

LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE AT THE
KEW JEWISH CENTRE, MELBOURNE
ON 25TH AUGUST, 1963

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency and Ladies and Gentlemen and Boys and Girls :

You notice that I haven't tried to compete with my predecessors who had the game of naming all the people who ought to be named to perfection (Laughter) and as I am quite an amateur in these matters, I will just begin by saying "Sir".

It is a very great pleasure for me and for my wife to be here. I don't need to tell you that. I have had the privilege in quite a few parts of Australia of attending the opening of Jewish Community Centres, schools, homes and the like, but do you know, this is the first time I was ever asked to attend one in my own electorate (Laughter). In fact, you are entitled to gaze on me today with a certain amount of suspicion (Laughter). Elsewhere it was quite all right; they weren't my electors, but this morning, I am exposing myself to great risk.

I lived in Kew for many years. I have a great ambition to live there again before I die, though of course, the speed with which I can achieve that result will depend very largely on what happens to me at the hands of people like Senator Cohen and Maurice Ashkanasy (Laughter)

You have just been reminded of the story of so many of you and so many of your friends. It is one of the dreadful chapters in European history and in world history, but it means something to so many of you to have come up out of the house of bondage and into a free land, because this is a free land. This indeed, I am happy to say, is a land of tolerance. It won't mean that you won't meet a few intolerant people. There are some people who are even intolerant of me. Very hard to believe (Laughter). But this, as a land, as a community, is a place of tolerance.

I just referred to your very distinguished colleague and office-bearer, Maurice Ashkanasy. I don't want to do him any damage but, Sir, he was a pupil of mine when he went to the Bar. I taught him practically all the law that he has now forgotten. (Laughter) And he is a great friend of mine. We are always delighted to see each other, but I gather that he is on the opposite side to mine, politically. Now this is good. We don't want too many people to be on the opposite side, but it is a very good thing. It is a very good thing that we should live in a community, isn't it, in which political opposition and personal friendship can dwell happily together. And this is of tremendous importance to the whole of Australia and particularly, if I may say so, of importance to you.

You are, many of you, so near to the bitterness of intolerance - persecution by intolerant people - that it's not so easy, perhaps, for you to realise the true quality of this community very quickly. But I say to you these memories will, I hope, fade. They won't be held in a direct sense by children.

More and more, everybody will come to realise that this is a country in which every community may form part of a greater community and that a tolerant one.

Now, of course, toleration is a very good thing. Perhaps it isn't enough. A man may be tolerant because he is indifferent, because he doesn't care what happens to the other fellow, and so although it's good, it isn't everything. In reality what makes a contribution to a nation like Australia is the service of people who have enthusiasm and faith, who do believe in something. They are not tolerant because they are indifferent. They are tolerant because they have a passionate belief in their hearts. And that's why the religious significance of this occasion is not to be overlooked. Indeed, this is at the very centre of it. I don't imagine that anybody in, what I will call for this purpose, the Jewish community, would wish that all Jews should live in one place together and that all Scotsmen should live in another suburb all together with nobody else. I don't know how you would get on but I would become awfully tired of Scotsmen. No, no. We don't want this. We don't want to have a sort of colonial system established and therefore it is a very good thing that we should be all of us in our various origins distributed in the community, but we must retain our right to get together from time to time for our common purposes, not thereby losing our sense of general obligation as citizens but gathering in the church of our faith, meeting the people of our faith, refreshing ourselves from time to time at the very fountainhead of the things that we believe in.

You know, I made a lighthearted reference just now to Scotsmen. I've been made an authentic one recently by being given the Order of the Thistle. Nothing could be more Scottish than that. Well, you know as well as I do that there are two races in this world who are suspected by ill-informed outsiders of being mean. (Laughter) -- the Jews and the Scots, the truth of course being that they are both diligent in business and may therefore stand before kings and that they are diligent in business, successful perhaps more than most, more than some, and with the greatest capacity for generosity that can be found anywhere around the world. This is a proud thing to recall. I always admire immensely, whenever I go to any Jewish establishment - as I will call it in Australia - how this family feeling, this instinct, this sense of responsibility for other people in your community as if they were all members of your family - how this is maintaining itself and what a great contribution it is making to Australian life.

You know, yesterday afternoon, I had the great honour of opening a very large building in Monash University, a building which they have named after me, and I said something about the naming of the University. Every young member of your community ought to feel inspired by the contribution made by great, great Australians like Monash and like Isaacs. These are outstanding examples of what can be done.

Now, I've said something and I won't say very much more, I've said something to you about not establishing separate communities in a physical sense, maintaining your community relations but contributing to the community in the broad sense, adding threads to the structure of the community. This, I believe, is of tremendous importance. There are a lot of people you will encounter who think that we all ought to be the same,

that there ought to be a species of drab uniformity, that they all ought to be like me, so to speak, that they all ought to be like you, so to speak. This passion for uniformity is not to be encouraged. What we need in Australia is that every person coming from some particular race or faith who comes into the Australian community should retain his quality in that sense but should add it to the qualities of all the other people in the community so that finally we get a powerful structure, a self-respecting structure, a community of high ideals and of clear faith and of generosity and of understanding.

Therefore, be yourselves - I say this to the more newly-arrived - be yourselves at all times, but also be something broader than that, a member of a community to which, given health and strength, you will make some notable contribution.

I am delighted that this centre is being established here. I could see at a glance as we came along this morning that you had established already a pretty considerable command over the local Council. I saw treble parking in the street (Laughter) and somebody said, in my party, "Now, look at that. That seems remarkable." I said, "Oh, no. Bill Birrell, the Town Clerk, will be there." (Laughter)

I won't detain you any longer. This is a very happy occasion for you and I must say, a very happy occasion for me. I ask God to bless you in your enterprise. May it succeed beyond your dreams.
