

OPENING OF DOMINICAN SISTERS TRAINING COLLEGE  
AT WATSON, CANBERRA, A.C.T. ON SUNDAY,  
24TH MARCH, 1963.

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

Mr. Chairman, Your Grace, My Lord Bishops, Mother Philomena,  
Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen :

The other day I was opening something in Canberra and I forgot to open it. (Laughter) The following day my wife went down to a country town in Victoria in which she was born; she took advantage of this by saying, "I won't follow the evil example of my husband. I declare this .... whatever it was) open," and so I'll be prudent. I have great pleasure in declaring this Training College open. (Applause)

It is indeed a very happy event. There have been references in the world of late to various ecumenical movements. What could be more ecumenical than to have a Presbyterian Prime Minister opening this Teachers' Training College (Laughter) and feeling very honoured to be allowed to do it.

The Archbishop who began life by being a scholar, and has ended up by being a considerable builder, occasionally comes to see me. He is always charming; we are on the best of terms and when he has left, I find myself almost invariably conducting a violent altercation with the Treasury (Laughter) (Applause). But it wouldn't be for me to say to him - he being a great scholar and profoundly interested in the problems of education in Australia - that there are perhaps three aspects of this matter, two of which are very well known and are considerably well understood and the third of which is occasionally overlooked.

First of all, if you are going to have a great expansion of educational facilities in the country you must have buildings. We are in a splendid one today. Buildings - bricks and mortar, as they used to say. And then you must have equipment - not easy to come by, increasingly more expensive, particularly on the scientific side. And, of course, to have both of those, you must have money. Quite a few people, when they have covered those three items, think they have dealt with the problem and yet they are not the most difficult of the problems, though they are not easy. They are not easy because none of these things is in illimitable supply; but with a struggle, with some sacrifice, with some enthusiasm, with some joint effort - yes, money can be found, but the remaining constituent is not so easily found: trained and devoted and competent teachers. You may have all the money and all the bricks and mortar in the world and provide, as you think, facilities for more and more thousands of people but all you will do will be to conduct education on a declining level of standards unless you meet this paramount requirement of people who are teachers - and I use that word in the broadest sense. And what is a good teacher?

A good teacher must have, of course, skill, and skill will be acquired by study. We have long since got past the time, I hope, when a university professor or a university lecturer might be found using the notes he prepared twenty years before; and yet I've known that in my own time. There is to be a constant study, a constant improvement of knowledge if skill is to be equal to the task. There must also be - and this is sometimes

overlooked - a great capacity to expound, to impart, the teaching faculty sometimes denied to the greatest of scholars; the capacity for conveying to students, to pupils, what it is the teacher desires them to understand and to remember. But above all these things again, there must be a sense of vocation. Teaching is not just a job. Any teacher who said, "Well, this is a job and I'll do it; I'll observe the rules and no more," would be a poor teacher. The sense of vocation - and this, Your Grace, is so admirably illustrated by so many I see here today - this sense of vocation is, I believe, of supreme importance. I can hardly imagine any civil occupation, if I may use a very rough division, so important as the work of teaching. This is a tremendous responsibility, a great challenge, a wonderful chance to make a powerful contribution to the future of the country; and when, as in the case of so many of you, the civil merges with the religious so that it gets the background of profound religious belief and you pursue the vocation of teaching, then I believe we have something very remarkable which I, for one, hope will never disappear from Australia. (Applause)

Another thing I should perhaps say to you is this. This college is being opened in the national capital; the national capital of a nation in which the national feeling has yet to reach its complete flowering; of a nation in which even now too much we are inclined to be parochial, local in our views and in our attitudes. One of the proofs to the world of the full national growth of Australia is being now built around us - a national capital which is, in physical terms, going ahead by leaps and bounds. I never cease to be astonished, day by day, at the signs of growth all around me. But not a national capital destined, as so many are, to be a centre of commerce, a centre of activities of the ordinary mercantile sort, although they will come more and more, but a capital increasingly designed to be a centre of education, a centre of the affairs of the spirit, a place in which great authorities in the various churches will be found, in which a great university will become greater and greater, a capital in which, as time goes on, schools will grow in a setting of beauty - and although there is not much at the moment in the vicinity of the Lake, it is going to be an enormous centre of beauty by the time we are a few years older.

In a setting of beauty, this capital will develop as something quite unlike any other city of its kind in Australia and will therefore draw men's minds and eyes to it; it will increasingly remind the people of Australia that they are a nation first and foremost and that this capital, the centre of government, a centre of religion, a centre of education, a centre of all kinds of things that cater for the higher reaches of the human mind, is to be looked at and admired and regarded as setting an example to the whole of the people of Australia. Now, it is because I believe that, that it has been my pleasure to lend considerable support to the National Capital Development Commission under the brilliant leadership of Mr. Overall (Applause). It is for that reason that my colleagues and I have, for years past, realised that a rapidly-growing capital produces uncommon problems and that just as they have produced uncommon problems for the State so they have produced uncommon problems for the Church, as the Archbishop knows - he has already indicated that he hasn't

finished with me (Laughter) and I have never believed for one moment that he had. But it is for that reason, setting aside the unhappy controversies that occur here and there, that we, in this place, have a responsibility in such a rapidly-growing community to help the work of education in all its fields in this Territory (Applause) and it has been a great privilege to do it.

Now I want to say no more than that, Sir. I have given you, in a very imperfect way, some of my reasons for having a genuine pleasure in being here this afternoon. It is a really great occasion, a splendid occasion and whatever branch of the Christian Church we may belong to, we must all thank God that the work of the Church goes on and that it will provide what to me is the essential and inevitable background of a civilised, instructional and educational course. So I say I am glad to be here. I have declared this College open with great satisfaction. I wish you all well. I thank you for all the work you have done in the past and in anticipation, I thank you for all the work you are going to do in the future.

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