

THE CARDINAL'S DINNER

SYDNEY, N.S.W.

30TH JULY, 1964

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

My Lord Cardinal, My Lords Bishops, Parliamentary Colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen :

This is really a most embarrassing occasion for me. There is nothing I enjoy half so much as a hostile audience. (Laughter) Tonight I have been listening to speeches, eminently true about her\*, and deplorably exaggerated about me. (Laughter) I think this is rather bad for me. I don't think a politician ought to be too much praised in his own lifetime. Well, I'll put it this way to you, in the worst moments of my unpopularity with this writer or this paper or that, I have been perfectly certain that the obituary notice will be pretty good. (Laughter) (Applause)

Since we are in Shakespearian mood, I am bound to tell you at once that I am no orator as Muldoon is (Applause) but I hope that somebody has recorded what he said (Laughter) and I will arrange with my solicitors to have this sent with a compliments slip on the day of my demise, and it will read very well then and my grandchildren will enjoy it. My children will read it with a slightly lifted eyebrow (Laughter) and my wife, God bless her, will in her charity say, "Ah, if they only knew". (Laughter) (Applause)

Now, your Eminence, it's a little late and I don't want to take up too much of your time, but one thing I did think about as I contemplated this evening and that was that it is not so long ago - oh, in the last year or two - that I encountered a telegraph messenger on a bicycle. You know, that's not such an uncommon phenomenon - a telegraph messenger on a bicycle. He'd come to the Lodge, probably to deliver a few abusive telegrams. And I stopped him and with a quiet face I said to him, "My dear boy, what are you going to be in the long run? A Cardinal? A Minister of the Crown? A Director-General of Postal Services?" And he looked at me with a blank face and rode off. I don't think he has ever come back to the Lodge. (Laughter) I think he went back to the Postmaster and said, "The old fellow's a nut". (Laughter) And yet it's perfectly true. A Cardinal, Sir, Ministers of the Crown, Directors-General, they all began life as telegraph messengers. (Laughter) The one thing that really upsets me as a sound Presbyterian and Protestant in this deplorable gathering tonight (Laughter), the one thing that upsets me is that there is no record of a Moderator-General having been a telegraph messenger. (Laughter) (Applause) Anyhow, Sir, there is a great significance. I say no more about your over-kind remarks. I wish only that I merited them.

But I do want to say something to you about one or two problems. The first thing to say about them is that there is too much time wasted in this world on side issues. There is too much time wasted by people who have the end in common taking time off to fight each other about the methods of achieving the end. In other words, to put it quite bluntly, there is far too much intolerance in the world, and in Australia.

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If I come here tonight, as I have, there will be some alleged Christian who will say I'm cultivating your vote. You know? (Laughter) Well, it's a little bit too late to do that, at the moment. But there is this nagging idea in so many minds that although we are all the children of God and hope to serve His purposes in this world, there is an unbridgeable difference between those who do it this way and those who do it that way.

Your Eminence, we are all members one of another. This is something we must never lose sight of, and whether we be Catholic or Protestant or Jewish or Muslim, the end remains clear: We have an overwhelming duty to serve our country on the highest level and to the best of our talents, and so what I want to say to you is, first of all, a little plea for tolerance.

Tolerance does not mean flabbiness. Tolerance of each other does not mean that we condone evil things or that we are not prepared to fight against evil things. Tolerance is mutual understanding, forbearance, a desire to assemble ourselves every time there is a common cause to be served. And we need tolerance - not only religious tolerance - political tolerance, social tolerance. I suppose it is one of the signs of the fact that we are a rather young country that there is still too much intolerance and bitterness. If I were asked at the end of my political life to say, "Well, Menzies, do you think you ever did anything that was any good?" I would pause for a reply, but I think one thing I would like to say for myself would be that I had never lent myself to any bitter disputes between people on the basis of their religion, their political views or their social position. (Applause) In other words, Sir, I believe that there is a chronic need in our country, and indeed in all countries, for cool, objective, dispassionate discussion, thought and utterance.

My friend, Sir Charles McDonald, who rather overplays me, I think, in his speech, is a classical scholar. Every time I meet him I am reminded of this because he takes me promptly out of my depth by some profound classical allusion (Laughter) but I would like him to know that there is a famous passage in Horace which I will do into English for the benefit of those educated at the Sydney University (Laughter) and that is, as he will recall - "I remember always to keep a calm mind in difficult matters". This is a profound truth - "I remember always to keep a calm mind in difficult matters". This is the greatest advice that could be given to anybody. We would solve our problems more quickly and soundly if we remembered that observation all the time - something cool, dispassionate, objective.

Now, I am mentioning that to you because one thing that I want to say something about tonight is that there has been a little controversy going on - I believe it is still going on - about my famous proposal, now in operation, that the Commonwealth Government - not by reason of any obligation but as a contribution to education in Australia - would find £5M. a year, for science teaching. I will use a comprehensive expression - for science laboratories, science equipment - in secondary schools. Now this, in my innocence, I thought was a sensible idea. I didn't know when I pronounced it, that it was so loaded with sinister aspects.

Five million pounds a year - yes, it's a great sum of money, and particularly if it is each year, a useful sum of money, and why did we do it? Well, we had various things in mind. In the first place, Australia in this scientific technological age, needs more people trained in science, better trained in science. The Australian universities need to have better equipped students coming up to them in science. We need to have, so far as we can, in the secondary school stages, such an encouragement of talent by teaching and equipment and every other way as to produce more people who will teach in these universities, maintain the standards of the past and increase them, improve them, as they ought to be improved for the future.

The greatest shortage in the forward look in universities is the shortage of trained and competent staff. All these other things are material things - money, bricks, mortar. I am not saying that there is no limit to these things, but they are, viewed in comparison, the smallest aspects of the problem, and if we are to have more and more people being trained in science, trained through some aspect of science in medicine, trained in engineering, and if we are to have this done in universities that are not third-rate universities so that we won't have bad money driving out good, then everything that can be done to improve the standard of the student in the secondary school, many of whom will go to the university, many of whom will go into other fields of applied science, anything that we can do seems to me to be all to the good.

Therefore, in my innocence, I thought: "Well, this is a pretty good idea. We'll do it." And we've done it and we will go on doing it. (Applause) Then, apparently, some dispute arises. Should you do this for church secondary schools? That's the first question.

Well, I had the numbers typed out for me today and the position is that in the secondary schools of Australia as at present, we have 674,000 students and of these 492,000 are in Government schools, 120,000 (I am taking it to the nearest thousand) in Catholic schools and 62,000 in non-Catholic schools. Well, those are very interesting figures. The first question that presents itself is: Should the Commonwealth confine its aid to science and equipment to the Government secondary schools?

Well, now, I am not going to buy into fields so much more competently handled by some of my friends here tonight as to what a State ought to do. Not a bit, because if a State which has the direct responsibility for primary and secondary education decides that it will have one system of education that the State will conduct, that's the State's business. Don't treat me as intervening in that field.

But when the Commonwealth comes along, with no obligation, making a grant in aid for a particular purpose, then the Commonwealth is bound to recognise that in fact there are two systems, that in fact there are Government secondary schools and there are non-Government secondary schools, and therefore the first thing that the opponent finds himself putting up is, "All right. Well, now I don't mind the Commonwealth finding £XM. a year for science laboratories in State or Government schools, but you are not to extend this to non-Government schools, whatever they may be."

Well, now, this seems to me to defy not only the facts of life which are that a very substantial percentage of students in secondary schools are in non-Government schools, but it also

would involve me in saying, "I'm not running the State educational system; I'm producing a grant in aid by the Commonwealth. Now on what principle do I say this may go to the Government of New South Wales but no portion of it may go to the Sydney Grammar School, or name any non-Government school you care to mention." And, quite frankly, whether it is through stupidity or otherwise, I just don't understand how any such distinction can be made. For us to discriminate in making a grant in aid for a purpose of high national significance, for us to discriminate between Government schools and non-Government schools, would open up a world of discrimination in other fields to my mind equally unjustifiable.

Then, of course, there are those who say, "Well, whatever you do, if you decide you won't discriminate, you can't fail to discriminate between Protestant schools and Roman Catholic schools". And the answer is that if I had to do that, I wouldn't want to be in public life. (Applause)

Now, I think that a good deal of this confusion that has arisen, has arisen because these elementary facts that I have been referring to haven't been understood and I repeat them for emphasis. What a State does about its educational system, what it decides as to which system it will support is its business and there is a long history behind these things. But the Commonwealth Government coming in to give some special assistance for a special purpose has no right to discriminate. The benefit of its aid must go all round for the purpose that has been indicated. (Applause)

And, Sir, I am happy to say, rightly or wrongly, I've been acting on this principle for a long time, because it was my own Government which introduced tax rebates on school fees, and I don't remember at that time any argument going on to the effect that a parent could have a deduction from income tax for school fees paid to a State high school but not for school fees paid to the Methodist Ladies College. I didn't hear any argument to that effect and I think if it had been put, it would have been laughed out of court. Anyhow, it never was put.

And then right back in 1950/51, I began my own exercises which I am happy to say have been not unfruitful in the universities field because we are not responsible for the universities except for our own in Canberra. A Committee was put up to make a very quick investigation and I was told at a certain stage that the Committee took the view that the residential colleges at the universities ought not to be in the picture because presumably a university could exist without them or, alternatively, they were not really part of a university. It gave me singular satisfaction at that time to say to the Committee: "Unless there is some recommendation in your list for the residential colleges at the universities, I will ignore your report" and so we got a little toe in the door - I think that's the expression. Then when the Murray Committee came along, all this was established, and from that time on, as you know, we have found very substantial sums of money for residential colleges, and the interesting thing is that I don't remember any residential college refusing (Laughter). We didn't discriminate. There are colleges connected with the churches in the University of Sydney. I don't remember any one of them saying, "Sorry, we can't take this." Of course they took it, because they understood quite clearly that this was something extra being put in by the Commonwealth, not of obligation, but as a national contribution,

every penny of which is provided by the people of the nation, whatever their religious denomination may be. (Applause) And so that has gone along very successfully, very happily, and as I go into the universities, I realise, to the very great advantage of the universities.

Look, ladies and gentlemen, there is one thing that all of us here tonight must bear in mind all the time. Everything I say is about what the Commonwealth does in this rather extra operation that it performs. But I have always been a tremendous believer in schools and in colleges at universities which have a background of religion, and the reason for that, the overwhelming reason for that is that I would get no satisfaction in thinking that we had pledged ourselves to a highly intellectual, if you like, but highly pagan future. (Applause) The world is full of talent. Not quite so full of character.

The world is full of the most tremendous skill, inventive genius - the things that have gone on in my lifetime are unbelievable. Nobody would ever have believed them in 1900 when I was a boy of five. Nobody would have. But the whole century has been marred, time after time, by man's inhumanity to man, by a failure of the spirit, and a failure of the spirit is a failure of the character, and if we are going to have a high spirit and a high character, an enduring character, then it is all nonsense to say that I must engage in these almost absurd discriminations that have been suggested. I am all for character. I am all for the man whose character is rooted in eternal beliefs because he is the man, she is the woman who will assure the future of this country. (Applause)

My Lord Cardinal, I am very grateful to the Bishop for that speech of his. I am sure he must have spoken it with a slight mental reservation. (Laughter) I don't want to engage in theological arguments but it was all, you know, rather true in a sense. Flattering in more senses than one, but very heartwarming. But I wouldn't like him to think he was bound to go on believing it for the rest of his life. (Laughter)

Your Eminence, I began by a little glancing reference to your earliest days. I was very amused when you told me tonight that at the last meeting in Rome the debate was conducted in Latin but there were people who spoke Latin with a French pronunciation and some with a German and some with an Italian pronunciation in which they say "in c(h)aelo". I never quite understood... ..but anyhow... .. And others with different pronunciations. Well this must have been extraordinarily difficult because even with us there is the old pronunciation on which Charles McDonald was brought up, no doubt, there is the new pronunciation on which a mere boy like me was brought up (Laughter), there is a law courts pronunciation which is one of highly enlightened illiteracy. (Laughter)

All I know is that on one occasion, one year, my wife and I were in Malta. We visited Malta for a day, and one of the things to be done in that hectic day was for me to be given - not for the first time - an unearned increment, an honorary degree at the Royal University of Malta. Just as we set out on our journey, they put into my hands the Latin that I had to pronounce at a faldstool in the course of getting this degree. It was about two or three hundred words. For a fellow a littly rusty in his Latin, this was a grim prospect. However, I read it through and thought about it a bit, and when we entered ultimately the university, the Vice Chancellor who was a lively character met me

and I said, "Quickly, quickly, before we go up there, what is it? New pronunciation or old?" He said, "It doesn't matter. None of them will know. You just mumble." (Laughter) So to the great puzzlement of my wife and my staff, there I was kneeling and mumbling. (Laughter) My wife said to me afterwards, "Never heard you mumble like that before". And I said, "No, and you have never heard me mumble in a better cause." (Laughter)

Sir, ladies and gentlemen, you have been more than kind. We've enjoyed this very much. I hope to get the written record at some time. It will come in handy for me, not only with my fellow politicians - important though that may be - but occasionally useful with my wife (Laughter), always useful with my children and beyond rubies with my grandchildren.

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