

INTERFACES

essays in honour of

PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT

edited by

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and

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UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

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PREFACE

This book is a tribute to Professor Peter Serracino Inglott who, on turning sixty in 1996, retired as Rector of the University of Malta and head of the Philosophy Department at the same institution. It is written by people who know him well, having been either his students, colleagues and friends over a number of years, or distinguished guests of the Department and the University. The promptness and pleasure with which all those who were invited to contribute to this collection accepted to do so are a clear sign of the high esteem in which Father Peter is held, both because of his achievements as well as for his personal qualities – his intelligence, his sense of humour, his breadth of vision, his warmth, his great hospitality, his amazing capacity for work, but above all his kindness and generosity. Not everyone in his position and with his responsibilities would open their door at night the way he did to people who needed help and sought advice. Those who came knew they wouldn't be turned away.

Often in his job, especially as Rector, Father Peter had to make decisions which he knew some wouldn't like. Though always willing to explain why it was necessary for him to do what he felt was right, he would also be acutely aware of the displeasure caused by his decisions and try, whenever possible, to mitigate their consequences. That he very often failed in this respect was what caused him greatest distress.

Father Peter was born into a family of modest means. His father died young and his mother had to struggle to raise eight children and give them a decent education. For most of his student days Father Peter had to work in order to make ends meet. At Oxford, where he read Philosophy, Politics and Economics, he distinguished himself in all subjects and won the Chancellor's Prize for English Prose. He got his Doctorate in

Philosophy from the Catholic University of Milan and went on to study Theology in Paris, where he worked in restaurants and slept under the bridges, learning most of his French from waiters and the down-and-outs. He was ordained by Cardinal Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI, in 1962, and started teaching philosophy in 1964, becoming head of the department six years later and radically transforming the teaching of the subject, widening its programme to cover the whole of its history, the variety of its traditions and the full range of its problems and concerns.

As a young priest, Father Peter was one of the driving forces behind the movement which led the Maltese Church to reform and come to terms with the sweeping social changes which transformed Maltese society in the wake of Independence (1964). As cultural promoter and critic, he not only encouraged Maltese artists and writers to develop modern styles and techniques but also wrote and lectured incessantly in an attempt to induce a rather reluctant public, and an even more reluctant establishment, to become more receptive, or at least less hostile, to their work. As national chaplain of the Young Christian Workers Movement he helped raise public and political awareness on a number of social problems and was himself instrumental in bringing about the required reforms, giving advice to politicians when necessary, and playing an active role in the drafting of the relevant legislation.

On the international scene, Father Peter was behind most of Malta's initiatives for peace and the rational use of the world's resources. With Arvid Pardo, he was responsible for Malta's proposal, presented to the UN General Assembly and accepted in 1967, of putting the resources of the seabed beyond the jurisdiction of nation states and under global management and control. The principle of the common heritage of mankind, which dramatically transformed international law, underpinned the Maltese initiative, as it did the process at UNESCO which led to the proposal of a Charter of the Rights of Future Gen-

erations, which can be seen as an application of the Common Heritage Principle to inter-generational equity.

During Father Peter's rectorship, under his guidance and inspired by his vision, the University of Malta grew from a small body catering for a tiny minority of school-leavers and producing a small number of graduates, mostly in the traditional professions, to an important institution geared to the country's needs and much better placed to contribute to the development of its human resources in all fields. In an interview he gave on his retirement, this is how Father Peter described the changes that took place during his term of office: "To put it in a nutshell, the University has become a 'multiversity'. It is not just that courses and options available to students have become much more varied (from aeronautics to zoomorphology) and ranging from well below to well above first-degree level (from Junior College to Postgraduate Medicine). A multidimensional change has taken place, converting the University from an unviable, pedagogic minifactory, producing only four to five traditional types of professional every two or three years, into a federation of a great diversity of entities, each with its own proper mode of governance and self-tailored style of operation."

The range of topics dealt with in this volume reflect Father Peter's main interests, which include Philosophy at their core, but branch out from it, sometimes quite unexpectedly, in many directions, giving rise to a fair amount of overlapping which is duly adverted to and advertised in the title of the book. The papers have been grouped under four headings – Logic and Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Social Philosophy, and Aesthetics. These, together with Metaphysics and the History of Philosophy, are the main areas in which Father Peter has lectured and published for well over thirty years. The bibliography at the end of the volume gives an idea of the range of his thought and writing.

We know that no one can do justice to Father Peter's merits and achievements in anything which is as short as this short

introduction. The tribute lies not here but in the essays that follow. We would like Father Peter to accept them as a small token of thanks for what he has done for the University of Malta, which he has so generously served, and for the country which has benefited from his wisdom and hard work. May that work continue for many years to come.

Joe Friggieri
Salvino Busuttil

31 January 1997

University of Malta