

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF "MENZIES WING", ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

14TH MAY, 1961

**Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, C.H.
O.C., M.P.**

Very Rev. Father, Your Eminence:

I can't remember the sequence as the Premier did. I shall therefore start again following my usual practice and say "Sir" which I think always gives you a good beginning.

As a matter of fact in the Courts of Criminal Jurisdiction I believe it is not unknown for a man after suffering the indignity of conviction to have a few words said for him by way of an appeal for mercy. I am going to reverse the process - I appeal for mercy before you find me guilty. I'm getting in early.

First, I apologise for my inability to follow the routine. But in the second place I want to say this to you, that the Rector made rather a point of directing attention to the presence here this afternoon not of my old friend the Premier, but of my present opponent, Mr. Whitlam. He seemed to think that this was a rather good thing, that Mr. Whitlam should be here as an old friend of this college. I want to tell you that this man, Whitlam, if I may so refer to him, has been present at each of the four speeches I have had in the last four days on a University occasion. And each time I start the next one he is strategically placed and his eye becomes glassier, and glassier. (Laughter) However I am very glad, Sir, that you should remember him. But I am going to forget him for the rest of the afternoon. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, when I was being beguiled - I think that is the right word - into coming here this afternoon I was sent the history of the College, and in particular a fascinating document that was produced on the 100th Anniversary. I wrote down one sentence from this history: 'If a poorly endowed minority of less than 90,000 could build St. John's what might we expect from the Catholics of today?' Now that, I thought was a very pungent sentence. I am not going to use it in an accusing sense. Any accusations that I have to make are, of course, directed exclusively to the Presbyterians. (Laughter)

But there is in that single, simple sentence a world of significance. Whenever I have travelled in the world and have found myself looking at some great Cathedral built back in the 11th, 12th, 13th century, a great Cathedral rising from the middle of a village and, at the time that it was built, rising from the middle of a few clusters of hamlets or perhaps the old monastic foundation itself, whenever I have seen these miracles of beauty, these margals of worship, not miserable, hungry things, but generous things, and remembered how few people did them, I have been reminded that upon us there falls a responsibility never to do less than the past demands, but always to do more if we can.

That is, of course, particularly true if you are dealing with some place like this which is part of a University - a College within the University. It is also a place of religious learning. It is, in a real sense, a place of worship. And when it comes to worship, as these our forefathers have taught us, there is no room for the mean approach; no room for what Wordsworth, you remember, described on looking at the King's College Chapel at Cambridge, as the "nicely calculated less or more". "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for?"

So, Sir, I have a particular pleasure in coming here. In common I think with most thoughtful people I feel that this hasn't been a noble century. It has been a clever one, a brilliant one, it has pushed back the boundaries of knowledge, particularly in science, to an extent never dreamed of before; but it has been disfigured as no other century has for a long time by wars, and worse than wars, by bitter inhumanity, by barbarism, by an inadequate sense of responsibility for others, by greed, by pressure. And there is only one correction for this and that is that education should never lose sight of its ethical responsibilities. We are not to produce clever barbarians. We are to produce educated Christian people as much as we can. (Applause)

Sir, one might elaborate on that theme for a long time. I don't need to elaborate it in your presence. Unless you, both Church and State represented here today, believed in these things I have been mentioning this College would never have been established; and it would never have been extended. If a highly cultivated barbarism is enough you don't need St. John's. But if the ultimate responsibility of man is the thing that matters, if the true values of civilisation are the things that matter, then you not only need one St. John's, you need a hundred in any nation. Because here you have that balance between scholarship and religious responsibility, ethical standards, which, if existing all round the world, would eliminate war more rapidly than all the United Nations that were ever established. (Applause)

Sir, I don't propose to detain you, but before I conclude I think perhaps I should say that when I found myself, by reason of the inscrutable judgment of the electors once more Prime Minister at the end of '49 - decided to give me a second chance - one of the first things that I did was to have a Committee, well before the Murray Committee, which examined the then urgent needs of the Universities. The reasons for that were sound. As a result of the enormous pressures that came after the war, as a sequel to the great reconstruction training scheme that my predecessor established after the war, there was a clamant demand for accommodation in the Universities, far more clamant, far more rapidly growing in terms of proportion than in any primary system of education, or the like. The Universities exhibited every sign at that time, of incurring either a strong risk of bankruptcy, or, at the best, of inadequacy, or of involving for State Governments, burdens which it was not reasonable to suppose that any State Government could carry unaided.

So this Committee got to work. It was a committee of people who had, for the most part, practical experience of Universities and of University affairs. About two-thirds of the way through their deliberations I was informed, with great vigour, by the head of one of the residential colleges at the University of Melbourne, that this Committee had decided that residential colleges were a frill, a private and personal luxury, and they did not come within their charter of reference. That was really the only good deed I ever did for you. Because I saw the members of the Committee and I said that unless there was some sum provided specifically for residential colleges their report would carry no weight whatever. (Applause) And a little bit of money was put in. When I look back on it nowadays I think "How little it was" - until of course I remembered that the greatest technique in the world is to get your foot in the door. Every time I see the Premier he smiles and smiles at me. He's a very good friend of mine too, but occasionally a little costly - because the foot is in the door!

Whenever I see your brilliant and much-loved Archbishop at Canberra, Archbishop O'Brien, for whom I have an unqualified admiration, and he sits down with me, I can almost see him putting the foot in the door. And, as he would say with that mastery that he has of language, one thing leads to another.

Therefore, I do claim just a little bit of credit for that. I'm not boasting. But I think the foot in the door at that time did it. And of course since then, as you know, there have been increasing, and now quite substantial, recommendations which I believe will help to transform the face of University education.

Wherever I go in Australia and visit a University I see great buildings in hand. I am very delighted to find that in the residential colleges which in a true sense are the heart of the University, the same signs of growth are to be seen.

Sir, I want to tell you that whatever little I may have been able to do I have done with a very warm heart and a good will on this matter. I take it as a great compliment that you, in this great and famous College, should have thought fit to allow my name to be inscribed on the wall. This, I think, is something that certainly I had never expected. It came to me as a great surprise. I want to tell you that I shall remember it for my life with great gratitude and with a due sense of pride.
