair advantage over us.

- I'm glad to hear you put the matter in those terms. But you still haven't fully answered my question about whether religion has nothing to do with winning football games?

- Okay. Well, the only other thing I'll say about that, in my opinion, if a person is truly religious, it tends to make him do a better job of every worthwhile thing he sets himself to do. It makes him more unselfish, more in with the discipline, more responsible in his attitude toward his fellow man, and things like that. So, in that sense, religion makes a player a better player, than he might otherwise be.

- Okay, then. Now, let me ask you what you meant about bulldozing the idea that religion is a way to get God, to help us napalm the poor people of Vietnam?

- Well, the unfortunate conclusion we come to from reading history books, is that ever since the time of Christ, so-called Christian nations have tried to claim crisis blessings on their walls against other nations. And again, and again, we have seen two nominally, Christian nations fighting each other, both praying to the same God to help them slaughter each other. And how stupid do we think God is?

- I'll say Amen to that. I'm not even going to ask you a question about the third false notion that you listed. You remember it was the one which has held suede, for much too long in America to the effect that religion

endorsed the practice of black people always being subservient to white people. Whether it was under a system of political slavery, or under a system of economics slavery, which is just as bad. I recall the short poem, which Countee Cullen wrote about a white woman whom he knew, who was real big on church attendance. And here was the poem which Countee Cullen wrote about her. "She thinks that even up in heaven, her class lies late in snores, while poor black cherubs rise at seven to do celestial chores." Any such concept proposed as this, should be labeled for what it is, absolutely pure blasphemy." I do however, wanna raise a question about your comments on church attendance, and memorizing portions of the Bible? Would I be right if I guess that activities such as that, can be important, so long as we don't treat them as being the major thrust of religion?

- I could perhaps agree with that way of stadium. Except that I think we ought to point out that some pastors, some parents, and some church offices, have emphasized church's attendance to such an extent that without actually saying so. They have created the impression that church attendance is what religion consist of.

- Okay. I get your point, C.G. And I assume, unless you correct me, that you feel approximately the same way about memorizing portions of scripture, about reciting the Apostle's Creed, and so on? You know, several years ago, I heard Dr. Carl Michaelson, then of Drew University give a modern parable about the Bible, while, by the way, he was preaching a sermon right here in this chapel. He said, "Let's imagine that a group of Duke students wanna go to Raleigh. They ask about the way to get there, and they're told to go west of the campus, get on 15 501 bypass, and then follow the signs. Well, a fellow student decides later that he wants to join the group in Raleigh. So, he jumps in his car, goes to the 15th, 501 bypass, follow the signs. Speeding on his way to Raleigh, he went on the east end of Durham. He spots the car of his friends, parked at the side of the highway, and sees the friends seated on the ground in a circle. So, he stopped his car and walks back to the group, and asked what on earth they're doing. They point to a highway sign in the middle of their circle and the sign reads, 'To Raleigh.' And it has an arrow pointing toward Raleigh. And the student who arrived late is mystified and asks what that has to do with they're sitting on the ground. They answered that they wanted to go to Raleigh, and that they found a sign, which said, 'To Raleigh.' So they have reached their destination. Dr. Michelson said that the logic of that hypothetical group, is no worse than the logic of those who make the Bible the center of their religion, rather than God himself."

- Point well made. Chaplain Wilkinson, we've been identifying a few of the false notions of what religion is all about. Now, perhaps we should suggest some directions in which a person could move to find an affirmative answer to the question.

- Okay. In the brief time that we have, we'll have to be very selective. There is a verse in the Bible, which gives a brief and succinct answer to that question, a positive answer. And it suggests that the answer to a sacred question, is to be found in the secular order. What is religion all about? James 1:27 answers it this way. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the father, is to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep himself uncontaminated by the world." So, when we ask a sacred question, what is pure religion? We receive a secular answer. Get involved in solving the poverty problem.

- That seems to be the clear implication of this verse in the Episcopal James. But is that typical of the Bible in general, or is it an exception?

- Well, I will say that from my own studies of the Bible and from reading the reliable studies of others, more competent in textual matters than I am. And I see some of 'em sitting in the congregation right now, so I have to watch my words. I have come to the conclusion, that the thrust of the Judeo Christian scriptures as a whole, is definitely in this direction. And one of the finest examples of it, is the passage in Joshua, which Lucy Austin read a little while ago. Let me briefly summarize the story. The ancient Israelites were in slavery to the Egyptians. They cried out to their masters for Liberty and they were denied. They cried out to Jehovah God, and He sent Moses to lead them up out of slavery. As they fled their captors, they were in danger next from the sea. They later recorded that Jehovah took up personal interest in their delivery, both from their captors and from the sea. But the end is not yet. They were next in the wilderness, now without food, now without water. They later recorded that their cries to Jehovah brought action, food and water came by Jehovah's acts. Lastly, as they prepared to cross over Jordan into the promised land, Jehovah provided an able leader in Joshua. Now, comes the part which intrigues us. As they passed through a dry river bed on their way directly into the promised land, Joshua wisely commanded that one representative from each of the 12 tribes, picked up a stone from the Riverbed and carry it with him. And then, when all the Israelites encamped, they piled these 12 stones together. Joshua knew how short memories sometimes are, and he knew how quickly important events can play from the attention of a people as new and younger generations come on the scene, who were not present when those events happened. So, he said to the Israelites, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, what do these stones mean? Then you shall let your children know." Know of what? "Let them know that God has been active and mighty in the every day problems of the secular lives of the people. He was active in freeing them from slavery, active in rescuing them from the sea, active in solving their inadequate food situation, and in getting them a decent place to live." Well, Chaplain Wilkinson you said, this story is a fine example of how the religious questions have secular answers. But can you sharpen the folks on this a bit?

- Okay. When the 12 stalls were placed in a pile in the promised land, they became along with the ark, the chief religious symbols, because they were there by God's command. So, the people began to think of them as the place where God was. Their religion was in those stones, they felt. If someone had asked these Israelites to point toward their God, they probably would have pointed toward those stones, or at least would have felt that those stones were a sacred place where God would be more likely found than anywhere else. But Joshua shattered this idea by his insistence, that the only meaning of these sacred stones was that God was basically not in those stone, but that He was out in the secular world, hard at work, freeing slaves, delivering people from danger, solving the hunger problem, and seeking to find a decent home for the homeless.

- Well, then is it valid to draw any comparisons between those stones and say, for example, the stones in this chapel?

- Well, in my opinion, C.G, it not only is valid to draw a comparison between them, but it is theologically accurate to say that the stones of this chapel, were intended to serve almost precisely the same religious

function as those 12 stones that Joshua commanded about. Namely, to remind the old generations and inform each new generation, that God is mighty in action to relieve the distress of the poor, the hungry, the ill-housed, and those in slavery. The function of these stones here, is to say, God is out there, not here basically. Last Sunday, Stafford Wing of the UNC music faculty sang here in this chapel, "Handles great prayer, thanks be to thee." And it was rooted in this mighty drama from Joshua. "Thanks be to thee, Lord, our God," he sang, "Thy people has thou lead safe through the sea." It wasn't talking about church, and yet that's what we sing in church. Now, to summarize it, we can put it this way. The function of our coming together within the stones of these walls, is to learn to detect the signs of God's handiwork in the secular world, and to dedicate ourselves here, to joining with Him in that work. So, what is religion all about? These stones, this chapel, this service of worship, this Bible, not as an end in themselves. Indeed, they become hindrances rather than helps. If we substitute them for walking with God, through the slums, the ghettos, and the war-torn refugees of a secular world, they can, however, be very helpful if they teach us what religion is really all about.

- Well, it comes down to this then, that we can't always build a house and put a saying of sign on it, saying "God's House," and then expect thereby to capture God in that house. If we try this sort of trick, we may find that God is far away, trying to stop a war in Vietnam, for example, or is actively seeking to get a promised land for people trapped in the ghetto. We can't always put God out of just any bottle that we've decided to stick a God label.

- The stones of this chapel are of your hometown church, are not any more sacred than the stones of a gambling casino, unless they come to mean for us, that our God is leading us into service for those in trouble in the world. Do you remember the reply which Jesus gave to the disciples of John The Baptist? When John was in prison, they approached Jesus and asked, "Are you he who should come or do we look for another?" What was the reply of our Lord Jesus Christ. Did He point to a building which he had erected with his own hands, and said, "see, I'm the one to come because I built this building." Or did he recite an Orthodox creed and then say, "Hear that, that proves I'm the Messiah." Did He spend waves of learning theological rhetoric important as all those are? No. You remember His reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see, the blind are receiving their sight. The lame people are walking. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf are hearing. The dead are being raised alive, and the poor are hearing good news." Perhaps as each of us seeks to answer for himself, this great question, what is religion all about anyway? He will find it profitable to search in that direction. Let us pray. Almighty God, our heavenly father, the God of our fathers and our forefathers, who led captives out of captivity. Who led safely, thy people through the sea and the wilderness, and across the rivers, and through every time of danger, and every place of toil. Lead us now in this day, on our campus, and in our world, we make this prayer with confidence because we believe it is thy world. And we pray in Jesus name. Amen. (bright organic piano music) (congregation hymning)

- Oh, God in whom we live and move and have our being, here we and present unto thee, our silver and our gold, a symbol of ourselves, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And unto God's gracious mercy and protection, do I commit you, may the blessing of God come upon you abundantly. May it keep you strong and tranquil in the truth of His promises through Jesus Christ our Lord. (congregation hymning) (bright organic piano music)