

(piano music)

- Among the many dynamic forces that propel us around this campus that drag us out of bed to class, to the library, to the lab, to chapel, is the simple drive of curiosity. This motive is obscured under more immediate organization man motives of the dread of flunking of the push for prestige standard seeking, the political and economic considerations that drive us towards the BA degree. But curiosity is there too underneath luring us into this or that research project, lab experiment, raising a hand in class, teasing us into the library, why, how come, what makes the machine run? The leaves turn, the universe tick. The same curiosity turned Moses aside in the ancient story, our lesson of the morning. Strange thing, the bush is burning but it is not burnt up. Why, while a university lives outwardly on endowments, it lives inwardly on curiosity. And in this week's university calendar, there is something to satisfy every curiosity from lectures on visual learning in pigeons to serial techniques in non tonal music, something for everybody. But it becomes an interesting to ponder the relation of this curiosity to a kind of polar opposite in the university culture, another dynamic which seems to pull in the opposite direction from curiosity and that's reverence. How do these two stand together in our common life if indeed they do. How are we to reconcile outwardly in policy, inwardly each of us in the secret place, the spirit of reverence with a spirit of curiosity. There's one direct answer to this question given often by the devout and the pious, which says the reverence and curiosity are sharply opposed to each other. The curiosity is dangerous to faith. That reverence is the mind set that we should only cultivate. As soon as we become curious, inquisitive, raise questions according to this view, we are starting down a perilous path, which leads to skepticism. Better than keeps safe in the truth, keep the head bowed and the heart faithful, lest the minds questions begin to insinuate themselves into the safe assurance who knows where insatiable curiosity will lead you. If you keep asking but why, and then ask, but why that, far into the night, you'll soon be far into the night of doubt, groping through infinite regresses of reasons to fall finally into the abyss. It's interesting to note that this fear of curiosity is strong in medieval culture. In the 12th century Bernard of Clairvaux describing the steps of humility in monasticism pointed out that the first way word step of pride away from humility is curiosity. "If you see a monk," he wrote, "whom you formerly trusted confidently beginning to roam with his eyes, hold his head erect and prick up his ears, whenever he's standing or walking or sitting, you may know," he says in effect, "that this monk has started down the skid roll to the perdition of unpaid." But this medieval slant which suspects curiosity as inimical to reverence is not just a medieval period piece. It's very contemporary in the mind of the earnest back town, Bible thumbing, Southern Protestant. It was very suspicious of all this fancy book learning at Duke, all this science stuff and critical study of religion, which will come to no good. He may write to the Dean's office protesting that he didn't send his child to college to have his faith tampered with. It's not right to ask questions of the Lord, just accept his ways and trust. All this mindset may be present in one or other of you in this congregation. A sophomore whose religious faith is a precious sacred object to be revealed, but excused ahead of time from inquiry from curiosity who is judged badly by class discussion of miracles in religion 51, 52, doesn't square with what he's been taught at church in home who may come to chapel to have his weakening faith showered up. But this answer, a reverence prohibiting curiosity is wrong hearted

as it is wrong headed. It's not the appropriate frame of mind for any university culture or university student. Reverence without curiosity is blind, docile, stupid. It bows the head but in fear not understanding its faith is closed, all finished and settled no more questions to ask. And such a reverence is a violation of the fact that we are by nature inquisitive animals. The only animals that can ask why and proof of this is seen in the fact that as soon as one prohibits inquiry and puts a fence around a sacred object saying no trespassing, such a sign is very invitation to heightened curiosity and trespass. ` So it was with Adam in the garden, so has it always been in history wherever church or sectors are tempted by up fences to keep out the curious in defense of the faith. Second answer to the question of how reverence is related to curiosity is much more typical of our day and this community than the first. This opposite answer calls for curiosity without reverence. If curiosity was the first vice of medieval man leading him away from truth, it was the first virtue of Renaissance man leading him toward it. The university is in a sense the length and shadow of Renaissance man, who was infinitely curious about why and builds his realms of knowledge on this insatiable search. No domains of truth are close to debate an investigation, whether it's the question of the theologian about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin or the nuclear physicist about how many atoms condense on the head of a pin. Angels and Adams, stars and souls all are equally subject to the master question why. And according to the faith of Renaissance man, curiosity avidly pursued prying into the matter supposedly sacred and holy shows them up often to be pious, spoofs, gigantic, dreary, opiates and delusions to keep the people quiet. Yeah this answer, curiosity without reverence has too its dangers. For a curiosity that has lost all mystery, all sense of humility in the presence of the inscrutable, all sense of hush in the presence of transcendent grandeur. He says, "Perilous as a blind reverence which asks no questions." Curiosity without reverence can become jaunty, brittle, reckless, morally insensitive, and at the last morally destructive. There's a curious kind of arrogance that can develop in a mind which is inquisitive with no respect for the holy and the awesome mysterium tremendum that surrounds our little life, the great power, the great wisdom that lie before and after our petty powers and wisdoms, the overwhelming beauty that lurks in the open fifths of a chest and a cough anthem. Such a jaunty curiosity is really a little pathetic. A student wrote a letter to the Chronicle last year, suggesting that since the main library was so badly overcrowded with books and since this chapel isn't used very much except by tourists, it should be converted into storage space for books. His proposal amounted to suggesting that the campus realm devoted to curiosity should take over the campus realm devoted to reverence. Well he was proposing a very profound educational issue but his answer was not very wise. He represented renaissance man called Beatnich. He had missed out on a deeper dimension of his education failed to catch what this university attempts to be about in its total philosophy of education. If medieval man catholic or protestant is in distrusting curiosity and Renaissance man of the 15th or 20th century in rejecting reverence, perhaps one could say that biblical man has a better grasp of the relation of these two great factors. Moses could stand here for biblical man and the strange folk story of the burning bush dramatizes the connection. Moses had something apparently what we call scientific spirit. He was curious to figure out why the bush was not consumed. He was led into an encounter with truth by an oddity that just piqued his curiosity. But the outcome of the encounter was not the dispelling of mystery but the reverence which accompanies mystery. Put off your shoes from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. Led by curiosity into an encounter with ultimate reality, he discovers that the desert place is the dwelling place of the Most High. That the immediate question of curiosity's why leads him to the ultimate question of existence which is who and to the answer, the God of his fathers. The original query of the mind leads to a final

acknowledgement of awe and about it or when thinks of another biblical man in whom also has represented a more profound joining of reverence with curiosity than either a docile part by a tear or an arrogant secularism could possibly see. It's significant that one of the first glimpses we have of the boy Jesus, is when He is found by His distraught parents in the temple sitting among the teachers. It says, "Listening to them and asking them questions in a kind of pickup seminar on the Torah." The significance of this glimpse is that for Jesus, the temple is the place where curiosity is proper, where questions are not forbidden but raised. If Moses found the desert place to be after all the kind of temple, Jesus found the temple to be a kind of classroom where the searching spirit could give and take in the exciting directive with mind and recall too that in the rephrasing of the law, Jesus reminds his hearers that we are to love God with all our minds, which certainly includes the exercise of curiosity, the critical faculties. Curiosity and reverence should be our normative stands of faith in the whole life of this university, if we are to abide by the aims of its original trust and acquire wisdom. This means it seems to me that in curricular policy, the critical analysis of the religious tradition of Western culture is indispensable to humane education. It means that the kind of class brittle secularism, which in class delights to scorn all reverence and obliterate all holiness is inappropriate. It means that all the way across from medical school to the athletic fields, the ground on which we stand and walk and work is holy ground. The persons with whom we deal are infinitely precious and sacred because sacred to the infinite person. And the truth is about which we contend are facets of an eternal truth. What either way, a reverence curiosity or curious reverence, it is the whole mark of a liberally educated person. Note that the relation of curiosity and reverence does not mean a division of territory of two concentric circles. The inner circle of curiosity and investigation earning an empirical knowledge which gradually moves out over the outer circle of mystery and the unknown. So that eventually in time, reverence is the fear of the unknown will be dispelled by knowledge. This was sort of the 19th century way of reconciling science and religion or so it was thought. But a biblical outlook is different from this in Genesis and Job, in the Psalms and in the mind of Christ. It is not knowledge bounded by mystery but knowledge infused with mystery. The sense of wonder does not begin at that point beyond which curiosity cannot reach. It permeates all that we know. Philosophy begins in wonder, ends in wonder, is sustained throughout by wonder. The immediate whys of 'cause of connection in the economic text or in the lab always point beyond themselves to the ultimate questions of the source, the goal, the who, who gives the rhyme or reason to it all. In whom do all these little bits of data cohere. These religious questions haunt all technical question. The moral answer to the problem, how am I to use all the technical answers for good or for ill? This arises from the sense of reverence. The sense that the ground on which I am standing is Holy ground. The moral problems about the uses of knowledge are answered from the side of reverence not curiosity in a universe which gives us a dreadful freedom to choose between life and death. To be sure, curiosity and reverence never fit quite neatly together. There's always some pull and haul between them, which makes for the exciting collision of ideas and the outer forums of debate and the inner agony of making up your mind. And you can be sure that the faculty of this institution are not of a single persuasion as to whether a reverent mind, as well as a curious mind should here be fostered. But the norm of a reverent curiosity holds good. And if sought commonly, it would preserve our motto or UTDO at religio. From being a statement only of an uneasy truce between two warring champs of the reverence and the curious for a wind held somehow together, curiosity protects reverence from a crowd, an abject fear without removing the wonder. Reverends keeps curiosity from arrogance without removing the quest and the question mark. This spirit would constitute our integrity and health and sustain us as we go our rounds of seeking and finding and

losing and seeking again, which is education. Amen, let us pray. All Mighty God, always hidden, always revealed. The unseen source and goal of our searching, the answer to our last question, the questioner of our last answer, grant us by thy grace, such open curious and reverent minds as they come to wisdom in obedience before Thee, in knowledge of whom standeth are eternal life. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.