



fondazione  
Campana  
dei Caduti

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# The Voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation

Centenary of the Bell

## A special year

The year that is drawing to a close will remain indelibly etched in the collective memory of the Presidency and Board of Trustees and the employees of the Campana dei Caduti Foundation. The events at the Miravalle Hill in 2025 taught us all an important lesson. In a world plagued by violence and widespread violations of civil order imposed by the powerful, it is vital to have institutions committed daily - quietly but with consistent determination - to promoting peace, respect for human rights, and democratic freedoms.

The fruitful path traced exactly one hundred years ago by the visionary inventor of Maria Dolens, Father Antonio Rossaro, and continued with equal wisdom by successive Presidents - Father Eusebio Jori, Pietro Monti, and Alberto Robol - has made it possible to celebrate the Centenary of the monumental Bell. The occasion, while appropriately formal for such an important historical milestone, was also marked by closeness and warmth, thanks to a community that rightly regards Maria Dolens as an almost "family" presence, always near at hand.

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A moment during the Israeli/Palestinian concert by Noá and Miriam Toukan

Within the planned programme, the visits to the Miravalle Hill by Head of State Sergio Mattarella (19 July) and by the President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi (4 October), were certainly the highlights. Widely covered by national and international media, these events left an indelible impression on all who had the privilege of attending (both were sold out.) The guests in attendance were able to hear, directly from these two distinguished figures, speeches marked by profound wisdom and dynamic foresight.

But, when scrolling through the calendar of events, how can we fail to mention the incredible Israeli/Palestinian concert by Noá and Miriam Toukan, which took place in extremely adverse weather conditions, in the end, adding to its charm? Or the refined musical performances by the Haydn Orchestra and the Guardia di Finanza Band, so different from each other, yet connected through the skillful blending of classical and modern repertoires? And who could forget the historic centre of

Rovereto brought to life for three enchanting summer evenings as a huge open-air stage by the creativity of the artists of Teatro Potlach?

Returning to the institutional sphere, we cannot overlook the extraordinary session of the Provincial Council of Trento, held at the Miravalle Hill rather than, as is usually the case, at Palazzo Trentini, during which the Council unanimously adopted a resolution of significant political and social importance on the subject of Peace. The unusual setting made the session truly unprecedented.

The list could indeed go on, since the Centenary year featured dozens of events, both organised by the Foundation itself and promoted by other associations hosted by it.



Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi at the Bell

While space prevents us from listing them all (the full list is available on our website for those interested), we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the public bodies - first and foremost the Autonomous Province



President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella on the Viale delle Bandiere with President Marco Marsilli



President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella at the Bell

of Trento and the Municipality of Rovereto - and to the private entities whose generous support, in terms of both ideas and resources, made it possible to carry out a programme of activities open to almost everyone, and notable for the excellence of its content and its well-rounded approach to all thematic sectors.

It hardly needs to be said that the positive outcome of the Centenary offers the Presidency and Board of Trustees - and my sincere thanks go to them, and to the officials for their crucial collaboration - the strongest motivation to pursue the Foundation's initiatives with steadfast dedication in the year ahead and in the years to follow. While we cannot provide detailed previews at this time, given that the programme is not yet fully defined, it would appear that cycles of conferences on pressing international issues and the expansion of educational initiatives, for both local institutions and off-site, will be key priorities in the agenda for 2026.

In closing, on a different yet equally important note, it is worth highlighting that, in the early months of next year, Trentino will host a substantial part of the competitions of the XXV Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Having the opportunity to welcome some of the key figures - authorities, athletes, and accompanying persons - of such a prestigious mega-event to Miravalle Hill, allowing them to experience Maria Dolens firsthand, would undoubtedly be a source of great satisfac-

tion and prestige for the Foundation. It would further strengthen its international vocation, already prominently reflected in the permanent display of nearly 100 national flags. Over the next few weeks, we will work with the appropriate authorities to assess the feasibility of this ambitious project. If the outcome is positive, we can begin preparing to move forward with the idea.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



The Haydn Orchestra at the Bell

## TWO EXHIBITIONS AT THE CAMPANA DEI CADUTI FOUNDATION

# Exploring memory, philately, and Muky's "Presepi Contro"

From 22 November, the Campana dei Caduti Foundation welcomes the public with two exhibitions that weave together memory, art and civic engagement. On the one hand Muky's Presepi Contro, on the other hand the exhibition organised with the Circolo Culturale Numismatico Filatelico Roveretano, which proposes a rich selection of publications, medals and stamps dedicated to Maria Dolens for the Centenary of the Bell, all sourced from the collections of its members. A dual perspective on past and present, illustrating how the Bell remains a space for meaningful reflection on the theme of Peace.



Somalia The memory of war is war - 1993



Palestine Christmas 1995-1996 - Peace Process

The heart of the event remains the now historical link between the Foundation and Muky, an artist who intertwined her research with the mission of Maria Dolens for decades. This deep bond, rooted in trust and a shared vision, has each year involved the Bell displaying her nativity scenes during the Christmas season. An event that never loses its impact, as the themes woven throughout the artist's work remain strikingly relevant, conflicts having continued unabated since then. This had already been clear to Muky from her very first nativity scene, dedicated to Cambodia, and then in her subsequent works focused on the wars that shaped the world's history: Ku-

wait, South Morocco, Israel, Somalia, Bosnia, Sarajevo, Palestine, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Afghanistan. A painful catalogue, an archive of wounds.

Her sculptures appear to spring from the very essence of conflict: they tell not just the story of a place, but of the people who inhabit it, particularly those who endure loss. For her, art is an act of ethical resistance. She does not seek the aesthetics of tragedy, but the responsibility of remembrance. Each nativity scene becomes a collective gesture, a tiny act of rebellion against violence. In this sense, her work is intertwined with the words of the many 20th century



2003-2004 - Iraq Black gold corrodes the sun

poets who tried to give a name to the horror of war. Giuseppe Ungaretti, at the height of the First World War, noted: "One stands like / in autumn / on the trees / the leaves"(Soldiers, 1918): just a few syllables that convey the utter fragility of life on the battlefield. A fragility found in the figures sculpted by Muky, bodies that are exposed, vulnerable, never heroised.

Her artistic journey also intersects with the collective memory of 11 September 2001. On that day, which for many marked the beginning of a new era of insecurity, the artist was in New York. The scene struck her with the force of a collective trauma: dust, chaos, sirens, blocked streets, people running or standing still. It was a crucial step in her thought: what can an artist do when we suddenly find ourselves face-to-face with destruction? Muky decided to continue. To continue sculpting, transforming clay as testimony.

Her task, then, became that of preserving names, faces, identities. As a symbolic protest against the eternal recurrence of violence in human history. Muky's nativity scenes capture this grim continuity with precision: the geographical areas and uniforms change, but the essence of the conflicts remains unchanged.

And this is why the Campana dei Caduti Foundation continues, year after year, to exhibit its works: because they speak a language that - unfortunately - does not age. They remind us that the war is not a distant memory, but an open wound that is still raw. On the Miravalle Pass, the sculptures echo the verses of Paul Éluard, who during the Second World War emphasised that if the voice of justice had ears, the world would have been saved long ago.

Art, then, does not bring salvation, but memory. And remembrance, in the context of Maria Dolens, is a stance, a way of remembering that Peace is not an abstract con-

cept, but a daily and fragile choice. Muky insists on this, through a simple and stubborn gesture: to keep sculpting pain so that it does not disappear, to prevent it from becoming nothing but statistics.

So, as the city prepares for Christmas, the Presepi Centro return to the Miravalle Hill as they do every year. Their relevance lies not in the fate of art, but in the fate of the world. And they remind us that as long as conflicts exist, we need someone who has the courage to look at them and turn them into stories. And perhaps it is precisely this fragile but strong devotion that Muky's works still show, while the wind through the Campana dei Caduti one again calls on humanity to truly understand the meaning of the word Peace.



Eastern Europeans



## INTERVIEW WITH PHILOSOPHER AND POLITICIAN MICHELE NICOLETTI ON THE RELEVANCE OF THE CAMPANA DEI CADUTI

# Peace is never won forever

At the heart of the tensions that are once again shaking the world, Michele Nicoletti, university professor and former president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, reflects on the universal value of the Bell of the Fallen, symbol of Peace, memory and responsibility. As a philosopher and politician, for years he has investigated the connection between evil, ethics and democratic coexistence, observing how violence always re-emerges in old and new forms. In our inter-

view with him, we analysed the role of dialogue between cultures, the weight of religions in conflicts and reconciliations, and the need for a policy capable of building a shared will. For Nicoletti, the Bell is not a static monument, but an invitation to recognise human dignity as the foundation of any just order. We therefore asked him how, in his career as a philosopher and lecturer, he has often worked on the relationship between politics, evil and ethical responsibility.

"The presence of evil in history is an ineradicable mystery. We are

now tragically seeing it at work again, in wars and massacres. After years in which, especially in our country, we had been lulled by the hope of definitive Peace, the war has returned. In the ancient forms of military invasions of other people's territories, but also in the very modern forms of technological wars, which are no less devastating. We hoped that all this evil could be at least partly tempered and contained by international law, and significant steps forward were taken in this direction after the Second World War. But today we face a devastating step backward: not only battles between soldiers, but the mass killing of civilians, the deportation of children, the rape of women, and even the use of starvation as a weapon. The message conveyed by the Bell seems more relevant today than ever before'.

Maria Dolens was created as a reminder of the horrors of war and an appeal for dialogue between peoples. How does this perspective resonate with your research experience in universities and your international work?

We must not grow weary of dialogue or of creating opportunities for dialogue among peoples. We must not assume that peace rests solely on the balance of arsenals or on economic exchanges that often conceal forms of exploitation. It is essential to nurture the cultural dialogue, especially among the younger generations. The meetings that the Bell promotes between teachers and schools from different countries - where girls and boys from diverse cultures can discuss and work toward shared positions on their future and the future of humanity - are exciting and essential.

*You have been exploring the relationship between religion and politics for a long time now. How useful is this relationship in interpreting the symbolism of the Bell, which speaks to believers and non-believers alike in a language that is first ethical and only then religious?*

Religions are places where the ultimate meanings of existence often settle, the important things in life, for individuals and communities. We seek refuge in them when the suffering of life becomes unbearable, the pain inexplicable, the injustice intolerable. We turn to them in search of inspiration, when life becomes flat and we feel the need to transcend the suffocating horizon of the present and invoke a different time. With this potential, religions can play very different roles in human societies. Sometimes they radicalise conflicts by exaggerating 'their' response to life's problems and condemning others. Sometimes they are capable of extraordinary conflict mitigation, multiplying feelings of benevolence, love and solidarity among all human beings. They are often sources of creativity. The symbolism of the Bell is one of the strongest. It was forged from the bronze of weapons to proclaim Peace, recalling the words of the prophet "They shall forge their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles; one people shall not lift up the sword against another people, they shall no longer practise the art of war" (Isaiah 2:3-4). And it is a symbol of everyday life, of the passing of time, of death but also of resurrection. A reminder that the meaning of time's passage on earth is this: to transform death into life, despair into hope.

*Your work at the Council of Europe has brought you face to face with conflicts, tensions and democratic fragilities. How can a symbol like the Bell help foster a more conscious and engaged European political culture?*

The symbol of the Bell does not stand alone on the hill. It is immersed in the middle of other symbols. The flags of the many countries that have welcomed



Michele Nicoletti

its message and wanted to stand alongside it. Peace does not happen by itself; it needs people who are willing to serve it. When I was president of the Italian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there was no Ukrainian flag at the Bell and I immediately asked the Ukrainian ambassador to Italy to come to Rovereto and hoist his country's flag there, especially as the Ukrainian community in Trentino was already very much alive. It was a deeply meaningful ceremony that allowed us to express our solidarity with a country already suffering due to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The presence of the flags reminds us not only that all countries must be actors for Peace, but must also respect the lives of other countries. Peace cannot exist without justice, without recognising the existence of others, their rights, and their dignity. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict; it is, in the words of Augustine, "the tranquillity of order," that is, giving each their due and rejecting violence. This is what Europe should do.

*You have combined political practice with theoretical reflection. What can symbolic places like the Bell of the Fallen offer to the often polarised contemporary public debate?*



The Bell is a place for reflection and dialogue. In today's public sphere, reflection and dialogue are as essential as daily bread. Our collective endeavour - regardless of our role in education or politics - should be to multiply places of reflection and dialogue. We are well aware that the public sphere today is characterised by the opposite dynamics, i.e. saying the first thing that crosses one's mind and clashing with others, but there is no point in simply condemning these habits. We must create alternatives: not get tired of 'reasoning' about politics and trying to understand the motives of others. This does not mean abandoning our own ideas; the task of democratic politics is not to impose "my" will over "your" will, but to work toward building "our" will.

*At a time when conflicts are once again at the forefront, which philosophical categories do you consider most useful for interpreting the original message of the Bell?*

The fundamental principle must remain the infinite dignity of every human being. This is the cornerstone on which our democratic coexistence is built, as stated in our Constitution, and international and European coexistence, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, whose 75th anniversary we celebrated this year - also at the Bell. The Bell was invented in protest against the carnage of World War I when the nation states of Europe, the home of humanism and human dignity, allowed millions of young people to be slaughtered in order to assert nationalistic ideals. Then, not content with this, a few years later they escalated their inhuman policies, plunging us into totalitarianism, the Shoah, and the Second World War. Respecting human rights does not mean respecting ideas, but respecting real, flesh and blood people, each one of whom has infinite dignity and deserves a full and free life.