

DINNER IN HONOUR OF RABBI DR. H.M. SANGER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS MINISTRY IN AUSTRALIA

Held at Melbourne on 17th November, 1962.

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Sir, Rabbi Sanger and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I wonder if I might begin by paying a small tribute to Mrs. Phillips. (Applause) I have been informed by reputable people at this table that she is now 100 years old. Looking at her, I don't believe it. (Laughter) If it turns out to be true, then I think the one error made tonight was that you should have compromised all your ideas and had a Scottish pipe band to play "A Hundred Pipers and a' and a'" (Applause).

Sir, when I agreed to come here, that wasn't a matter of great difficulty because at least twice I have been to Alma Road and I have made a speech and then I have sat down and then I have listened to Rabbi Sanger without discourtesy explaining to me by his own speech how a speech ought to be made. (Laughter) And I have become his very warm admirer and I needed very little persuasion - none in fact - to come here tonight.

But having agreed that I would come, I of course had to do my homework. They sent me printed material - yes, I read my brief (Laughter). I read a panegyric about Rabbi Sanger which explained that he was sometimes impatient - this this and this and this and up to that point, I said, "Dear me, how like me he is." (Laughter) (Applause)

But among other things that I was introduced to was the fact that just as there is regrettable distinction between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland and the Congregationalists and the Methodists - a conflict in which the Presbyterians are invariably and inevitably right (Laughter) - so there are distinctions of a somewhat theological kind between the Orthodox and the Liberal congregations of your faith. Having read that, I realised, as my friend Mr. Calwell who is here tonight would at once agree, that I am the perfect nominee for this position because I am both orthodox and liberal. (Applause)

So it is not just a chance medley that brings together, on this occasion to celebrate twentyfive years of magnificent religious and community service, representatives of a great variety of churches, representatives of utterly conflicting political ideas - this is not a chance, not at all. This is one of the occasions which demonstrates that there are certain qualities of the heart and the mind and the spirit that override all boundaries. (Applause) In fact, without detaining you overlong, I would just like to put three questions about Rabbi Sanger. Three questions, and I would like to answer them myself. You know, there is a great advantage in life in putting the questions yourself and answering them yourself. It was one that I invariably denied the witnesses when I was Maurice Ashkanasy's tutor at the Bar, but I would like to concede it to myself tonight.

Has Dr. Sanger added to our civilisation?
Civilisation being in our hearts and our minds has very little

to do with aircraft or television sets or all the mechanical triumphs of our century. Civilisation is in the heart and the mind. Has he added to it? And the answer must be "Yes". For twentyfive years he has made a contribution to it as great as that of any other man in this city. (Applause)

And my second question is: "Has he made us understand each other better?" At this point, I would like to say this: Here I am, a singularly unbigoted man of Scots descent, a singularly unbigoted Presbyterian (Laughter), a singularly unbigoted Liberal (Laughter), a singularly unbigoted supporter of Carlton in the football (Laughter), a singularly unbigoted whatever you may care to say. (Laughter) But, Sir, I have been troubled - not for a year, but for a few years - by the feeling that there are still people who think that there is some bigotry in Australia about people of the Jewish faith. Now I beg of everybody to forget it. Forget it. All chips must come off all shoulders on this matter. This is too foolish. Too foolish. This country has been too enriched by the contribution of people of the Jewish faith to be living in a dead age on these matters. This country is too conscious of the hideous consequences in the Old World of such bigotries and hatreds and prejudices. I beg of you and I say this for every man in every parliament in the Commonwealth of Australia: forget about it. Forget about it. Let us understand each other better. There is no reason why we should not. We are all the same people. We live in a lovely country. We all have friends from here and here and here and I want to say about our guest of honour tonight that no man has done more than he has to get people to shrug off these absurdities, these antiquated absurdities and to make us all realise that we have one task - whatever we may be - to understand each other better and to become greater and greater contributors to a civilised life in our own country.

And, Sir, thirdly - that's a good word ex-Moderator-General - thirdly - that's an expression well known in the Presbyterian kirk (Laughter); "Has he deepened religious feeling in what has threatened to be a material and almost cynical age?" This is the most important question of the lot because this is a material age. This is an age in which people are too much disposed to consider all problems in terms of profit and loss; a cynical age because whoever exhibits a high-minded attitude towards a problem is as likely as not to be asked "What is in it for you?" This happens too much, too frequently, too deeply. And this is one of the great problems, great spiritual problems of our age and I believe that our distinguished guest has made a remarkable contribution to the deepening of religious feeling with all its own standards of values in a period of time in which we can become much too easily slick, hard, cynical, material. I was astonished to find that he has been doing his work, his great work, for twentyfive years - ten years longer, as my distinguished friend, Arthur Calwell, will tell you, than I've been Prime Minister of Australia (Laughter). But Sir, the very great distinction between Dr. Sanger and myself people will, for some obscure reason, still argue about whether it's been a good thing for Australia that I should have been Prime Minister. Nobody argues about whether it is a good thing that he should have been doing his work in his place and in his community for twentyfive years. (Applause)

I'm delighted to be here. I've talked in one sense too long - in another sense I have talked too little to say on behalf of all of you how grateful we are to him and to his wife and to all of those who work with him for what they have done in this great country. (Applause)