

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.  
MENZIES, AT OFFICIAL OPENING OF SCIENCE BLOCK,  
ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE, SYDNEY

on  
16th July, 1961

Your Eminence, Rev. Bro. Provincial, Bro. Othmar, Sir John (McCauley) and ladies and gentlemen:

I think I ought to begin by telling you that the story that the Rev. Bro. Provincial told about somebody falling through the floor and thus justifying a new laboratory woke an echo in my mind because I once had a Minister for the Army who came along to me one afternoon and put up a most impassioned plea for a new Sergeants' Mess at Duntroon. I was in a bad mood and I said "Rubbish! Nonsense! They can get along with the old one. This is not a time to be spending all this money". You know, the sort of thing that Prime Ministers have to do occasionally. That night the old Sergeants' Mess was burnt down. (Laughter) I sent for the Minister the next morning and complimented him on a turn of speed that I hadn't credited him with. No, I say no more than that; otherwise it might be uncommonly defamatory.

Now I am terribly sorry that you have to sit out there and freeze - the only time I have ever struck a cold day in Sydney - and so I will help you, if I may, by being tolerably brief.

There are two things about this School that I suggest we should all have in mind. One of them consists of the fact, just referred to by Sir John, that when this school was established 80 years ago it was built and established for far more boys than then appeared to be in sight for the school. I discovered with great interest this afternoon that this is, today, the biggest boarding school in the whole of Australia. Now this means that 80 years ago there were people who had courage, vision, and imagination, who did things in a big way, who accepted the chance of failure, who didn't under-provide for the service of a school, but at that time over-provided for it. This is exactly the same spirit as the spirit that has set up in some of the old countries of Europe magnificent cathedrals, wonderful structures providing places of worship built at a time when a mere handful of people were responsible for them. This, I think, is a stimulating thing.

It would not have happened if it had not been for the profound belief in the minds of the founders of this school that they were dealing with matters of eternal importance. They were not just providing a certain amount of instruction; they were providing something that would be built into the character of every boy who went through the school. That was a great vision; and it was a vision full of a remarkably clear perception of the great truths of education.

I had occasion recently, to deliver a speech on the broad subject of education - in Adelaide before a learned body - and in the course of preparing for it I came across one observation which I will take leave to quote to you - and I do this with all the more acceptance, no doubt, on your part, when I tell you these words fell from the lips of Father Gleeson who had attended a Conference which initiated the movement that I was addressing. These are superb words: "All knowledge is grist to the mill of the educator; but unless he concerns himself with his pupils' character he remains an informer, a source of facts piled upon one another and imparted to a mind both immature and untrained in their proper use".

This is the great choice in education - the giving of information, the acquiring of a stock of facts, the acquiring, perhaps, of some professional skill, some technical knowledge. That, on the one side, by itself. And on the other side 'all that, and heaven too'.

All that, and the training in character which, of all schools, great Church foundations like this are best qualified to provide. This is, I think, the great truth.

When we were being told by the Provincial about these dreadful, modern, yet historic episodes it kept coming back into my mind all the time 'Why do these things happen?' Not because in those very countries men hadn't been to school, not because there were not people of trained intelligence on the wrong side, but because they had not learned that civilization is in the heart and in the soul, they had not learned the ethical values which are involved in education. That is why people trained in ethics, believers in religion, believers in the Almighty, have been ruthlessly attacked by people who saw in them more reactionaries - as if it could be reactionary to consider, to study, to ponder, eternal things. I am, as probably you know, a tremendous believer in Church schools. I don't criticise any other kind of school; it is not everybody who can go to a school like this. I myself have had a variety of experiences in the course of being educationally dragged up in some fashion - a State school in a little country village, a State school in a bigger provincial town, and a great Church school in a great city and the University, and so on - so that I have looked at this thing from the inside. The more I look at it, and the older I become, the more conscious I am that the problems of the world today are problems of character more than of anything else, and the more thankful I am that schools like this have been established and have flourished and are making such a great contribution to the world.

There are very many people, clever people, I suppose, who think that we are living in the golden age of civilization. Why? Because we can move through the air at speeds that nobody once thought of; because we can stand in front of a thousand or two thousand people and be heard comfortably over a public address system; because we can look at the television, or go back home in a car; because we can enjoy all these things which have all come in my own lifetime. And this, we are told, is the golden age of civilization. Firing a man to the moon which no doubt will be the next piece of lunacy; putting people into orbit. All this is great stuff, clever stuff, no doubt very important stuff. But the odd thing, the thing to remember is that in this century, easily the cleverest century in history in technology and in some aspects of science, we have seen more hatred and bitterness, more war, more injustice, more brutality, than perhaps any other century in history was able to witness. And why? Because we have failed, broadly, to understand that the two great tasks in life, the two great tasks of civilization, which, if performed, are the proof of civilization, is that men should get to understand each other and value each other and be just to each other, and that they should be united in a brotherhood which is the inevitable result of the fatherhood of God. These are the great elements in civilization; and Sir, I would like to congratulate you on being a director of a School which lives by these principles, and has put them into practice, and has so, I believe, made a great contribution to our country.

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