



Gratitude and acknowledgements “Marina Diana Mercurio” Award 2018



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First, I wish to sincerely thank Settimo Termini, Cristiano Viappiani, Carlo Musio as well as Enrico Di Cera and Leone Montagnini (previous recipients of the Award) for their attention and esteem that brought them to give me the honour of being awarded the prestigious “Marina Diana Mercurio” Award 2018.

I consider myself a privileged person, who has had great masters and colleagues; some of whom helped me from falling down along the long road of my life.

When I was a Physics student, in the sixties of last century, in many Universities, and in Pisa particularly, and in some way in large sectors of civil society, it seemed possible to build a different world, based on justice, solidarity, in summary grounded on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>). Nowadays all this sounds terribly far, but then it was a daily commitment.

In the Physics Institute of Pisa University the third year students had the key of the Institute and of the Library and felt at home. Professors like Adriano Gozzini and Adriano Di Giacomo, Cesare Ascoli, Donatella Petracchi, Sergio Santucci and others were everyday available tutors who thought us how to study and to love Physics. Their goal was to help their students to prove the best of themselves.

Once graduated, young confused physicist trying to start research in Biophysics, I had the opportunity of listening to and learning from Antonino Borsellino, Pietro Omodeo, Arnaldo Vecchi, Alessandro Checucci, discovering not only how to carry on research, but also the basis of scientific and civil correctness. Thus I was so lucky to start working in the “Laboratorio per lo Studio delle Proprietà Fisiche di Biomolecole e Cellule” (Laboratory for the Study of the Physical Properties of Biomolecules and Cells), at that time directed by Alessandro Checucci. In those years Biophysics, this new interdisciplinary science, was sprouting and growing in CNR.

Beginning of the seventies, under the guidance of these eminent leaders, I also had the privilege of contributing to the foundation of SIBPA.

Beginning of the eighties I decided to use large part of my free time to study arms control and disarmament issues and dedicated myself to work in the Unione degli Scienziati Per Il Disarmo ONLUS (Union of Scientists For Disarmament, <http://www.uspid.org>), a non-profit association of scientists and researchers founded in 1982 with the

objective of providing information and analyses on arms control and disarmament, including information on the environmental impact and human costs of development and dissemination of arms. We, USPID members, were and are convinced that this task is a moral imperative for scientists and that it is part of their social responsibility. All this would not have been possible without the guidance of Edoardo Amaldi, Francesco Calogero, Carlo Bernardini, Paolo Cotta Ramusino, Roberto Fieschi, Carlo Schaerf. In particular I will never forget Joseph (Jo) Rotblat, an inspiring person for all of us, whom had the privilege of working with. Jo was the only scientist who abandoned the Manhattan Project in 1944, after learning that Nazi Germany would not build a weapon of mass destruction, co-signatory of the Russell-Einstein Manifest, cofounder of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (<https://pugwash.org/>), Peace Nobel Prize in 1995 (together with the Conferences) “for his efforts to diminish the part played by nuclear arms in international politics and, in the longer run, to eliminate such arms”. Since some years I am member of the Pugwash Council and before retiring I lectured on “Arms race, arms control, disarmament” in the Scienze per la Pace Pisa University Degree Course.

Many of my CNR and University Colleagues were friends, real friends, and working with them was a daily pleasant intellectual and human adventure, in particular with Giuliano Colombetti, since more than fifty years a comrade in science and life. With Giuliano I started my adventure in Biophysics, using Electron Paramagnetic Resonance techniques to investigate biophysical problems such as X-ray- and photo-induced free radicals in biological molecules, later moving together in the field of Photosensory Biophysics. This new field of investigation gave me the good luck of working for more than forty years with a lifelong mentor and friend, Pill-Soon Song, once in the United States and now in South Korea, with whom I always felt and keep on feeling at home.

Serving as Director of the CNR Biophysics Institute of Pisa for more than ten years, in the nineteen's, I had the support, the suggestions and the help of the scientific, technical and administrative staffs of the Institute and I would not have been able to play any role as President of the European Society for Photobiology and as member in the Councils of other Scientific Societies without the inspiration of Giulio Jori and Francesco Ghetti.

I still am in touch with several of my former students, and I am very

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happy of the success many of them had and have.

With Franco Gambale and Gigi San Biagio I enjoyed trying to imagine and shape a “great” national Biophysics Institute. I personally think we did not get what we wanted, but for sure we experienced an extraordinary common commitment based on honesty and mutual respect.

Before concluding I wish to quote an idea of my beloved friend and maestro, Carlo Bernardini, recently passed away: “Physics (and I think all sciences) progresses with the bursts of great ideas, but also with the multitude of flames of small, modest ideas, which do not give fame but “light up the landscape”. So, it is not only to young colleagues, but also

to those ones like me that, I want to say between lines, the “normal ones”, have contributed to the development of science and we can assert this with dignity and humility. For the youngest, this message is also equivalent to saying: the important thing is that you do what you like, not what you can show off in the gazettes”.

As I mentioned at the beginning, all that I have achieved in my activities has a simple reason: I have been guided by great masters and I had great companions. Let me also acknowledge that I would have been unable to follow their lead without my wife, who has supported and tolerated me for more than 50 years. To you too, Mavi, heartfelt thanks.