

OPENING OF ADDITIONS TO WAVERLEY CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERS COLLEGE, SYDNEY CN  
20TH OCTOBER, 1963

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

Mr. Chairman, My Lord Bishop, Mr. Headmaster, Your Honours, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys, and in particular, Captain Bernard Jones, the Captain of the School :

As I am constantly being warned that the habit of speech grows on a man as he gets older and that he therefore sometimes forgets, I at once declare these building additions open. (Laughter) (Applause)

The next thing that I want to say to you is that my friend, Mr. Robson, so justly described as one of the great headmasters, has expressed some embarrassment at being with me speechmaking for the fourth time. I can assure him that the embarrassment is reciprocal. (Laughter) We are joint brothers in misery: He has listened to me four times and I have had to listen to him. The only difference between us is that he is usually present because he has persuaded a great number of businessmen to get rid of a great deal of money in a good cause and I am here in my dubious, ambiguous capacity as a politician who, from time to time, is the enemy of all mankind. (Laughter)

But, Sir, it must be said for me and I would like to say particularly to the boys that, contrary to all your expectation after my many years in public affairs, I still retain a considerable trace of Christian spirit, because I have been sitting here on the dais next to an old boy of St. Patrick's College in Ballarat. St. Patrick's College in Ballarat - a school which, when I was in the football team - a kind of football you don't understand (Laughter) - for another school much smaller, inflicted on us the greatest thrashing in the history of football in my State. I hesitate to tell you what they scored. All I know is that we didn't score at all. (Laughter) And every time I meet a distinguished old boy of St. Patrick's College, I find myself looking at him and saying - "Should I be nice to this chap, or shouldn't I?" and the fact that I am says something for me that you might not have supposed to exist.

Now, Sir, I of course, as you have been reminded, have a tremendous interest in education in Australia. I, myself, am the half-educated product of a series of scholastic institutions. I began my life learning - if you may so describe it - in a little country State school with about thirty or forty children in it. I then went to a much larger one in a much larger town and then I went to a secondary school which was, in effect, privately conducted, and then I went to what you call a great public school in Melbourne and then to a university. So that I may claim to have seen the educational process at various levels and in various ways and out of it all, I have come, firmly persuaded, as His Lordship the Bishop has just stated to you as his own view, that there is no greater superstition in the world than the idea that all education has to be uniform and uniformly conducted.

One of our dangers in a democracy is this passion for everything being uniform. We must all be the same as the next man. I am all for us all having the same rights as the next man but I am not a bit in favour of being the same as the

next man. Heaven forbid that we should all be exactly the same type of people with the same body of ideas, with the same formal educational equipment in our own minds as if in some sense this would mean that we would all think the same. If anybody in Australia thinks that everybody thinks the same because everybody is in a democracy, he'll have a great disillusionment on November 30th. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, this is, I think, the basic truth: We must not get into this deplorable habit of thinking that there is virtue in uniformity for its own sake. This is not to criticise the State forms of education. I am, of all people, their beneficiary. But this is merely to say that the greater the variety that we have, the greater the versatility of our educational system, the more people are encouraged to choose the school that they want for their children, the better for all of us. (Applause) Of course, Mr. Chairman, this is something that goes deep.

We have heard today, very properly, words about science, the importance of science in the world. Of course, tremendously important, increasingly important, but it would be a strange world - wouldn't it - in which we were all scientists, a strange world in which we had forgotten that, after all, the proper study of mankind is man, the relations between man and man, the relations between man and his Maker. All these great humane studies which, of course, could co-exist with science, are not to be forgotten. Education is, in its nature, an all-round business. The humanists must learn more about science and, if I may say so, the scientists must learn more about the humanities, otherwise we may get to the stage, of course, of becoming so scientific, so knowledgeable on God's creations, that we begin to think we know all about God. This is a cardinal error.

Now, a school like this, a school like the one I went to in Melbourne; other schools - the school that Mr. Robson conducted with such distinction - such schools have a double aim. Those aims should produce the highest level of education, meaning by that not only the acquiring of knowledge - vastly important as that is, not only the acquiring of accurate habits of thought, rare and splendid as they may be, not only the acquiring of habits of courtesy and tolerance and understanding, but also realising all through that we are not here today and gone tomorrow, we are not a mere dusty phenomenon that will be blown away but that we have some of the stuff of immortality in us. When I say that I don't mean just reputation or something of that kind, but some of the stuff of the spirit, something that is based upon the whole religious feeling that we have and the religious background against which we do our work. This is tremendously important. Sir, if you didn't believe this, this school wouldn't be here. If other people didn't believe it, other great and famous schools would not be here. These schools do not, this great school does not exist just in order to indicate that it is a bit superior to the firm next door. Not at all. It is here because the parents who send their boys here want something more than ordinary lay education. (Applause) They want some background.

Sir, I must tell you - and perhaps Mr. Robson has heard me say this before - I hope he has a faulty memory - but when the war ended, I was at that time in that strange place they call, politically, "the wilderness". You may know what it means. But I had one idea in my mind which turned out to be utterly wrong. I thought that with all the tremendous rates of taxation that then existed, necessarily so for the conduct of the war,

with all that, wouldn't it be terribly difficult for people to send their children to schools where they have to pay fees for them and make some sacrifice for them; wouldn't this mean that the great number of schools now well known would feel the pinch and tend to disappear? I couldn't have been more wrong. It is one of the most astonishing things in post-war history in Australia that these schools, about whose future I was nervous, before long had waiting lists, before long began to expand and expand. Why, I noticed on the back of the programme today a very very interesting figure - Waverley College was opened in January, 1903 with a roll call of twentytwo pupils. Twentytwo - and it now has 1,420, and so magnetic obviously has been the work that it has done that a distinguished Judge is able to get up and announce the completion of an enterprise running into - what did he say? - £390,000. This, I think, is one of the great phenomena of the post-war era, a wonderful thing. I have had a good deal to do with it on the university side, as you know, and a little to do with taxation remissions and so on, on donations to schools, but the whole essence of this thing has been that people have been able and willing - and when I say able, I know what sacrifices are involved in this - to give to their children that form of education which they regard as best here and best in eternity. This is something tremendous. I am proud of a country that has done it. I am proud of people who can work to produce a result like this. (Applause)

Sir, I have a singular pleasure in being here. I am sorry my wife is not here but as you may have heard by courtesy of the press, we now have a tenth grandchild. (Applause) I thought for a moment a little earlier that somebody wanted me to adopt an eleventh. (Laughter) If you know my wife as well as I do, you will know that she is a tremendous grandmother and so for a variety of reasons, my daughter coming back last evening from hospital, she decided she couldn't come, but her heart is with me. She shares my views on these matters (Applause) and therefore it is a great thing, a pleasant thing for me to have been able to declare open this building and express my hope that it will for many many years to come serve both God and man in this city.

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