

(banging sound) (rattling sound)

- First of all, I would like to say a very sincere thank you for the warm welcome that has been given to me. I regard this as a rare privilege in my life to worship with this great congregation. This is my first visit to Duke University and to North Carolina, but this is not the first time I have come to know of this great place. For a long time, I have wanted to visit Duke I am now very happy indeed, to have this opportunity. The text I have chosen for this morning is found in St. Paul's episode to the Philippians chapter three, verse 14, "I press on toward the goal for the price of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The new English Bible translate this as, "I press towards the goal to win the price, which is God's call to the life above in Christ Jesus, We are familiar with the slogan, "religion is the opiate of the people." Religion has been associated with a static pattern of life. Some people even describe this as a kind of tranquilizer to bring quietness, comfort and peace, when man faces a world of turmoil and troubles. Christianity too has often been regarded as a kind of static pattern of life. Every religion has their creed, their cultures and producers of certain culture gives a certain code of models to live by, and every religion has produced their set of doctrines. Christianity also has its own creed and cultures code of models and doctrines. And very often Christianity just takes its place alongside of other religions. However, in recent times, many have been talking about Christianity going beyond religion, the religionless Christianity as some have described it. And in many books written in recent times have in some ways disturbed Christians in many parts of the world, which A.T. Robinson's book, "Honest to God," Bonhoeffer's writings, speaking of "Religionless Christianity, books on the secular interpretation of the gospel and all these have disturbed Christians. But when we look into the Bible, there too, we discover that a dissatisfaction against a static pattern of religious life is at the very core of the biblical faith. For example, the Deuteronomy writer reflects on the history of the Hebrew people and raises the question why after all God chose these people Israel? He points out that it was the result of God's love and it was not because of anything, especially a bachelors are great in the Hebrew people themselves. But what was the nature of God's love for Israel? And in answering that question, He has an interesting picture, the picture of an eagle building its nest, laying eggs, hatching them and caring for the young ones. And then staring up the nest, throwing the young eaglets out forcing them to learn to fly themselves. And then he also has the picture of the mother eagle spreading its wings so that if the eaglets fall, they will fall on the wings. Here's a picture of God leading His people out of secure positions, into positions of danger, into new insights, into new dimensions of the knowledge of God's love. Of course when you read the whole Old Testament, you also come to the teaching of the prophets that God's love was not just directed to the people of Israel. The same love was extended to all the peoples of the earth. We also read in the Psalmist, in Psalm 61, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." There you have a kind of vision of always wanting to go beyond oneself when you are caught up in faith in God. Saint Paul, in his episode to the Philippians as also in other epistle, gives a testimony about his religious experience. And in this epistle, he speaks of his background as a very religious person, as a very strict Pharisee, trying to live according to the law, he was a man full of zeal for God and for the religion of Israel. And he could say looking back on his Hebrew faith, that he regarded himself as blameless according to the law. He had fulfilled the requirements of the Hebrew

religion and that religion was good. But then he comes to know Christ and after his knowledge of Christ, he does not any longer have that complacent attitude that he was blameless, he rather learn to regard himself as a sinner as the least among the saints as one who has not yet reached the goal, the goal is far off, now he's only running the race. He cannot call himself perfect yet because Christ has given him what he calls an upward call. And the goal he is thriving for, is a life where he will be guided by this upward call in the heavenly places with Christ. We find the same kind of emphasis in Jesus teaching. He said that among those born of women, there is none greater than John the Baptist, but the least in the kingdom of God, which he came to elaborate, is greater than he, he came to lead people beyond what John the Baptist had conceived. Again He said, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Apostle John had the same kind of insight. After many years of Christian life, he writes, "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be, but when we see Him as He is, we shall be like Him." That means he developed the insight that Christ is beyond him. He has not yet known the fullness of Christ and the whole Christian life is one of knowing Christ in his fullness. To be a Christian is to be involved in the redemptive activity of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit of God has taken hold of the church and is leading the church to greater and greater understanding of the mystery of God in creating this world and placing us in it. Certainly God has never meant life on this planet to be a dull and a static one. Man's history on this planet is one of unceasing adventure. Man is never satisfied with what he has or with what he has achieved. He wants to climb the highest peaks, he wants to go down and explore the depths of the oceans. And now we are living at a time when new visitors of knowledge have opened up in the splitting of the atom and discovering the powers embedded in the atom and with the energy that man has been able to release out of the atom. Man seeks to explore into out of space. Only for this weekend, we got the news of the new photographs taken off the moon. That's only one part of man's adventure into the future adventure into space. We do not yet know what science has in store for us, God has given us that wisdom and that unceasing quest for more knowledge. Now, war against the thrills of such scientific exploration, such adventurous nature, religious life often appears to be rather prosaic and dull, religious life often appears to be a life of a trial from secular adventure. Now, just pause a minute and think, can this be true, if we believe that Christ, the son of God died on the cross to give a salvation? If our place in nature is so adventurous. Can the life to which God has brought us through the death of Christ on the cross be less adventurous? Certainly saint Paul learned that it could not be less adventurous, he learned that the life that Christ brought him was one of unending adventure, unending race, and the price for that race is the upward call of God in Christ. We have been reminded that this day is the World Day of Prayer for students. And when we pray for students, we remember the many problems that students face in different parts of the world because of unsettling political situations because of their being refugees in some parts of the world, because of their struggle with poverty and other problems. We remember the students with all their needs, but our prayer for our students, is not just a prayer remembering their physical, intellectual and social needs, we also pray that during their student period, they regained this vision, which St. Paul had the vision that Christian life is a life of unending exploration towards the highest that God has given us. We pray that students throughout the world gain this vision. In the further gaining of this vision, there are certain signs, especially irrelevant for our time, there are signs which we can read and understand that God is still leading us beyond religion, beyond the static pattern of life to higher dimensions of Christian life. I would like to draw your attention to three points. First, we are now given a fresh vision of the Catholicity of the church. Our membership in the church is certainly through particular churches, through the Methodist church, through the Anglican church,

through the Presbyterian church and so on, but our membership in the charity is not fulfilled until we go beyond such particular denominations. We are reminded about this by the communitarian movement and by the church union movement. I was brought up as a congregationalist in South India. My wife was an Anglican and in the region where I grew up as a boy, there where Missouri Synod Lutheran and we were told that we could not pray together. They would not regard us as Christians and some of us will not regard them as Christians. The same thing was true between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. We often refer to them as Catholics and not as Christians. And similarly, they refer to us as Protestants and not Christians. But now my wife and I are both members of the church of South India, the United church, which has brought together four different denominations in South India, but the church of South India is itself not an end, we are now having conversations with the Lutherans and Missouri Synod Lutheran are also involved in that conversation. And our goal for union in South India is, the bringing together into one visible fellowship all those who believe in Jesus Christ and similar church union projects are at work throughout the world. And this year, the new United church is going to be integrated in December in Nigeria. We also live at a time when through the Vatican council, the Roman Catholic church has moved much further than where they were. One of the decrees issued by the Vatican council, the Decree on Christian Unity, they emphasize the need for cooperation among all Christians. And only this week and this past week, they have decided to cooperate with the World Council of Churches for the constellation of common problems. Christian Church is being led by the Holy Spirit to manifest its people unity in Christ. And we are taught that our membership in the church is really meant to manifest our membership in the one universal body of Christ that God is gathering from all nations and tongues and peoples. Pope John 23rd, in one of his encyclicals in 1962, taught his church about the goal of Christian prayer and Christian worship. This is what he said, "To go to church must mean for you to go up to cleanse yourselves, to extend the horizon of an individual's life, to the cares of the whole Catholicity, your hearts beating in unison with the hearts of your brothers in the faith and of all others who are your brothers also, because all we are redeemed in the blood of Christ." It is towards the realization of that fellowship we gather here to worship. Secondly, God has also given us the vision of what has been called a secular ecumenism. This was an expression used by one of the leaders of the Indian church, Mr. Imam Thomas, at the conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism held in Mexico in December of 1963. Perhaps the meaning of this can be illustrated by the experience throughout the world following the assassination of President Kennedy. As soon as the news of his assassination came, there was a sense of loss felt by almost all people. Certainly in India, his loss was regarded as greater than the loss of some top defense personnel, which occurred at the same time. Why? Because people throughout the world had learned that Kennedy was expressing in his concern for justice, peace, removal of poverty, and human well-being in general. What mankind throughout the world was after he in a way was the spokesman of the yearnings of people throughout the world. And now in many nations, in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America and the rest of the world also, programs for social uplift, for political rehabilitation are taking place on the basis of human dignity. Nehru used to say that, the purpose of the national planning in India, the five-year programs would not be achieved until visible results are seen in the way people live. He wanted to see people better clothed, better fed, better educated, better housed and he said that every Indian citizen should be lifted up to a level of dignity. That was the purpose of what Indian government calls the socialist pattern of society. Now, this is not just a human concern. This was better expressed by Jesus Christ Himself when He summed up His mission in the words of the Nazareth manifesto, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim the release to the captives and

the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the Jubilee year of the Lord." And then Hebrew thought the Jubilee year was meant for every Israelite to return to his ancestral heritage. That was a symbol of God's plan for man. Every citizen, every human person is meant to be a member of the household of God, with a full dignity of being fellow heir with Christ, a for child of God created in the image of God himself. Now that is the goal for which Christ came. So, what is known as this secular ecumenism, the concern which brings all mankind together? This concern is one in which Christians are called to participate by membership in the church. And our concern will take us much further than socialist pattern of society, our economic justice, or whatever program man may produce, because this concern is expressed in the concern of the good shepherd who came to lay down his life for the sheep in order that even if one lost sheep is gone astray, he will leave the 99 and go and bring the lost sheep back. We live in a world of not just one lost sheep in India, the country of 450 million people, about 60 percent of that large population is living substandard lives without any sense of their dignity, without any reason to respect themselves, they have to be awakened, and they have to be restored to the full dignity of the people of God. But this can happen only if people who know the love of Christ will see that big gap between the wealthy and the poor, between the developed nations and the undeveloped nations that this gap is removed. The leader of the British Council of Churches recently said that churches really are to tell their nations that they know we helped their programs of development so that the resources may be shared with other peoples. Certainly that is a concern God has given to the church or the participation in secular ecumenism. And thirdly, the church has also given a new vision of the reconciling ministry of Christ, Saint Paul, as it reflected on the death of Christ, he said, "Through the death of Christ, the Jew and the Gentile are reconciled. The separating wall of hostility is broken down and the two are made into one new man." And that was the vision Saint Paul had, and until that vision is fulfilled, Christ's work is not consummated. Of course, the middle of world of partition is not just the wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile. There are many other walls of partition separating man from man, even when through science and modern communication, the world have come much closer together. We know that there are many new tensions, tensions between India and Pakistan, between India and China is not Vietnam and south Vietnam, between the east and the west, many new tensions separate man from man. And here, Christ death has given a new vision to the church, a new vision of bringing the power of the death of Christ and his resurrection into human relationships. This does not come mechanically, this can come only when we reflect on what Christ death means to us and what that means to our relationships with others. Seven years ago, when my wife and I were coming to this country from India, taking the Pacific route, we spent a couple of weeks in the Philippines and there we called on a friend of ours, a Filipino family. And they have discovered that two Japanese students were living with them. And we also discovered that during the war, this family had lost their only son, because he was brutally killed by the Japanese soldiers. You can imagine what the feelings of such a family would be against the Japanese. But they also reflected on the meaning of their Christian faith and the result of that kind of killing and war in the relationships between the Filipino people and the Japanese people. And therefore they deliberately took the decision of having two Japanese students in their home, so that every day they can remember what Christ death for the people he breaks down the wall of hostility, the wall of enmity, this is what the church is called to witness to the world. We are not simply to accept the political barriers that exists, political barriers keep coming up. And sometimes these political barriers are being strengthened by ideas of enmity, enmity between the so called free people and the communist people and we sometimes assume that the communists are all bad people they're

outside the scope of God's love, are they? Is that what we have learned in Christ, Christ love will not be fulfilled until all these barriers are turned down and the church has given to the world in order that the church may bear witness to that love Christ. Christ has given us a vision, a vision of the upward call of God, which will keep us on the move, striving for the new dimensions of fellowship and the church and members of the church can never have rest until the purpose of the gathering of all things in Christ is ultimately fulfilled. And to his name, be all praise and honor, now and forever. Amen. (machine roaring) Oh, thou who has called us out of darkness into thy marvelous light through thy son Jesus Christ, fulfill in us the mighty work which thou has begun, renew in us the vision of thy kingdom, and give us the joy of running the race for the upward call of Christ to the glory of thy holy name, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.