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FOUNDATION STONE CEREMONY AT THE
BETH RIVKAH LADIES' COLLEGE SADIE ELLINSON
SECONDARY SCHOOL,
MELBOURNE.
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12 MAY 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. President, Parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It is for me the second occasion in quite a short time that I have had the pleasure and the honour of speaking to Australians who are of Jewish descent or of the Jewish faith. Not long ago, I had a similar opportunity in the Town Hall in Sydney, and there I said, as I will now repeat, because your Headmistress mentioned something concerning debts - that any debts that are owed by people of the Jewish faith to Australia, are reciprocated by debts from Australians to people of the Jewish faith who in the First and in the Second World War, and indeed in the present troubles which beset our nation, are taking their full place as Australians - as they should, and as they are, and Madam Headmistress, the books are completely balanced, if indeed there is in these things to be talk of balances.

But I am here to congratulate you on opening here today - not opening. . . . on continuing the growth here today of your independent schools. There was a time when it was a common occurrence for me to appear at the opening of independent schools, particularly if they had anything to do with science blocks, but this has recently been interrupted and it is a pleasure to come back again to have the opportunity to see the growth taking place here in the centre of this community.

I do not need to expand upon my own beliefs concerning the value of independent schools, and indeed in this congregation, in this gathering, there is no need for me to do so because there is nobody who needs to be converted. If it were not true that you all believe that it was proper and right for those who wished to do so to graft on to the education that is given by a State the particular beliefs and particular teachings and particular spiritual inheritances which you wish your children to have, then you would not have done what you have done and made this school possible. But, of course, in schools such as this throughout the countryside, it is necessary not only that there should be great academic attainments, and I think you will agree when you look at the figures, that this school has shown great academic attainments, academic attainment in those subjects required by a State education system - but also that it should, as I know it does, inculcate those beliefs, those spiritual sustenances about which I shall have a little more to say later on. It teaches not only academic subjects, not only the requirements of spiritual beliefs, but what is in fact the great strength and joy in Australia, that whether people are of Scottish descent and the Presbyterian faith or of Irish descent and the Roman Catholic faith, or of English descent and adhere to the Church of England, or of Jewish descent and adhere to the Jewish faith, yet they are all Australians in the one community, working together for the one ultimate objective, that all of them may maintain their faith without fear, that all of them may inculcate that which I believe is one of the major things this faculty in this school seeks to inculcate, and that is a faith in the individual human spirit, the individual man, a belief that that is the cornerstone alone on which a great and enduring civilisation can be built.

But what a doubly special occasion it must be for you, for here just a short time ago, there was the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the re-founding, the re-establishment - not the establishment - of the State of Israel. Just as those others of whom I have previously spoken can look back as Australians to the lands from which they came, and can remember the deeds their forefathers did, and can remember the struggles in those countries, so can you now look back to such a land. And looking back, remember for the teaching of the young, so that the future may be maintained in freedom, of what happened over the 2,000 years since Israel ceased to be a State in its own right; look back upon a nation which being conquered kept faith, kept bright its spiritual ideals and because of that had its holy places defiled and its temples torn down and its peoples dispersed to the four corners of the earth, and there being dispersed, still keeping faith, still keeping a dream of a country which would one day be re-established, still keeping the beliefs which to them were beliefs for which one lived or which, if one revoked, one died either physically or spiritually, still keeping those beliefs, were forced into separate communities in the countries in which they lived, were persecuted, were massacred, had all that could be done to destroy them done to them, at least in many of those countries in which, homeless themselves, they sought to make their homes.

All through this period of time was kept not only this belief in the inherent importance of the individual man, not only this belief in the overriding importance of the spiritual existence of a man as against his material existence, but also the seed of a dream of some day which would come when just as others can look back to lands from which their forefathers came as still a country, so could the people of Israel, as they hoped, look back to the land from which they came, their forefathers came. And this happened, and this came to pass. This has been protected, and even though today Israel is still under the shadow of attack, under the shadow of threat, there must come a time when the whole of that area of the Middle East will agree: "Here is a place in which there are Arab States, in which there is the State of Israel. By working together economically, by co-operating with each other, by recognising the inalienable existence of each other, surely we can do more for the people living there than by living in a state of tension and of febrile argument which now pervades the region." And I think that day will come.

The first step towards it must be a willingness for those from the Arab States and those from the State of Israel to sit down and talk over the problem which now exists and come to a reasonable agreement on how this matter can be settled. It has been of some surprise to me that for a long time I have heard, when international disputes have broken out: "Sit down and talk about a solution of matters in Korea. Sit down and talk about the solution of the fighting in Malaya. Sit down and talk about the solution of the fighting in Vietnam". I haven't heard enough about: "Sit down and talk about the threat which is now posed to the State of Israel", and yet it is essential that this should be done, and while my Government cannot do much towards it, it will urge it, it will support it, it will do all it can to see it comes about.

Then you, and the children that you will educate here, in the school you are building will have a country - not one, I hope, that will attract first fealty, but a country in which you can have pride, will have a country from which you can say: "Our traditions sprang", a country in which you can say: "Our faith is centred," and you look there, as Australians, just as I, perhaps, as an Australian would look to England from which my parents came.

This, I think, will be helped by schools such as this. When we walked in, we heard a choir singing "Open to us the Gates of Righteousness". I don't think I quite understood the words. They were translated to me, but this is what I am told they were singing. And it is for schools such as this a major task to open to children the "Gates of Righteousness" and to show them that the "Gates of Righteousness", as all gates, need to be guarded without hatred of those who seek to break them down.

This is all I wish to say now. I think it was one of your great writers who said something like this: "A miracle does not prove that which is impossible. A miracle merely confirms that something in fact was possible". There are many things we now think impossible. There are many things we think it may require a miracle to change, but it won't require a miracle, it will just require a belief that in fact things we think are impossible are possible, and they will then be achieved, just as this school has been achieved, as other schools will be achieved, and as I hope and trust and pray, in the Middle East, a safe, progressive area will be created in which the State of Israel will play its full and proper part.
