

- That's when we pray to say, 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 for ever. Amen.

- He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. This sermon if it is a sermon must begin with an explanation and an apology. It is clearly presumptuous to step into this pulpit and talk about impressions from a sabbatical year in India. Ezekiel was taken to a very high mountain and told to look with your eyes and hear with your ears and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, and declare all that you see to the house of Israel. Chaplin Wilkinson offered me a similar challenge which I could not resist. But let me hasten to add that in choosing this title, A Himalayan View of Christianity, I am not claiming an Olympian view. The buses and motor scooters and third class trains on which I penetrated some remote corners of India are not conducive to a divine perspective, quite the contrary. But to label these individual comments as Indian might've suggested that in some sense they represent a nation or a culture or a church. Himalayan however implies the remote and lofty view. The remoteness of a casual traveler spending less than a year and speaking only English. My contacts included Christian saints and Hindu sadhus, missionary administrators and politicians, social and ecumenical pioneers. Protestants and Roman Catholics and Syrian Orthodox. Yet I cannot pretend to have entered vitally into the life of the Indian church or to have shared in its daily struggle for survival, physical and spiritual. Himalayan may also suggest a far distant perspective. Across the arid plains and the tropical seas perhaps even to the other side of the globe. In a year of absence from familiar surroundings and from routine tasks, one may heed more readily the advice of Isaiah. Harken to me you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were digged. One small American pebble can easily get lost in a strange culture of 500 million people. Yet such an alien environment often helps one to look up the rock from which you were hewn. There is no time this morning for me to draw comparisons between Indian society and ours to apply impressions of the Indian church to American Christianity. But I do entreat you to use your own binoculars to climb beyond this bullet and look afresh into the quarry from which you were digged, to focus on your own Himalayan view of Christianity. My word of apology concerns the overly personal approach, the reliance on my experiences and my observations. Yet in a deeper sense, our Christian preaching ought to be more personal, more confessional, more witness and testimonial than it usually is. The first confession surprises even me. When I yielded to the temptation offered by the university chaplain, I warned him that my current perspective on Christianity might be largely critical and negative. There are surely enough depressing features about the church in India. Many congregations remain segregated in spite of constitutional laws and the Christian gospel. Or if they are physically open to all, the outcasts nevertheless remain outside the redemptive community. Although the church of South India deserves recognition as the most far reaching experiment in church union, a similar merger in North India has been blocked so far by the fear that any wider

commissioning of the clergy implies that one denominational ordination is inferior to another. Or the participation in the United Church will reduce salaries and other benefits from the United States. There is conspicuous opportunism in many segments of the Indian church. Groups which frankly demand continued subsidies from abroad. At least two high government officials, one Christian and one Hindu delivered to me very bitter tirades against the inordinate salaries of some bishops on the ground that they were thus isolated from the regular clergy as well as from the penniless Lama. Among some historic bodies of Indian Christianity and especially among the fundamentalist sects which have flooded the country since independence, there is a streak of pietism, escapism, other worldliness, so-called spirituality which comes nearer to Hindu world denial than Judeo-Christian realism. As a minority of 2% in a hostile environment, religiously tolerant but socially intolerant, Christianity has so long feared syncretism, absorption into the prevailing culture that it has adopted a ghetto mentality of isolation, ignorance and self defensiveness in relation to non-Christian faith. The ancient Mar Thomas Syrian Orthodox churches who date their origin from the 1st century AD have until recently remained ingrown communities without social or evangelistic outreach. The Protestant denominations are still considered foreign importations. Extracting converts from family, home and village to live in alien worlds. In fear that the gospel would be swallowed up by the encroaching sons of Hindu society, many Christians have ignored the wisdom of the Indian poet Tagore. If you close the door to all errors, you also shut out the truth. This is the negative picture which could be painted in much broader, bolder strokes. The parallels within Western Christianity are obvious. These are some of the factors that produce a pessimistic view of the church in India, especially when it is encountered after the vitality and hope and energy of Christians in Eastern and Southeastern Asia. What surprised me however, when I tried to say this to myself and to you, is that far more positive affirmations crowded to the four. These are perhaps minority movements still, trends which might be disclaimed by a majority of Indian Christians today. Yet glimmers of light in the darkness which may presage a coming dawn. First, despite the ecumenical leg already mentioned, Christian unity is manifesting real vitality in service. During these recent critical famine years in India, international and interfaith agencies have pooled their resources in a program known as AFPRO, Action for Food Production. Church World Service from America, (indistinct), the Bishops Appeal in Germany. Oxfam, the Oxford Famine Relief in England. Catholic Relief Services and other groups have joined together not merely to distribute emergency food, but to tackle a long range problem by digging tube wells, supplying fertilizers, building irrigation projects and so on. Or for a very different approach I attended one session of an All India Christian Educators Conference. The first time in history that principals and college presidents and administrators from all kinds of schools, under Protestant, Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and other auspices had convened to discuss their common problems and common goals. Welcomed by the Hindu state governor, addressed by the stately Cardinal, this meeting was both a witness and the working session. Many Indian leaders including the recently retired President Radhakrishnan owe something of their dedication and vision to education in Christian mission schools. But the contribution was acknowledged if at all in isolated individual terms. Last January, the entire country could see that Christians of many varied creeds have a constructive role to fill in nation building, and are determined to fill it. This ecumenical unity and service suggests the second positive emphasis. A few people here and there are committed to the church's participation in the world. The ghetto mentality, the pietistic spirituality still prevail. But some Christians are convinced that the church must deal with social evils and injustice at the source instead of the symptoms as citizens of the nation and as followers of Jesus Christ. Near the Western shore of India, I tramped an entire day across dusty fields with an agricultural missionary who was paying a

courtesy call on the village welfare officer, repairing an irrigation pump, advising farmers about fertilizers and pesticides, and topography and seed. The following month a thousand miles away in the industrial east, I accompanied another missionary as he discussed urban development problems with a young city planner, one of the new breed of dynamic enthusiastic, technically trained engineers who are remolding the Indian society. In the capital, a research officer in the Ministry of Community Development was making a survey into motivations for service. He was a burly seek with no previous Christian context that I could discern. The other four agencies he chose to study my new play, a hospital, a children's home, a literacy center, and an extensive ministry to destitute people. Three of them just happen to be Christian institutions. It is no mere coincidence that the motivation, the commitment which this man seeks to instill into government personnel are most clearly manifest in the Christian community. I would go further and brand this unrepresentative, irresponsible slander the frequent charge that Indian Christians are more corrupt and less trustworthy than their Hindu neighbors. There are undoubtedly crooks within the church, not to mention all kinds of hypocrites and one does not need to go to India to find them. But I would confidently assert that there are more cases in which Christians are sought after and appreciated because of their superior integrity, unselfishness, sacrifice and dependability. Shortly before going to India, I met an attractive young American Jesuit who teaches on the faculty of a labor relations institute. It was exciting to hear him talk like some protestant liberals about the Christian presence in India, the responsibility of the church in the world, the conviction that we missionaries do not take Christ to India, he is already there at work. We merely serve in his name and spirit. But when he discussed not only service but salvation outside the church, the redemptive activity of Christ within Hinduism, I asked why the superiors thought of such heretical views. I don't give a damn what they think he said, and when a year later I visited his school almost in the shadow of the oldest and largest steel mill in India. He informed me lethally that the new director general of the society of Jesus had been there on tour and had given his task that endorsement to this non evangelistic ministry. This program for training efficient, socially responsible labor and management leaders without regard to religious affiliation. As elsewhere in the world, the church in India appears still largely bound to institutions and traditional structures. But here and there, it is seeking new forms of ministry, new expressions of witness and service, new ways of integrating the sacred and the secular. This in turn points to a third embryonic movement evident in Indian Christianity. The development of a more inclusive theology. And this ray of light has two parallel beams. One is the concept of salvation in Christ without conscious acknowledgement of him. The other is the discovery of common ground for dialogue with other faiths. The concept of salvation in Christ apart from baptism and confirmation sounds like a contradiction to many people, both Orthodox Christians and critics outside the church. Yet most modern theologies are reluctant to say even on scriptural authority that human beings who have never heard of Christ are eternally damned. Even conservative literalists are eager to extend the redemptive power of Christ to all of life, including possible creatures in outer space who obviously have never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Many of us have tried to escape this dilemma with a dualistic approach that God may certainly in his wisdom and mercy use unknown methods and include unrecognized persons in his scheme of salvation. But according to human perspective, we must continue to affirm biblically that there is no salvation outside the Christian community. This is no longer adequate. We have seen too many persons who bear the marks of Jesus Christ yet remain outside the church. If our rational minds are in any sense made in the image of God, we rebel at the injustice of unmerited punishment, and any doctrine of forgiveness or grace begs for the inclusion of people beyond the visible body of believers. One contemporary answer is that men may be saved not

inevitably are but maybe saved by Christ or in Christ without knowing or accepting him. The redemptive work of Christ in other words may take place apart from conscious allegiance to the Christian faith and thus may apply to the Hindu or the Buddhist or the humanist or the atheist. My Jesuit friends and a number of protestants would adopt some such approach stressing the opening text from Ephesians or the promise in Romans 8:21, that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. All creation, all man, all life some theologians would say. Let me add that this attempt at the solution does not fully satisfy me but not because it is radical or unscriptural. If the work of Christ is to be so divorced from the historic person of Jesus or at least from recognition of him, then it seems to me we might as well acknowledge frankly that we are talking about God's activity whether we call him father, son or holy spirit. But Jesus of Nazareth is simply our Western Christian way of understanding God and the others may come to him through Buddha, Krishna or Christ. In other words, I believe in the universality of Christ as revealing and implementing God's love for all mankind. But if that activity, that revelation can take place apart from knowledge of Jesus, apart from the Christian community which he founded, apart from theological creeds and traditions, then we must face realistically the practical consequences of this more inclusive theology. First, God may reveal himself in other cultures through other events even in other incarnations and who are we to deny God that authority? Second, if Christ is at work in Hindu society and an individual on aware of the historical Jesus, then the necessity for baptism and church membership is called into question. Some of the most dedicated younger missionaries in India today are asking if conversion means not just a new life, a commitment to God's purpose, but a deliberate rejection of a person's own culture, does the church have any right to demand such conversion? Joining the church in this country is a respectable act though protestant traditions are somewhat embarrassed by adult baptisms. But where becoming a Christian often means separation from family, job, community, even national heritage. Do we have the right to insist on a public procedure which many of us would be unwilling to accept? Just last week I read a vivid Japanese characterization of this outmoded view, removing fish from a dirty river called the world and placing them in a clean pool called the church. Is such conversion even consistent with a new theology which stresses the gospel in the world, the sacred in the secular, the assurance of Christ's presence in non-Christian situations. In a recent address in this country M.A. Thomas, director of an exciting new ecumenical center in South India describe the mission of a Christian thus, to heal not convert, to enter a life of service seeking to meet human need wherever it may be found taking the form of a suffering servant. I do not know the answer to these problems. I dare even to raise the issues from this pulpit with real soul searching agony. To universalize or abstract the work of Christ from the formal acceptance of Jesus and the church is merely one effort of some thoughtful Christians to combine his unique function, no man cometh unto the father but by me. With an inclusive opportunity for salvation, for the millions who do not acknowledge him. I do know that in this modern secular age which embraces the east as well as the west, Christian theology must find some formulation which does not give the impression of dogmatic, exclusive, arrogant finality if it is to get even the hearing. Jesus Christ is not the problem. Millions of non-Christians admire even revere him as a supreme teacher, a perfect example, an object of genuine devotion. Yes even as a savior if by that we mean one uniquely sent by God for a specific task. Two barriers stand in the way of full acceptance. One is the claim that Christianity is the only path to salvation. That Christ is the only revelation of God, that all other religious experience is there by thoughts. The second barrier, Mahatma Gandhi put blankly when someone asked him what was the greatest handicap that Christ faced in India. His answer, Christians. These comments lead to the other facet of a more inclusive theology. The need to find common

ground for dialogue with man of other faiths. The dream of a universal syncretistic world religion has long since faded from all but a few exotic cults. Religious leaders generally agree that the major faiths will continue to co-exist for centuries to come. But peaceful coexistence requires mutual understanding, recognition of some common goals, and a willingness to give and receive insights. My Himalayan view has led me to reject two popular notions in regard to world religions. One is the denial that we worship the same God. That we hold widely divergent concepts and practice widely divergent rituals does not justify the categorical assertion that we seek or follow different gods. Such an assertion seems to me either a regression to polytheism or an assumption about the nature of God as presumptuous and absurd as the ontological declaration that God is dead. The second notion I've come to abandon is the belief that we cannot and should not compare our religions. Of course we must avoid the common temptation to contrast their worst with our best or their practice with our theory. Karl Barth has branded all religions including Christianity as man's search for God in contradistinction to the revelation in Jesus Christ which is God's action toward man. I have long felt that man's search for ultimate reality is part of God's creativity, his activity and his plan. But the revelation of law, love and sacrifice, a victory over alienation and death which we Christians see in Jesus Christ will remain only an arrogant and hypocritical claim to others, unless in some way, our conviction results in greater reconciliation and service, a more consistent cosmic view, better psychological adjustment to a revolutionary world, clear purpose for living beyond ourselves. The Muslim may know more about God's transcendence than we do. The Buddhist may practice deeper communion with the absolute. The Hindu may have a more consistent theory of evil. But unless by this frankly pragmatic standard, Christianity can be seen in some overall sense superior to these other religions. Then we deny by our lives what we affirm in theological creeds about Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God. May I illustrate this with one final personal incident, almost literally the high point of my year in India. My last foray into the actual Himalayas. I had written on the back of a friend's motor scooter, 50 miles from the nearest rail head to visit the Dalai Lama, spiritual and political ruler of Tibetan Buddhism in exile since 1960. For over two hours we discussed politics and theology, mostly theology by his preference. And I shall not recapitulate that conversation now. But two or three quotations I do want to share with you. After his holiness had asked us Christians what we consider the nature of God, I returned the question. Immediately the Dalai Lama broke in ahead of his interpreter to answer in excellent English, the ultimate truth not as being everything based on it. He went on to explain in almost tilikian terms this concept of the highest quality of natural existence, the principle on which everything is dependent, the roseness of a rose that gives meaning and purpose to the seed, the plant, the blossom, and death. This is not self existence but dependence. A Buddhist detain salvation when he understands this ultimate truth. Or as his holiness put it for our benefit, you can say that you've come into direct contact with God. A few minutes later, the Dalai Lama, largely self-taught, spiritual and intellectual leader of one of the more primitive superstitious forms of Buddhism acknowledged that quote, "Jesus was not an ordinary man. After he has passed away, he still exists. Yes, you can also meet him." If you are groping for the conclusion of this sermon so am I. The implications of what I've tried to say obviously involve not only our attitudes toward other faiths and other cultures, but also our Christian program of mission as dialogue and service, and some of our traditional theological constructs. From my Himalayan view, I am distressed by the complacency, the denominational jealousies, the frequent irrelevance, the insensitive arrogance of much contemporary Christianity in India or the United States. But I come down into the valleys with at least a measure of eagerness and hope based on the conviction that a few Christians here and there are determined to break out of restrictive moles and divisive

barriers. It is not my province to judge whether Pandit Nehru or Swami Ranganathananda for example are saved according to any Orthodox Christian theology. I'm sure that they are in any concept of salvation that would be meaningful or welcome to them, or to the God of love whom I see revealed in Jesus Christ. His holiness the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist acknowledges that one can still meet Jesus. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu lived in constant fellowship devotionally and ethically with Christ though he never became converted or baptized. If men like these are part of God's family, then the important question for us as Christians who do acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not how we meet him in what creeds or sacred buildings, but that we meet him and how we follow him. Let us pray. Open our hearts oh God, both to thy word and to thy world. Help us by our lives to witness to thy love revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (upbeat music)