

(piano playing)

- Once upon a time, according to an old Hindu fable a group of blind men encountered an elephant, a totally new object to be identified. One of them took hold of his leg and claimed that the elephant was like a tree, another grabbed his trunk and argued that the elephant was like a snake, another based another theory on his bit of research by grabbing the elephant's ear and so forth and so forth. And as the poem him puts it, "And so these men of Hindustan disputed loud and long each in his own opinion, exceeding sure and strong though each was partly in the right and all were in the wrong." It's an ancient parable, but it is apt. It catches a certain condition of mind in any modern university. I hear the fable retold every time I go to a faculty meeting and you who are students are the victims of the predicament of the blind men and the elephant. In one morning's run of classes where you are exposed now to one aspect of the universe in biology another in psych, another in religion, another in English and solemnly informed by each more or less myopic professor that this is it, that the elephant of truth is explained best by its biochemistry, its psychology, its theology and so forth. No wonder you're mixed up. No wonder you save yourself from exhaustion by the convenient trick of compartmentalizing. You leave the integration of knowledge to the educators. No wonder you end up safe in your major a well rounded person of a very short radius. Presumably if the blind man, all pieced their separate bits of evidence together, they'd get the whole elephant. But the trouble with the educators is their intellectual imperialism. They read the whole in terms of their part. There's not only confusion of tongues, a loss of a common language, but the strife of systems in schools each claiming to be the core discipline. Some years ago at one point the department of sociology at Brown University delivered an earnest memorandum to the president recommending that all departments of the university should be organized around sociology. The strange biblical myth in Genesis of the tower of Babel is also fitting to describe the intellectual fall of man from the time when the whole earth had one language and few words to the building of a tower of arrogance reaching to the heavens down to the confusion of the tongues, the loss of a common universe of discourse in a multiverse where the scientists cannot talk with the humanists and the psych majors and the pre-meds and the pre-law majors stay in their own circles. The power of Babel is rebuilt in the modern university which Robert Hutchins once defined as a group of separate buildings and schools connected with a common heating plant. We've been having our problems around here lately as have all heavily universities about the terms of community in the tussle between students and administration, about our social life and the setting of the delicate equilibrium of freedom and order, rights and obligations. The problem of keeping a sense of personal common trust is a very difficult one but appearances sometimes to the contrary we are a school as well as a club, we are a community of teachers and students. The problem of intellectual disintegration of the divided mind, indeed of the splintered mind of the university is even more difficult than the social problem. And what now might be said to this one from the vantage point of this pulpit in this chapel which to the nostalgia of some to the mild embarrassment of others to the stubborn hopes of still others is architecturally at the center of this campus. The first thing to be said, I think is a negative word. It would be wrong even if it were possible to try to recover a single mind by imposing some scheme of Christian doctrine on this anarchy to find reintegration of the parts of

knowledge by a uniform system of Christian truth. That's a shortcut solution that would try to undo what's been going on since the Renaissance. It would be an attempt at uniformity counter to the free spirit of the modern university. Theology is no longer if ever indeed it were the queen of the sciences to attempt to recover a common language and to make Duke a Christian university by showing how biology, sociology, psychology, history, economics, geology, are to be taught and studied as facets of Christian doctrine would be ridiculous. There's no Christian biology or Buddhist math or Jewish economics. Though each of these disciplines can be and should be taught always in sight of the great question, who am I? What are we here for? Is it a yes or a no at the heart of the universe? To stack the answers to these great questions for the apostles creed or the 39 articles or any body of doctrine, however ecumenical that would violate the freedom of the secular university. If it be your intention or that of your family in sending you here that you should acquire a Christian picture of truth. Or if you come here to chapel Shook up by the psych class or the sociology encounter or devastated by that senior who knows all the reasons why God is dead to have your tidy worldview restored of a bearded Methodist God presiding over a Protestant culture, you're coming here for the wrong reasons. For better or worse in our intellectual life, we are committed to plural worldviews. No one of them, the establishment. We are committed to feeling out all the different parts of the elephant in the long agonized inconclusive dialogue of the minds of men with the booming buzzing confusion of the universe. But there is another way of finding community within the study life of a university. It has to do with the love of the heart rather than the sight of the mind with motivation and the stance of soul that we bear toward each other and toward the truth we learn rather than with the truth or falsity of the conclusions we come to. In so far as we are a community in scholarship and teaching and research we are made one by singleness of heart not a common subscription to a common creed. That singleness of spirit is best caught in classical biblical phrases. Reverence is the beginning of wisdom and to depart from evil, his understanding. Or in the great commandment, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength." And the second, like unto it thou shall love neighbor as thy self. Or it's put In Ephesians our new Testament lesson, the bond of community in love. The terms of community are set in the mandate of the great commandment. As requiring a certain slant of the will and a style of life to the degree that we fulfill the great commandment. Whatever may be the pictures of truth in our minds we are to that degree, a Christian university. There are two parts to this matter, two reference of the will: one, the love of God, the other, the love of neighbor. As enacted in the daily life Of a university, the love of God means a reverence in the face of mystery. It means a trustful curiosity, a restless searching, probing, doubting, affirming wonder sustained by the confidence that there is an order of truth beyond the puzzle of this present disorder that the little parts are parts of a hole that the whole elephant is there beyond the part of it that any one of us can possibly grasp. We are justified as a community of scholars by the trust of our hearts that there is meaning in this mystery and that in its presence, awe or reverence is the attitude of will the scientist, the engineer, the human, the poet can share. As Einstein's word put this shared faith, "The Lord God", he said, "Maybe subtle but He is never mischievous." The love of God in the university means openness, contrition, a willingness to listen that tentativity which is the best part of scientific method. A wise Bishop of the 17th century once said, "Man hath but a shallow sound and a short reach and deals only with probabilities and likelihoods." It precludes the arrogance of closed systems and final pronouncements. It fosters the risk of question raising and doubt. One who seeks the truth out of reverence is also blessed with a sense of humor and perspective about his particular segment partly because he sees it under the aspect of eternity. Out of the love of God, the community of scholars can each other by mutual limitation. In

a kind of system of checks and balances in the democracy of learning a teacher or student in the sciences may serve to correct any tendency toward woo or sentimental thinking in the religion department while a teacher in the humanities, in religion or philosophy may serve the sciences by raising the ultimate questions of ends like, "Ought we to do all the things we can do with technical knowledge?" This is a question which technology cannot answer by itself. In all these ways, I suggest theology as the practice of the love of God is not queen but servant of the sciences and of the university. The other part of the great commandment is the moral one, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self." Reverence is the beginning of wisdom and to depart from all is understanding. There is no authentic love of God, which does not entail moral obligations of commitment and service. A university is singly Christian in heart in so far as it keeps its conscience under the moral mandate of the law of neighbor love. Knowledge is in order to goodness. The uses to which technology are put are not a matter of indifference. The university is conscious and servant of the larger society in which it stands. This moral dimension might be illustrated by two telling remarks made in the stacks of the library. One of my colleagues overheard a mumbled comment of a Negro janitor to himself as he was emptying waste baskets along the row of carols. "They just write books about books about books, don't do no good." Another comment, I recall from an incident some years ago was from another Negro janitor who paused at my carol where I was working on some books about ethics and race relations and flicked his finger on the back of a copy of Gunnar Myrdal: American Dilemma. "Great book," he said. He illustrated the American Dilemma himself as a North Carolina college graduate at that time able to get only a janitor's job. But he also illustrated the moral imperatives that surround and impel scholarship. Myrtle's rigorous scholarship on race was value charged with a moral purpose, how to close the gap between the American creed and its racial deeds. Let his comment stand as a symbol of the link between (speaks foreign language) a reminder that however indirectly the training of persons in whatever discipline is not that they should be parasites, an ornaments on society, but servants and insofar as servants fulfilling the law of love. This moral mandate may say something to this besetting problem that seems to plague this and all other campuses the restless generation the uncommitted as Kenton's excellent study characterizes us who seem to regard college as a privilege and a right to be enjoyed Before it is an obligation and a commitment. The main question I hear students seeming to be asking is, "Why don't they make me happier here?" Which may not be the first question to ask of a university. This mood is symbolized on many new campuses in the shift of emotional center of gravity, from the chapel, the symbol of transcendent responsibility to the student union replete with TV lounges and snack bars, the symbol of pleasures and creature comforts. The chapel is the reminder of the Christian law of life. We gather here for the university service of worship not to recite a common creed, but whatever be are confused are conflicting theologies, we gather here to join in singleness of heart, to kneel in the presence of the great mystery that surrounds and blesses our short days. To recall That the law of our life is the law of love and to rise and go forth on our many paths to acquire skills of hand and mind for an informed heart renewed in joy made whole by grace. Amen. Let us pray. Restore unto us oh God, the joy of thy salvation, and renew in us a right spirit, that in going forth from the height of the altar of vision, we may honor thee in truth and how thy name in service to the common good. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all. (choir singing)