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The Voice of Maria Dolens

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France and Murphy's Law

As is well known, "Murphy's Law" is that rather annoying, unwritten rule according to which a person, already experiencing a difficult phase of life, is suddenly confronted by additional unforeseen and unforeseeable negative factors that further darken a situation already marked by more shadows than light.

Applying this perspective to France, the comparison fits perfectly. The country is grappling with a serious institutional impasse, with a President who has become largely weakened and even discredited. Yet he persists in pro-

posing an unlikely remedy to a deep political crisis—one that is, on the one hand, systemic, and on the other, largely attributable to his own actions—, particularly in the revolving door of "disposable" prime ministers, five of whom have served in the past three years.

On top of this, there is a less than brilliant economic situation (industrial production has long been in decline) and a constant threat of social conflicts (think of the chaotic demonstrations of the *gilets jaunes* not long ago) ready to explode in the event of unpopular measures.

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It is hardly a coincidence that, to avoid a massive resurgence of hostile crowds, President Macron was forced to withdraw one of the laws he had most personally championed: that which would have increased the age of retirement."

And let us turn to the concrete manifestations of 'Murphy's Law' in France which are few in number (essentially two), but which have an extraordinary impact on the country's image, both at home and abroad.

The first took place on the morning of 19 October (a Sunday), when four perpetrators, equipped with less than sophisticated technical means (a van with a hoist ladder; glass-cutting tools; two getaway scooters) as well as a significant amount of cold blood, broke into the country's most important museum, the Louvre, in broad daylight, removing nine priceless Napoleonic jewels from the so-called Apollo Gallery. The estimated value of the stolen goods, set at €88 million, is actually lower than their "original" value, considering that the most valuable item—the famous Empress Eugenie's crown—was later found in a public street, only slightly dented, due to an incredible oversight on the part of the thieves.

The investigations - which led to the arrest of two convicted criminals about to leave the country - revealed, to the dismay of national public opinion, a number of decidedly surprising factors: the jewel-

lery was uninsured, and the perimeter alarm only went off after the thieves had entered the museum and nearly got away with the heist. For an institution that welcomes 9 million visitors annually, such precautions—though certainly costly—would seem essential. Yet, once their absence was revealed, the French can now only watch helplessly as the usual blame game plays out.

The second episode, on 21 October, involved the transfer of Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic from 2007 to 2012, to the Santé prison in Paris. The judiciary had already launched a couple of investigations against him in the past (in particular for illegal telephone tapping), which ended with minor convictions.

The gravity of the charges against him, with the most recent brought by the Court of Paris, sentenced him to 5 years in prison with additional penalties of ineligibility and loss of civil rights, for criminal conspiracy—the only charge retained after bribery and embezzlement allegations, which could have led to a harsher sentence, were dismissed. The crime is linked to his (victorious) election campaign in 2007, where his opponent was the socialist Royal. At that time, two of his close associates approached the then Libyan president, Muammar Gaddafi, to solicit funding from him in exchange for unspecified 'political support' from Paris. In fact, the judges were unable to establish whether the funds actually reached the campaign coffers, or whether Sarkozy himself had taken any action to obtain this illicit contribution. In short, the magistrates found him guilty and convicted him on the basis that he could not have been unaware of his collaborators' illegal actions, and instead that he knew of and did nothing to prevent them.

By an ironic twist of fate, Sarkozy's imprisonment after a single level of judgment stems from a 2020 law, backed by the Gaullist group, designed to punish offenders more harshly by denying them the right to await appeal as free men and women. Since, in his case, the second trial is set for March 2026, Sarkozy was supposed to spend at least five months in prison. However, the judges granted his lawyers' request and that of the public prosecutor's office, which had called for the release of the former president. Sarkozy then left the prison after serving only 20 days behind bars, remaining under judicial supervision.

Whatever the outcome, this is undeniably a *jamais vu* situation in post-World War II European politics, set to deeply affect France's image and the collective consciousness of its citizens.



In conclusion, it seems appropriate to make a few remarks on the broader situation in the “Hexagon”. The prolonged political crisis discussed at the outset of this editorial stems from the severe defeat of pro-government parties in the June 2024 European elections, a situation further exacerbated a few weeks later by President Macron’s abrupt decision to dissolve the Chambers and call new legislative elections. Contrary to the Élysée’s expectations, the elections failed to deliver a majority to govern, despite the benefits of a presidential democratic system, largely because of the substantial advances made by left-wing and far-right parties.

In addition to the concerns of the financial markets, anxious about further domestic uncertainty and growing social tensions, such concerns also extend to European politics, where France has long been an indispensable pillar—a role underscored even more since Brexit in January 2020, as the EU’s only nuclear-armed nation.

Nonetheless, it is in the field of foreign policy that President Macron, (whose mandate runs until spring 2027), can claim notable accomplishments. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he was, in fact, the driving force behind the recent round of pro-Palestinian statehood recognitions recorded in New York at the General Assembly. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, he was the co-founder—together with Britain’s Starmer—and an active member of the “Coalition of the Willing,” a group of some thirty Western countries committed to providing long-term security guarantees for Kiev, while also supplying the necessary financial support to its authorities.

In conclusion, a weakened France is ultimately in no European country’s interest, and least of all Italy’s, which, despite occasional bilateral misunderstandings, regards its ‘Latin sister’ as a valuable and generally reliable partner for advancing common goals and shared priorities on the continent.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President

ART AND PEACE

A universal requiem for the victims of all wars

SHOSTAKOVICH'S STRING QUARTET NO. 8

In July 1960, the Soviet government sent Dmitri Shostakovich to East Germany to collaborate on the film *Five Days - Five Nights*. Filming took place in Dresden, a city still scarred by the wounds of the Allied bombing that had reduced it to rubble. Faced with that devastation, the composer was deeply disturbed: the ruins were not only a symbol of the physical destruction, but also of the moral and spiritual havoc that the war had wreaked on the whole of humanity, regardless of the outcome of the conflict.

That experience gave rise to the *String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, op. 110*, composed in a few days and dedicated 'To the victims of fascism and war'. But behind that official formula lies a broader and more universal commitment: a sorrow shared for all victims of violence and oppression, across all times and places.

Shostakovich evokes a mourning that is both personal and collective, weaving in quotations from his earlier works as if retracing his own musical biography and intertwining it with the history of the century. Within those notes, his famous musical monogram—D, E-flat, C, B—also resounds, a signature that becomes a confession. Quartet no. 8 is a sound relic of a century destroyed by wars.

The author himself summed up the meaning a few years later: "I feel eternal sorrow for those who were killed by Hitler, but I am no less upset about



Dmitrij Šostakovič

those who died on Stalin's command. I grieve for all those who were tortured, shot, or left to starve. Many of my Symphonies are tombstones. Too many of our people died and were buried in places unknown to anyone, even their relatives.

Where to put their gravestones? Only music can do that for them. I would like to write a composition for each of the fallen, but I am unable to do so, and this is the only reason why I dedicate my music to all of them. Words that give a voice to the ultimate meaning of that work: an invisible monument to the nameless of History.

And this is where the Bell comes in. Marked by a tragic and visionary intensity, the work was later tran-

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scribed for string orchestra by Rudolf Barshai, with the composer's approval. Thus the Chamber Symphony, Op. 110a was composed, amplifying the dramatic force of the quartet, and transforming intimate pain into a collective cry. On 22 October, at the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata', the Roma Sinfonietta Orchestra, conducted by Gabriele Bonolis, performed this symphonic version: an event that brought Shostakovich's voice back to life as the conscience of memory. These artists are well known on the Miravalle Pass, and indeed 16 July 2016 Bonolis himself received the 'International Ennio Morricone Award for Peace' at the end of a concert in which he conducted the Roma Sinfonietta. Not by chance, ten years later, the seed sown beneath Maria Dolens continues to bear fruit among those who tirelessly pursue Peace, including through the power of art. In a world that still knows war, this music resonates like a secular prayer, a call that urges us not to forget.



A view of Dresden after the Allied bombing in 1945



Arafat – Netanyahu. Middle East Peace Talks. Truce of the manhunt

MUKY'S 'PRESEPI CONTRO'

INAUGURATION OF THE EXHIBITION AT THE BELL

As every year at this time, Wanda Berasi, aka Muky, is presenting her 'Presepi contro' exhibition at the Bell. The exhibition ends on 6 January.

Unfortunately, this year—as indeed every year—some of these works feel especially topical.

And as has happened every year now, for too long, the visitor cannot help but pause in front of a 1998 work entitled 'Arafat - Netanyahu. Middle East Peace Talks. Truce of the manhunt'.

As always, we hope that a year from now, there will be no need to mention this. Unfortunately for now, these works are extremely topical, which proves their strength, their tragic foresight, the fact that art predicts without knowing, questions without knowing the answers.

CARDINAL MATTEO ZUPPI AT THE BELL

It's easy to say Peace

On 4 October, on the occasion of the centenary of the first chime of Maria Dolens, a 'Dialogue for Peace' took place in the Auditorium Alberto Robol between Cardinal Matteo Zuppi and the Honourable Mario Raffaelli, moderated by Gianni Bonvicini. Here below we will publish an excerpt from the cardinal's speech.

By transforming that which brings death into something that calls for life, the Campana dei Caduti of Rovereto still speaks to us. It is a signal that marks time, bringing the community together, and reminding us of the dignity and value of life. But not only that: the Bell is a great alarm clock. It not only calls us together, but also urges us forcefully: wake up! Wake up from the torpor, the resignation, the indifference that makes us forget the pain of others.

Today, on the centenary of its first tolling, the Bell rings in a world that seems to have learned nothing. Despite what happens, we struggle to understand. We never learn. So I ask myself - and I ask you - will we ever learn to live, as someone sang, 'without killing'? How many more cannonballs will it take for us to understand?

The answer is here, in this Bell. In this bronze that turned weapons into voice, death into memory, memory into commitment. Herein

lies the meaning of our presence: not to celebrate a distant past, but to take responsibility in the present. The Bell is not a museum object, but a consciousness that calls to us.

A century ago, in 1925, this Bell rang for the first time, like a cry of love launched towards a wounded humanity. Today, when we see wars in so many parts of the world and a more fragile Peace than we had imagined, that gesture reminds us that Peace can never be taken for granted. Memory is fundamental, but it is not enough: it is not an end, it is a starting point.

Sixty years ago, in 1965, on 4 October, Paul VI spoke at the UN. The words he spoke were prophetic: 'No more war, ever'. He did so 'with the voice of all the fallen', as he put it. He had the courage to speak of Peace in a world that is still divided. That courage challenges us today, in a time that has so much need for prophecy and so little desire to listen.

The Church, by its very nature, is called to be a peacemaker.



Not a spectator, not a commentator, but an operator. All Christians are operators, or they should be. We do not always succeed—I know this all too well—but our vocation endures: to be builders of Peace.

Being peacemakers means being disarmed, because only those who are disarmed can truly disarm others. It is not enough to talk about Peace, you have to practice it in our daily lives. If we preach peace but continue to act aggressively, if we do not renounce violence - including the violence of words - then our voice becomes hollow. It becomes noise, rhetoric, sometimes even scandal. Peace is not only proclaimed: it is prepared, built, witnessed.

Repudiating war is an act of conscience. It is not a political or diplomatic formula: it is the conversion of the heart. Repudiating war means transforming memory into awareness. Borders remain, yet—as Paul VI reminded us—they no longer stand against others, no longer without others, but together.” Peace is not the absence of borders, but the ability to inhabit them with respect and trust.



War, any war, is always futile. Every conflict adds pain to the pain, and leaves scars that do not heal.

I recently listened to a daughter's account of her father, a World War I survivor, who witnessed the horror of gassings. And I met Ukrainian women looking for the bodies of their missing loved ones, who did not even have a place in which to mourn. In those faces I saw the true meaning of the Unknown Soldier: the suffering of those who do not even have a trace to remember.

The Bell is therefore a commitment. It is the voice of those who can no longer speak, but also the voice of those who must act. Every one of its chimes is a question: “And you, what do you do for Peace?” Maria Dolens transforms death into a call to life, tragedy into responsibility. It is a civil and spiritual sacrament at the same time.

Today we also celebrate St Francis, genius and poet of Peace. As a young man he had wanted to be a knight, and he achieved this, remaining a knight in white armour, a champion of courtesy, humanity and fraternity. In him we see the disarming face of an unarmed man. His encounter with the wolf of Gubbio is more than a legend: it is a Peace manual. Everyone else wanted to kill the wolf, yet St Francis called it ‘brother’. He did not deny evil, he acknowledged it and sought the reason for its presence. He told the animal: “I know why you

do it. You are hungry. If we feed you, will you stop?” And that is what happened.

St Francis did not eliminate the enemy, he reconciled it. He took away the cause of the evil. He taught Gubbio that Peace is not something that is imposed, it is built together. When the wolf died, everyone grieved for it: it had become part of the community. This is Peace. Not the absence of conflict, but its transformation. Not the illusion of a world without differences, but the ability to experience differences as brotherhood.

This is why I say that Peacemakers are the only true realists. It is easy to talk about ‘Peace’. Peace is possible, it is not naivety, it is intelligence of the heart. Doing the groundwork to achieve Peace is the only way to avoid war. Paul VI said so, quoting Kennedy: ‘Man will end war or war will end humanity’.

I’m afraid we have got worse. There is even a ‘nuclear clock’ that measures the number of seconds until the catastrophe strikes. But we do not really understand what the destruction of millions of people in a few moments means. Perhaps this is why the Bell is needed: it wakes us up. It reminds us that Peace is not a dream for beautiful souls, but something urgently required by real people.

The groundwork for Peace is done by removing the causes of hatred, by listening, reconciling. And this, believe me, is possible. Now, and always.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS - P 20

Alberto Robol's international vision

With the passing of Alberto Robol in 2024, Rovereto lost, not only the president of the Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti from 2003 to 2020, but a man of letters, a thinker, a profound interpreter of the spirit that animates Maria Dolens. In his vision, the Bell was not an object, but a living entity that accompanies history and interprets its changes. Following in the footsteps of Don Rossaro, Father Iori, and Monti, Robol recognised the decisive turning point in 1965, the year in which Paul VI blessed it in St. Peter's Square, redefining its meaning from a symbol of the fallen to a vigilant conscience of Humanity. 'The veneration of the dead,' he explained, 'becomes a warning to the living, a stimulus to hope'.

For him, the Bell represented a cultural revolution: it was made from the

bronze of the cannons of victors and vanquished, an unprecedented gesture that transformed the memory of war into a universal embrace. "The Bell speaks to Humanity itself" he said, with the passion of a philosopher. As a man of letters, Robol knew that symbols endure thanks to words and interpretations, and he wanted Maria Dolens to become the "conscience of the world", a place where Peace was not mere rhetoric, but a lasting education of the spirit.

Under his presidency, the Foundation embraced an international outlook, hosting the flags of more than eighty nations and dreaming of displaying them all. His project was clear: to transform the Miravalle Pass into a citadel of Peace, a meeting point for cultures and religions, a sort of 'universal altar' where every faith could find space.

There, he said, 'sky and vegetation meet', and nature and Man are reconciled.

For Robol, the Bell was not Rovereto's, but the world's, for him the city was its spiritual guardian, not its owner. That is why he invited associations, schools, and citizens to recognize the evening toll of Maria Dolens as a call to civic awareness. Through the Youth Congress, an educational initiative for students, he shaped a genuine pedagogy of Peace—a means of nurturing new generations in the awareness that dialogue is "a personal commitment, not a mere aspiration".

His literary reflection shines through in every word. Like Manzoni, Robol believed that history is an immense present, in which the past and the future are embedded. The Bell, in its vision, is just that: a resounding, everyday judgement on Humanity, which 'remembers the fallen of all wars, even the unknown ones', while at the same time inviting the living to assume responsibility. And to do this he did not hesitate to use art. In the early 2000s, the Potlach Theatre launched a series of performances of *Invisible Cities* that, even in the centenary year, "re-read" the city of Rovereto through the values embodied by Maria Dolens. At the same time, he inaugurated the 'Strumenti di Pace' International Composition Competition, which in its three editions brought internationally renowned performers, including the unforgettable Ennio Morricone, to Colle di Miravalle.

All his initiatives seem to form part of an overall design. Convinced that Peace is the highest form of justice, also on a political level, Robol worked for Maria Dolens to establish a dialogue with the major international institutions, from the Council of Europe to the UN. This is also why banners of countries in conflict fly side by side on the Viale delle Bandiere: an image that sums up his dream of universal brotherhood.

