Giovanni Paolo Martelli (1935–2020)

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Giovanni Paolo Martelli, Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Plant Pathology*, passed away on January 8, 2020. He dedicated his long-lasting academic and scientific career to the advancement of knowledge, contributing outstanding achievements in plant virology, with a relentless commitment and generous vision.

He was born in Palermo, on January 17, 1935. In 1956, he graduated *cum laude* in Agricultural Sciences from the University of Bari, where he spent most of his career, rising through the professional ranks, to be appointed full professor in 1973. From 1980 till his retirement in November 2010, G.P. Martelli held the chair of Plant Virology. He lectured in Microbiology and Plant Pathology at the Universities of Bari and Palermo. During his career, Professor Martelli chaired the Institute of Plant Pathology of the University of Palermo (1972–73), the Department of Plant Pathology (1980 to 1986) and the Department of Plant Protection and Applied Microbiology (now Department of Soil, Plant and Food Sciences) of the University of Bari. Following his retirement,

G.P. Martelli was appointed Emeritus Professor of the University “Aldo Moro” of Bari as a testament to his extraordinary scientific contributions.

Professor Martelli fostered the establishment of the Study Center of the National Research Council of Italy (CNR) on Viruses and Virus-like Diseases of Mediterranean Crops (now a section of the Institute for Sustainable Plant Protection of the CNR), and directed it from its very foundation in 1982 until his retirement. With his colleagues, he also promoted the International Course on Protection and Sanitation of Mediterranean Fruit Crops at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (Valenzano, Bari), an Institute of the Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (CIHEAM). He coordinated this course and the related M.Sc. program in Plant Virology from its establishment till 2008.

Professor Martelli started his scientific career working on plant protection and mycology, investigating the biology of fungal parasites of olive (anthracnose, in particular), grapevine, fruit and vegetable crops, and describing new species of micromycetes. From 1960 through 1963, G.P. Martelli spent several study leaves abroad, first at the Botany Institute of the University of Liverpool, England, then at the Department of Plant Pathology of the University of California, Davis, and finally at the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie, Scotland. At Davis, he developed his everlasting passion for plant virology under the guidance of Professor W.B. Hewitt, and was also exposed to nematology. This enabled him alongside several colleagues to initiate studies on Italian longidorids. Upon returning to Bari, he organized from scratch a plant virology laboratory which soon became one of the leading units in Italy and remains internationally renowned to this day.

G.P. Martelli investigated viruses and virus diseases of a great variety of Mediterranean crops including vegetables, fruit trees, and to a lesser extent, ornamentals as well as weeds. He was a recognized authority on viruses and virus diseases of grapevines. He co-authored the description of more than 50 new virus species, genera and families, and characterized

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many other viruses physico-chemically, serologically, ultra-structurally and molecularly. He was particularly active in the study of virus-host interactions at the ultrastructural level, conducting exhaustive investigations on the cytopathology of virus infections, structure and nature of inclusion bodies, and intracellular sites of synthesis of viral nucleic acids and proteins. He utilized cytopathology as a tool for diagnosis and taxonomy. His epidemiological studies have dealt with viruses transmitted by nematodes and mealybugs or via seeds and pollen. In the late 1980s, Professor Martelli set up a biotechnological research unit for plant virus diagnostics based on the use of recombinant DNA and monoclonal antibodies. He also established a unit for the sanitation of grapevines and fruit trees, and the production of virus disease-free material, and was active in the planning and implementation of plant certification programs.

G.P. Martelli had also a keen interest for viral taxonomy. He was an active member of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) since 1978. He chaired the Study Group on *Closteroviridae* and was a member of the Study Groups on *Tombusviridae*, *Flexiviridae*, *Tymoviridae* and *Emaravirus*. From 1987 to 1993, he chaired the ICTV Plant Virus Subcommittee and later served on the Executive Committee as an elected member. He fostered the adoption of the taxonomic system based on family-genus-species. In recognition to his contribution to plant virus taxonomy, he was elected as a “Life member” of the Executive Committee of ICTV in 1999. In the recent extension of the virus taxonomy structure to 15 ranks, the name “*Martellivirales*” was ratified by ICTV to acknowledge Professor Martelli’s outstanding contribution to plant virology and virus taxonomy.

Professor Martelli published more than 300 research papers in international refereed journals and many additional written contributions for a total over 600 scripts, including six books, one of which on virus diseases of grapevine co-authored with R. Bovey, W. Gärtel, W.B. Hewitt and A. Vuittenez, for which he was awarded a gold medal by the Académie d’Agriculture de France. His international academic standing was affirmed by numerous invitations to chair sessions, present papers at international conferences, and write reviews in textbooks and international journals.

Professor Martelli was President of the International Council for the Study of Viruses and Virus Diseases of the Grapevine (ICVG) from 1987 to 2018, the Associazione Fitopatologica Italiana (1980–1986) and the Italian Society for Plant Pathology (2002–2004). He chaired the ISHS International Working Group on Vegetable Viruses (1979–1981) and was a long-lasting member of the Councils of the Italian Society for Virology and of the Italian Society for Plant

Pathology. He was an active member of many Scientific Societies and was elected Fellow of the American Phytopathological Society in 1997. He was also a member of prestigious Italian Academies, such as the Accademia Italiana della Vite e del Vino, Accademia Nazionale di Agricoltura, Accademia Pugliese delle Scienze, Accademia Italiana dell’Olivo e dell’Olio, Accademia dei Georgofili, Accademia di Agricoltura di Torino and Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. In recognition of his scientific merit, Professor Martelli was awarded numerous prizes, among which the “F. Maseri-Florio World Prize for Distinguished Research in Agriculture”.

G.P. Martelli carried out scientific missions for the FAO, UNDP, CNR, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CIHEAM or, upon invitation by local governments, in North Africa, Near and Far East, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, and several Eastern European countries.

In recent years, he had the merit of guessing the causal role of the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa* in olive quick decline in southern Italy prior to its discovery, and co-authored important publications on this disease while wholeheartedly and diligently defending scientific facts.

Professor Martelli served as an associate editor of *Phytopathology*, *European Journal of Plant Pathology* and *Vitis*. Since 2002, he was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Plant Pathology*, the official journal of the Italian Society for Plant Pathology, now published by Springer, and devoted much effort to its growth and success. He considered the quality of articles of utmost importance for the reputation of the journal and thoroughly edited every manuscript. The *Journal of Plant Pathology* owes much to Professor Martelli and will be forever grateful for his commitment and leadership.

G.P. Martelli will be always remembered as an excellent scientist and a pioneer with a broad, far-sighted vision. He was an exceptional mentor and a guide for his coworkers, always open to challenging discussions, and invariably listening to different opinions and to sharing of ideas and thoughts for maintaining his scientific curiosity. He passionately thought, practiced and defended rigorous, honest and high-quality research. His passing is a great loss for those who had the honor and privilege of working with him and benefited from his constant support and help.

Professor Martelli was a true gentleman, with a unique style and a reserved attitude. He was a kind, generous and loyal friend, and a very nice person, with an ironic sense of humor. G.P. Martelli is survived by his wife Nicoletta, his daughter Maria Carla, his son Giuseppe and five grandchildren.