



fondazione
Campana
dei Caduti

100

The Voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation

Centenary of the Bell

One Hundred Years 100 Chimes

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The first issue of Voce di Maria Dolens in 2025 is, very appropriately, dedicated to presenting some of the activities through which the Campana dei Caduti Foundation intends to celebrate the centenary of the monumental Bell.

I make no secret of the fact that, originally, the goal was actually more ambitious, that is, it was to give an account as early as January of all the initiatives included in 'One Hundred Years - 100 Chimes', the official name of the commemorative programme.

Various reasons, partly related to the unconfirmed financial coverage of this or that module, have led us to focus, for

now, our primary attention on two initiatives that have already been defined. These are, on the one hand, the publication of a new volume on the history and news regarding the Bell of the Fallen which, at the same time, is an updated 'mission statement' of the entity that bears its name. On the other, thanks to the collaboration with the Italian War History Museum, we have the setting up of an extensive and articulate reconstruction of Maria Dolens' existence, as well as its varied imprint on the collective imagination located at the Foundation's headquarters, the first 'residence' of Don Rossaro's creation.

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THE HISTORY OF THE BELL IN A VOLUME BY MAURO MARCANTONI AND ALICE SALAVOLTI

The first hundred years



Bas-relief frieze by sculptor Stefano Zuech. Detail of the Ecce Homo and the phrase spoken by Pope Pius XII on the eve of the Second World War.

One hundred years after the first tolling of Maria Dolens, the Campana dei Caduti Foundation sought to critically reflect - without rhetoric - on the century that has passed since October 4, 1925, the date marking the beginning of a story that continues to this day. The task was entrusted to two historians, Mauro Marcantoni and Alice Salavolti, authors of the book Rintocchi di Pace. Cento anni della Campana dei Caduti di Rovereto (Chimes of Peace. One hundred years of the Bell of the Fallen in Rovereto), thanks to which one can relive the adventure sparked by an intuition of Don Antonio Rossaro: casting the cannons of the Great War to make a symbol of Peace. The authors have chosen, among other things, to emphasise the events that led to the current arrangement of the Bell, the relationship with the city and the province, and the international role that Maria Dolens has earned over the decades. We are pleased to preview some excerpts from the volume in these pages.

1. SPACES, SYMBOLS, IDENTITY

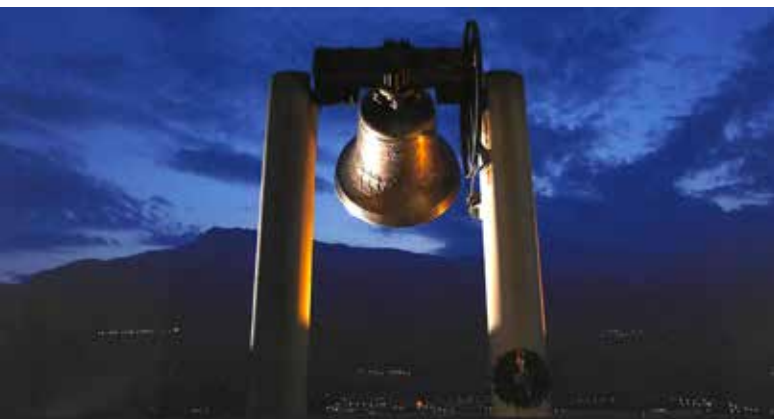
The long avenue, poised between earth and sky, leads to the large open-air amphitheatre that seems to overlook a void, allowing one's gaze to embrace the entire Vallagarina area. Suspended in the middle between two white concrete pillars, Maria Dolens surprises the visitor-not only for its grandeur and the weight of its history but because here, one truly gets the impression that the many evocative and symbolic references-the interweaving of history and geography, collective memories, and the depths of individual consciousness-find their sole centre of gravity in the Bell itself.

The direction in which we find ourselves contemplating the area reserved for the Bell is the east-west axis, which, in addition to referencing the sun's daily arc, is the historical orientation of sacred places. Until the early Middle Ages, in fact, Christian churches were built with the apse facing east, so that the priest and the faithful could pray facing the sunrise, an ancient symbol of rebirth adopted by the Christian religion as a metaphor for the resurrection of Christ. But this was also the axis, longitudinal to the Alpine arc, along which the front line ran during the First World War. Vallagarina, located in what was the southernmost part of the Italian Tyrol, was the scene of many bloody clashes and battles.

The urban development of the following decades—particularly in the late 20th century—covered, camouflaged, and sometimes obliterated many traces of that past. Yet, despite these erasures over time, artifacts, forts, and trenches still resurface. From up here, the view looks over a panorama that was sadly familiar from the war bulletins of one hundred years ago.

The direction in which we find ourselves contemplating the area reserved for the Bell is the historical orientation of sacred places

The Pasubio massif is dotted with structures, tunnels, and pathways. On Monte Zugna, the remains of a military hospital and the Italian 'trincerone' can be visited. Artillery emplacements and military roads are scattered on Mount Altissimo, Doss Casina, Malga Zures, the Vignola and Cor-
no della Paura.



2. AN EXEMPLARY CONTEXT OF PEACE

When Maria Dolens tolls its hundred solemn chimes each evening, the austere and profound call echoes across a valley where the visual elements—the Adige River, the winding roads, and the urban clusters—stretch in the opposite direction, running north to south. This axis links Mitteleuropa and the Mediterranean—regions that, though only glimpsed from here, have always permeated this natural “hinge” nestled within the Alps.

Together with neighbouring South Tyrol, Trentino is a borderland. A land that has always sought harmony, not conflict, among different histories, cultures, languages, and interests. An idea of a border not reduced to a sharp demarcation—a wall, barbed wire, or an irreconcilable difference—but its opposite: as proximity, a sense of closeness, sharing not a barrier but a threshold.

3. MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF A SYMBOL

The border as “proximity” rather than division was, in the end, the essence of Don Antonio Rossaro’s vision. In the aftermath of the terrible tragedy of the First World War, the priest pursued the dream of building a large Bell, one of the largest ever seen in the world, cast from the bronze of the cannons of the nations involved in the conflict, whose echoing chimes would radiate the message of Peace, commemorating the victims. The voice of the Bell would have united what the howitzers and bombs had divided, sowing death and destruction.

A land that has always sought harmony among different histories, cultures, languages, and interests.

The one who lives next door is a neighbour, not the enemy. A clear example of this commendable attitude can be seen in the lands south of the Brenner, as well as in neighbouring Tyrol, even in recent times. One need only think of Austria’s signing of the Dispute Settlement, which in 1992 successfully resolved the thirty-year-long UN dispute over the South Tyrol issue.

An extremely bitter and bloody ethnic-linguistic conflict, which, at the beginning of the second half of the last century, seemed irresolvable, was peacefully ended with the Settlement. This extraordinary achievement, unique in its kind in Europe, saw the participation of numerous figures, both local (South Tyroleans, Italians from Bolzano, Trentino, and Tyrol) and national (high-ranking representatives from the Italian and Austrian governments). A collective effort driven by positive intentions clearly showing that, with the right conditions and intentions, even what initially seems impossible to resolve can be overcome. A coherent and reassuring framework for understanding the border not only as a threshold, a fertile ground for exchange, a permeable passage, but also as a goal—a target of peaceful coexistence to be pursued, achieved, and maintained.

In the 1920s, re-emerging from the destruction of the First World War, Don Rossaro’s fellow countrymen were driven by the same sentiment shared by all Italians, and by all those in the world who had survived that tragic madness: to move forward, look to the future, and even to forget. There was a sense that every word, every gesture, every action risked diminishing the immense significance of that experience. Until someone takes it upon themselves, in their own consciousness, to embrace the unspeakable, to truly engage with it, and to explore its inherent potential: the

The voice of the Bell
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potential to bring about change. This is what we might call the 'subversive force of memory'. Not a painful, introspective retreat into the past, but its reinterpretation to guide the future in a different direction.

Sometimes, it takes dreamers or visionaries to arrive at this awareness. Don Rossaro's project took that visionary path: to transform the unspeakable into a generative symbol (the Bell, in fact), capable of inspiring a transformation in consciences.

The authority, as well as the symbolic and metaphorical presence of Maria Dolens, thus lies in the profound connection between the symbol and the concept it represents. That is, between the physical substance, consisting of an imposing material presence and a ma-



7th Youth Congress at the Bell of the Fallen, 9 May 2003

jestic sound (the symbol as "the acoustic image," to use the definition by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, which fits particularly well in this context), and the profound concept of Peace and brotherhood, first envisioned by Rossaro and later renewed and updated by the Foundation in the decades that followed. The inseparable connection between symbol and concept became tangible, infused with meaning, also in its material transformation: from cannon to Bell, from artillery shell to chime.

4. A MESSAGE TO THE WORLD FROM MIRAVALLE

The Bell would perhaps not have had the symbolic power it has today had it not been for the intuition in 1965 - which at the time sparked heated debates - to place it on the Miravalle Hill on the slopes of Mount Zugna. The place, which at the time did not yet bear this name but was identified as part of the Val Scodela, was in fact devoid of significant features other than its fortunate geographic location. This includes both the wide panoramic view that spans the valley and its proximity to the Military Shrine of Castel Dante, inaugurated in 1938. This monumental structure houses the remains of the soldiers who fell in the First World War, recovered from the area between the Pasubio and Lake Garda. Although just a few kilometres from

the centre of Rovereto, over the past sixty years the hill has developed its own identity, deeply connected to the soul of the Bell and the voice of those who have been able to echo its message of peace - namely, the Foundation. This presence has profoundly changed the identity of the environment, giving rise to a unique, distinctive ecosystem. While geographically and legally part of the municipality of Rovereto, it is primarily and foremost under the complete sovereignty of the Bell and the philosophy that accompanies its presence, to the point where one can almost feel an air of extraterritoriality.

Here, a place that was once simply a pleasant hill, comparable to many others, has gained glory and significance from its sole dedication to the

Bell. It has become the focal point of a complex of symbols and works that evoke a sense of the 'sacred' in the visitor, characteristic of religious shrines, but also reminiscent of the ossuaries and reliquaries of other wars or disasters, across all latitudes. The dedication of the Bell to Maria Dolens - which Don Rossaro, as a priest and believer, clearly intended as a direct tribute to the Mother of Christ - does not, however, disrupt the clear secular nature of the space. It is as if, when speaking here about Peace and recalling the wars of the world, one immediately realises that 'sacred' is not merely religious, but rather spiritual - the deepest human emotion that draws from suffering and the shared awareness of death, ultimately leading to ideals of Peace and hope for a better world.

A supranational emblem, transcending all religious beliefs and political ideals, as Don Rossaro himself clearly expressed: "The monumental Bell of the Fallen in Rovereto was consecrated-and will remain so-exclusively in memory of all those who fell in the World War, regardless of their faith or nationality. [...] I specifically wanted everything related to the Bell of the Fallen to be above and beyond any political or nationalistic conflict. In fact, I excluded all military uniforms and national insignia from the Bell's decoration.

A complex of symbols capable of generating in the visitor a sense of the 'sacred' characteristic of religious shrines

This way, the Miravalle Hill, with its architectural and spatial layout centred around the Bell, becomes a place where people from all over the world can experience a sense of unity.

The area around the Bell is dotted with signs and symbols. Universal signs and symbols that speak to everyone. Thus, the fluttering flags of countries from around the world lining the entrance drive remind us that the Miravalle Hill is not just one

of many shrines dedicated to the memory of wars, but an ongoing, living project. The raising of each new flag takes place in a ceremony that brings together the highest officials of that country, in what might seem, at first glance, like a periphery of Europe, but which, in many ways-culturally, historically, and even economically today-is its beating heart. Not only does each country leave its flag here, but through this symbolic act, it identifies itself with and

upholds the principles embodied by the Bell, committing to national peacekeeping and international dialogue. A total of one hundred and six flags surround the Bell, in the amphitheatre of Piazza delle Genti and along the avenue it looks on to: those of the nations, and those of international organisations and peoples: UN, COE, European Union, Red Cross and Red Crescent, Sovereign Order of Malta, Roma-Sinti, Palestinian Autonomous Territories.



Visit of Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, 26 May 2017

To be continued from page 1...

The contributions by Mauro Marcantoni, coordinator of the book, and Chiara Moser, curator of the exhibition, will enable our readers to gain a deeper insight into these two initiatives, with which the Foundation is closely associated, as well as the further proposals (in some cases at an advanced stage of 'negotiation') in which it is engaged in a close dialogue with public authorities, insiders and possible sponsors.

Two final remarks, before concluding an 'editorial' that is deliberately brief to leave adequate space for more the technical presentations. The first relates to the desire of the Regency Board and myself to involve not only the Colle di Miravalle in the centenary (as is expected), but also the Municipality, with which a dialogue has been ongoing for several months now, the citizens and the other cultural institutions of Rovereto, Vallagarina and further afield in Trentino.

Allow me to mention, by way of example, the fact that not only the aforementioned Italian War History Museum but also the Museo Civico and the MART contributed to the above-mentioned exhibition on 'Maria Dolens' by making their works available.

The second concerns the continuation in 2025, with minimal variations, of the 'ordinary' institutional activity, through which the Foundation aims to keep the Miravalle site open and available over the next 12 months to the numerous and qualified hospitality requests from the local community, with the only natural caveat being the avoidance of overlapping or conflicting dates with the 'Centennial' initiatives.

"One Hundred Years - 100 Chimes", an appointment that we invite all our readers, when the time comes, to record, follow and share, in short, to consider as their own!

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President

AN EXHIBITION FOR THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARIA DOLENS

'The Bell is in Rovereto, but it is not only Rovereto's'

To mark the centenary of the first tolling of Maria Dolens, the Campana dei Caduti Foundation proposes an exhibition that will open on 12 April and close on 31 October 2025. We asked the curator, art historian Chiara Moser, to tell us about the criteria on which it is based.

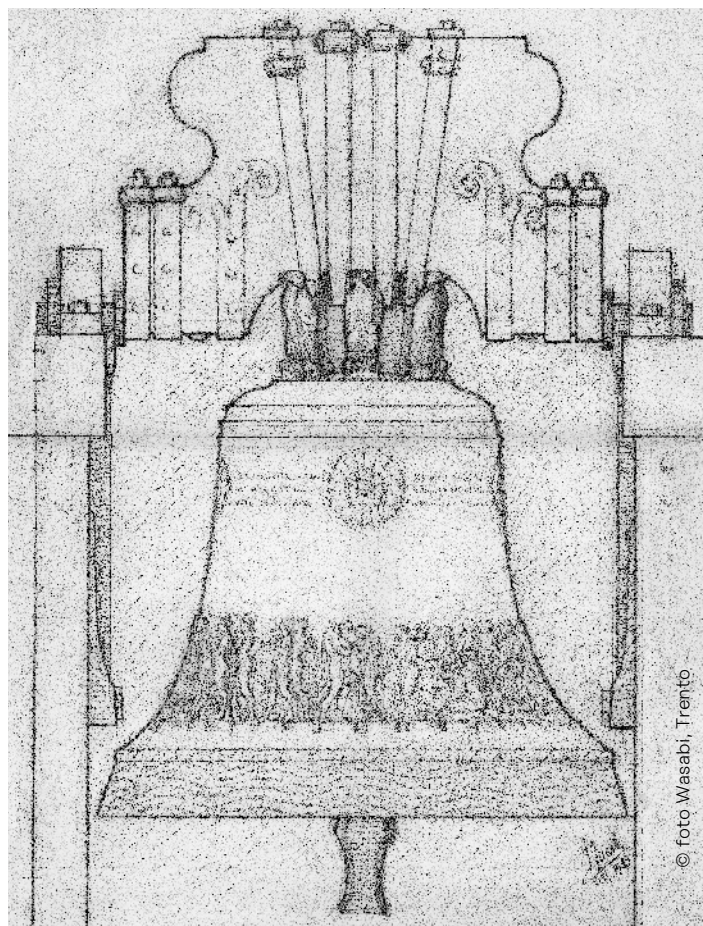
One hundred years after the casting of Maria Dolens, the Campana dei Caduti Fondazione in Rovereto is preparing to celebrate its Bell in 2025. In fact, a century has passed since Don Antonio Rossaro promoted this visionary undertaking, donating this symbol of Peace and rebirth to Rovereto and the Province in primis, but in concrete terms to the whole world.

The exhibition aims to retrace the 'myth' of the Bell. It is not a celebration of the object itself, but a reflection on how Maria Dolens has left its mark on the collective imagination, how it has imprinted itself on the memory of the community, and how the Bell has shaped its time while continuing to make an impact today, thanks to the Foundation that preserves its message.

There will be two main focuses, the first dedicated to 'Artists, souvenirs and mass media'.

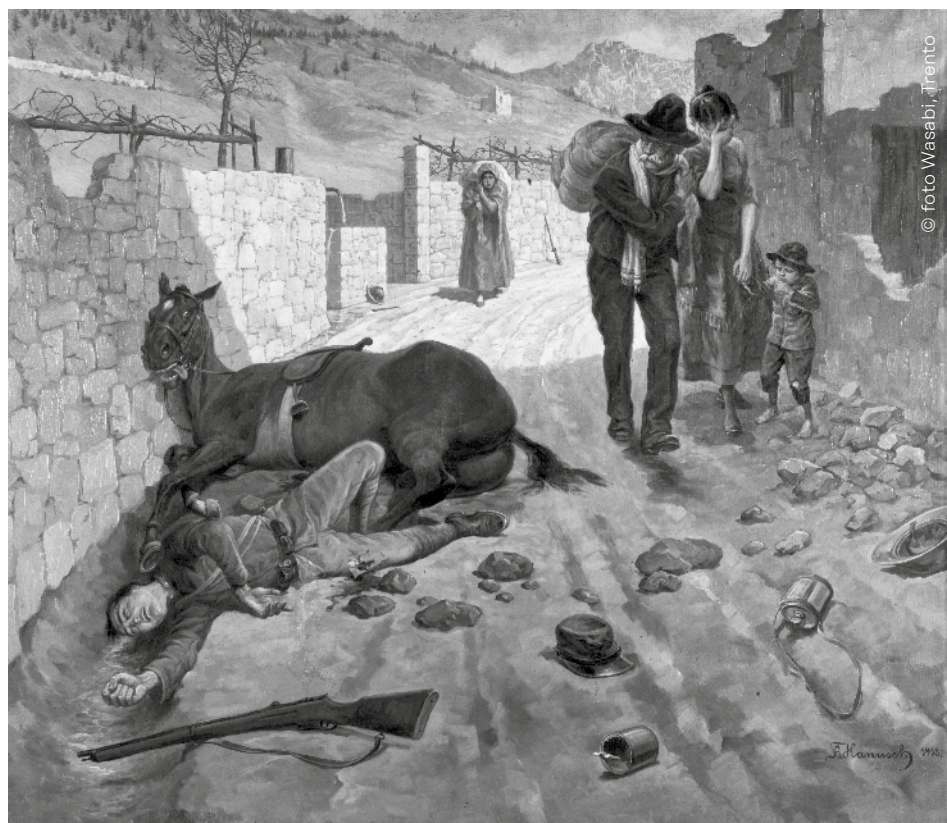
During the First World War, modern propaganda was born. The mass media - press, cinema and radio - were used to garner support for the war effort and boost morale. Don Antonio Rossaro, in the aftermath of the conflict, cleverly reinterpreted what he saw in the dark years of the Great War to build a contemporary legend. As Renato Trinco aptly writes, Don Antonio Rossaro created around the Bell of the Fallen an aura of poetry and spirituality, not without the rhetorical emphasis associated with the veneration of those who fell for their homeland.

The prelate thus succeeded in organising a campaign of propaganda and dissemination through the most varied communication channels, primarily the press, without neglecting cinema and radio, placing in particular a strong emphasis on official events. He immediately involved the community of artists, also thanks to the help of Giorgio Wenter Marini, the clergyman's cousin, commissioning the creation of postcards, posters, and



Stefano Zuech, 'Design for the Maria Dolens War Memorial Bell' (1923. Rovereto, Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti)

medals as well as objects. Indeed, since its first casting, the Bell has entered households and homes through a thriving market of objects and printed materials. From the very beginning, Don Antonio Rossaro encouraged the production of souvenirs and small objects, understanding the importance of allowing 'its' symbol to enter the intimacy of every family.



Hanusch, 'The evacuation in Vallarsa' (1918, Rovereto, Italian War History Museum)

Don Antonio Rossaro also borrowed inspiring themes, iconography and models from art, and the artists in turn, while the artists, in turn, offered a reinterpreted vision of this legend.

Works from public and private collections would thus narrate the genesis of Maria Dolens, beginning with the context in which Don Antonio Rossaro envisioned it and extending to various representations and interpretations

The second focus is on 'the Foundation and international momentum'.

'The monumental Bell of the Fallen was placed on Rovereto Castle, which has seen so many cruel battles and which flew over the trenches of Serravalle the white flag of armistice that put an end to the Great War. The bell should remain forever on Rovereto Castle, as a daily commemoration of the historic events and the Dead of the Great War, who fell in combat, each fighting for a noble ideal.' From the intentions stated in the Magna Charta, the founding

act of the Bell, to today, the journey has been long and eventful.

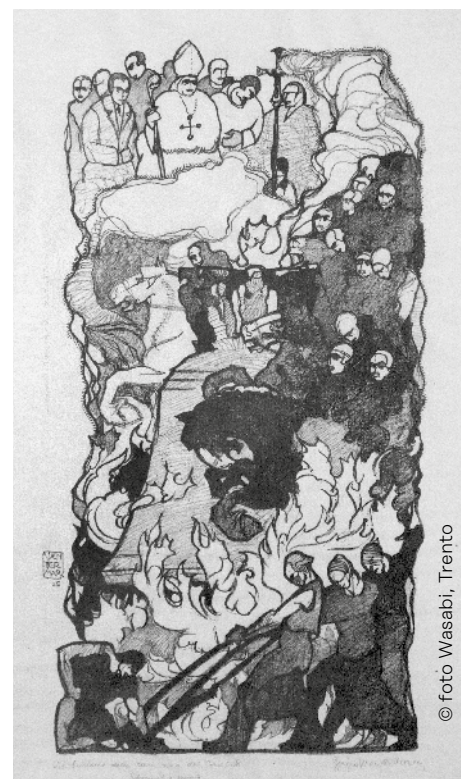
The Foundation's founding act, signed by President of the Republic Giuseppe Saragat on 18 January 1968, is a milestone that opened up previously unimaginable horizons. This made it possible to expand the mission that the founder had already envisioned: to address all of Humanity and to serve as a voice not only for the heroism and tragedies of those who had fallen in war but also for the need to foster exchanges and relationships of Peace among nations.

Over these decades, the Foundation has been actively engaged in promoting cultural and educational initiatives aimed at building a culture of Peace and inclusion. In this section, set up in the Gallery, two crucial moments in this history will be specifically addressed: the partnership with the Council of Europe and the special consultative status with the United Nations.

The aim is not only to showcase the Foundation's activities within these contexts but also to invite visitors to learn about these international organisations—now so "close" through the communication that reaches us daily, yet still so elusive. The aim is to address these issues on a concrete level, close to ordinary people (in the most general and positive sense of the term).

To support this narrative, contemporary artworks from the Foundation's collection will be used to engage, challenge, and provoke visitors, encouraging them to explore pressing contemporary issues addressed by the Council of Europe, the UN, and, by extension, the Campana dei Caduti Foundation.

The aim of the exhibition is to tell the story of the hundred years of the Bell, Maria Dolens which is 'here' but at the same time is 'everywhere', because, as Director Alberto Robol said, quoting Father Eusebio Jori, Don Rossaro's successor 'The Bell is in Rovereto, but it is not only Rovereto's'.



Giorgio Wenter Marini, 'The Casting of the Bell of the Fallen' (1925, lithograph. Rovereto, Italian War History Museum)

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS - P 14

Don Rossaro's legacy

On 2 November 1948, the tolling of the Bell was again broadcast on the radio. The aim was to speak to everyone, and say one thing: 'Nothing is lost in Peace. All can be lost with war'. Pius XII's phrase was famous, but it might have been better to cast it on the bronze mantle of Maria Dolens so that it would remain an everlasting warning. It took a while. We had to wait until 1964, but eventually those words appeared right below the Ecce Homo, and they are still there today. Don Rossaro did not live to see them, but in his heart he probably knew that one day it would happen.

True, there were some practical problems, such as replacing the battlement that had broken, or widening the platform of the Malipiero bastion to allow more people to attend official ceremonies, but the thorniest issues were the ethical and moral ones. The most challenging endeavours of Don Rossaro were his attempts to preserve the original spirit of the Bell and enforce the statutes: Maria Dolens was only to sound in the evening and only to commemorate the victims, including civilians, of all conflicts.

Just as in the Fascist era, in the post-war period too, at every political or religious demonstration, someone would request the Bell to be rung at any given moment. This happened after the affirmation of the Republic on 2 June 1946, at the arrival of the Pilgrim Mother in 1948, and on many other occasions. Any "excuse" was used to request an exception to the rule, as if Maria Dolens had become a tool for celebrating events that, while undoubtedly important, were far removed from its true vocation. The priest from Rovereto continued to oppose it, each time emphasising the profound spiritual significance of the hundred chimes, which transcended the temporary circumstances of the moment.

He was strong, stubborn and determined. But time passes for everyone. On 2 November 1951, the radio broadcast the customary ringing of the Bell of Rovereto, preceded by a short speech by its creator. The priest's voice was faint, but there and then people thought that

this weakness was due to the operations he had undergone a few months earlier. The signs, however, were beginning to be clearer and clearer. On 14 November, the Historical Register of the Bell reported the news of the death of Prince Chigi Albani, Grand Master of the Order of Malta. Then nothing. And that was not normal, especially for a man who had always talked in great detail about what was happening to his creation.

Don Rossaro died on 4 January 1952. The city responded to the news with shows of affection. The priest was considered to be what Giuseppe Parini in *La caduta* defined as the Good Citizen who 'at the point / where nature and the first / events ordained, guides his intellect in such a way that he esteems his homeland': the one who "directs his intellect toward the goal to which his nature and the early events of his life have led him, so that his homeland may appreciate him.'

In those decades he had commissioned a wealth of statues, plaques and busts for the city of Rovereto. Characters and episodes that were not to be forgotten, especially by the citizens of the city he considered a 'small homeland', built on pride and a shared sense of responsibility.

But while everything started from that territory, the idea of the Bell has projected the city and its inhabitants beyond the boundaries of the municipality. The Bell of the Fallen is the symbol of a vision of reality that led Don Rossaro to explore the world, laying the foundations for work aimed at fostering dialogue between different groups, sometimes even between enemies, with the sole and ultimate goal of Peace. This is, perhaps, his greatest legacy.

