

**CITATION DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR LAUCHLAN CHIPMAN,  
PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WOLLONGONG ON THE OCCASION OF THE ADMISSION OF SIR  
JOHN GREY GORTON TO THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
LETTERS, HONORIS CAUSA, ON 8 DECEMBER, 1989.**

Chancellor, I present to you, The Right Honourable Sir John Grey Gorton.

Sir John Gorton was born in Melbourne in 1911. He attended preparatory school and the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) in Sydney before returning to Victoria. He entered Geelong Grammar School at the age of sixteen and, four years later, travelled to Brasenose College, Oxford, where he read politics, history and economics. He holds the degree of Master of Arts from Oxford University.

Sir John's less formal education took place on his father's property at Kangaroo Lake in the famously tough Victorian Mallee country. He knew, at first hand, the struggle against the climate and the bush that had shaped the traditional Australian character celebrated in the works of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson. He shared with those writers a love for the Australian landscape and people. He was also to resent, like them, the loss of Australia's pioneering spirit of independence and self-reliance.

John Gorton returned to his family's orchard property in 1935. In 1940 he enlisted as a fighter pilot. He served with the RAF in Britain and with the RAAF in Singapore, Darwin and Milne Bay. His war experiences strengthened his passionate commitment to individual freedom. He also developed his natural capacity for daring and ingenuity.

Sir John entered politics at the local government level in 1947 and became President of Kerang Shire Council. In 1949 he was elected to the federal Parliament as a Liberal Senator from Victoria, a position he held until 1968. During that time he held several ministerial portfolios including Education. In his Education portfolios he worked eagerly for the introduction of Commonwealth secondary school and technical scholarships and to provide large grants for well-equipped science blocks at secondary schools. His efforts involved adroit handling of inter-State jealousies and the State Aid issue.

John Gorton believed that education should develop the individual's talents to their fullest. He commented once that "*You cannot destroy ability even in the name of equality*". During his ministerial term of office, Colleges of Advanced Education were established in Australia to offer a wider choice of tertiary education, particularly to those unable to take advantage of the limited places in the Universities.

Sir John became Government Leader in the Senate in October 1967. In January 1968, after the sudden death of Harold Holt, he became Prime Minister. His leadership style was in itself a challenge to the nation. As one observer noted, it raised the question of whether the Australian electorate and the Australian establishment could accept a radical departure from the comfortable Menzies style. John Gorton tested the maturity and assuredness of the Australian people and perhaps, at that time, found it wanting.

In the 1960s Australia had some experience of the social upheaval and the questioning of traditional values that were to become the hallmark of that decade. Donald Horne remarked that, at that time, *"Australian intellectuals, artists and scholars and those they could reach out to were now (at last) losing the colonial mentality"*. A renaissance of Australian creativity, as expressed through the arts, was possible.

Like all renaissances, it needed patronage and support. Artists raged against the self-satisfied but not self-aware attitudes of their society. The writer, Bob Ellis, argued that his country was then *"a ... provincial, ignorant nation ... with a history it was largely unaware of, and a cultural present that possessed little in common with the local reality"*. As Prime Minister, John Gorton tapped into that restless current that was not satisfied with the cultural and economic cringe to Europe and the United States.

In 1968, his first year in office, the Australian Council for the Arts made its first grants. Prime Minister Gorton provided further government sponsorship for the Arts Council. He increased spending on education by 25 per cent, and established the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. He sought to reform the censorship laws and health insurance.

In a series of radical moves he proclaimed the right of Australia to act as an independent nation. He reduced Australia's military involvement in Vietnam and challenged the nature of foreign investment. He also signalled directly the end of Australian colonial rule in Papua New Guinea.

By 1969, John Gorton was personally convinced that the *"gradual"* route to self-government in Papua New Guinea was not acceptable. He endorsed the greater devolution of power to Papua New Guinea's own Ministers and his government increased spending for education. In June 1970, at the end of a tumultuous visit to Papua New Guinea, he committed the Australian government to a program for self-government and independence.

Sir John Gorton departed the office of Prime Minister in March 1971 after a 3 year term which as Donald Horne put it *"cleared a lot of ground"* - a metaphor which John Gorton from the Mallee country would appreciate. He prepared Australia to realise further its home-grown potential. His political rival, Gough Whitlam, has commented that Sir John had sought *"to act in a contemporary and relevant way as Prime Minister of Australia"*.

Sir John was appointed to the Privy Council in 1968 and made a Companion of Honour in 1971. He received his knighthood in 1977. To these honours, the University wishes to add its recognition of a man who

sought to express his sincere love for his country by helping it to take a more adult stand in the world. We applaud also his support for education and the re-awakening of the Arts in Australia. As an academic community, the University expresses its appreciation of someone who challenges society and who, as a great individual, can proudly bear the title - "*not easily classified*".

Chancellor, it is a great pleasure and privilege to present to you John Grey Gorton for the award of Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa.