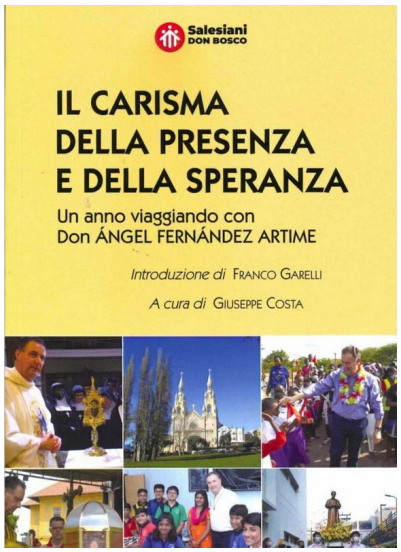
 Reading time: 8 min.

The slowdown in the pandemic has allowed the Rector Major to resume his travels to meet the Salesian Family around the world, to animate them to live and transmit the charism of the holy founder, John Bosco. Spain, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Thailand, Hungary, Brazil, India, Italy, Croatia, the United States and Peru welcomed and listened to the successor of Don Bosco. We present the introduction to the book that sets the story of these journeys.

The globetrotter of the Salesian charism

The book that I have the honour of presenting is quite special. It is the chronicle of the journeys around the world made by the Rector Major of the Salesians over the last fifteen months (from the beginning of 2022 until March 2023), dedicated to visiting the houses of a Congregation that has been present for a long time on all continents and which constitutes the largest “religious family” of the Catholic Church. It is a family that operates in 136 countries of the world, whose global dimensions drive its leader (and his closest collaborators) to live continuously with suitcase in hand, meeting brothers and sisters scattered across the various nations, to get to know the specific situations, to monitor the effectiveness in the different cultures of the educational charism of Don Bosco, which is the trademark of this unique “multinational” of the faith.



The book, therefore, illustrates one of the most important tasks connected to the role of the Rector Major of the Salesians, that of guiding a worldwide Congregation not only remotely (staying at the headquarters in Rome), but as much as possible seeing it in person, since even in the digital era, face-to-face relationships, personal knowledge, sharing experiences, “being there” at certain special moments, represent the added value of every human and spiritual enterprise. A value, moreover, that is entirely congenial with the human traits of Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, the tenth successor of Don Bosco, who, since he has been at the head of the Salesian Family (since 2014) has already visited around 100 works around the world; in this way aligning himself (on a more limited scale, of course) with the “globetrotter” style of Catholicism that has characterised the most recent pontiffs, especially John Paul II and the current pope.
Fr Artime’s world tour, after having undergone a forced interruption in 2020-2021 (due to the outbreak of the pandemic everywhere), resumed its course with renewed vigour in 2022, with a series of stages that gradually took him to Iberian soil, to two African countries (Zimbabwe and Zambia), in the footsteps of the Salesian mission in Thailand, to Hungary, France, Brasilia and Belo Horizonte, to six provinces of India (on two different occasions), to Croatia, the United States and Canada, Peru, and in some Italian regions.

All-round visits, not just celebrations



Viedma, Argentina – March 2023

“Touch and go” images or the mere celebration of important events do not suit the Rector Major’s visits. His presence is often requested by Salesian houses or Provinces to celebrate a significant milestone in their history, such as the 100th or 50th anniversary of the foundation, the beginning of a new work, the profession of vows or priestly ordination of new confreres, the commemoration of Salesian figures who are exemplary for the different lands and for the entire Church. However, the celebratory intent is always part of a meeting rich in content and comparisons on the state of health of the Salesian charism in the local situation.

Hence the multifaceted character of these visits, marked by moments of celebration and glances upwards, of ribbon cutting and discernment, of emotional involvement and mutual commitments, of reporting on the situation and focusing on the educational challenges; all moments that involve the various branches of the great family (Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, past pupils, etc.), often also Bishops and clergy of the local Church; but above all the young people, since their

leadership and active involvement is in the DNA of Salesian pedagogy.
Don Bosco's successor is not only paid homage (and, in the "hottest" areas of the globe, "welcomed like a king", honoured with the "robes and symbols of the local authorities"); but he is also made the object of great expectations, of a "word" that both reassures and broadens horizons. Here emerges one of the most precious features of these visits *ad gentes*: the attitude of the Rector Major to act as a "communicating vessel", a "connector" between what the Salesian Family experiences and plans in the different areas of the world: from the mature, reflective, sometimes tired pace observed in the old continent, to the energy found in Africa and the East; from the best practices in place in some countries to the difficulties and problems encountered elsewhere. Another comparison concerns the reception in the various Salesian provinces of the indications that emerged from the last General Chapter of the Congregation (the 28th), to ensure that everyone is tuned in to the common objectives.
And it is in bridging the different Salesian areas and "souls" around the world that the Rector Major speaks of the "miracles" he witnesses. When he reminds everyone that what makes the Congregation great are above all the minimal presences, such as the Salesian missionary from the Czech Republic who lives in Siberia, in the middle of the ice, and has a community 1000 km away, which he manages to join no more than once a month; an occasion blessed by the faithful of the place, which makes them say that "God has not forgotten about us".
Or again when he brings to everyone's attention the redemption of a land that in December 2004 was hit by the greatest natural disaster of modern times, the tsunami that resulted in 230,000 dead, thousands missing and destroyed entire countries. Precisely in one of the hardest hit areas, a Salesian house was reborn to take in many orphans, who are flourishing again after many years: "12% of these Don Bosco boys/girls have gone to university; 15% have continued their technical studies in our vocational schools; more than 50%, after finishing public school, have found a job with which to start their lives independently."

Key words
There is a leitmotif in all these visits: the evocation of certain key words that reaffirm the particular mission of the sons of Don Bosco, called to take care of the young, but with a distinctive attention and method, with a "Salesian" pedagogy in fact, which has been the subject of long reflection throughout history. Some of these "icons" are the aphorisms introduced by the holy founder to summarise his educational intuitions; others are more recent, but have the same nature, they serve to update the Salesian charism over the years, in the face of new demanding

challenges.

I resoconti delle visite del Rettor Maggiore alle case salesiane sparse nel mondo, sono ricchi di questi appelli. Anzitutto “*credere nei giovani*”, “*essere fedeli ai giovani*”, aver fiducia nelle loro potenzialità, trasmettere fiducia; il che implica non avere pregiudizi nei loro confronti, accompagnarli con empatia nel loro cammino, sostenerli nei momenti accidentati, condividere valori e suscitare libertà.
Rientra nel richiamo alla fiducia l’impegno di “*dar vita ai sogni dei giovani*”, di far sì che essi tornino a pensare in grande, a non vivere con le ali tarpate; monito questo che sembra applicabile più alle nuove generazioni presenti nelle società mature (in Occidente) che a quelle dei paesi emergenti.



Australia – April 2023

The reports of the Rector Major’s visits to Salesian houses around the world are full of these appeals. First and foremost, “to believe in young people”, “to be faithful to

young people”, to trust in their potential, to transmit confidence; which implies not being prejudiced towards them, accompanying them with empathy on their journey, supporting them in difficult moments, sharing values and inspiring freedom.
Included in the call to trust is the commitment to “give life to young people’s dreams”, to make them think big again, not to live with clipped wings; a warning that seems more applicable to the new generations in mature societies (in the West) than to those in emerging countries. There are also many references to two concepts (love and heart) that are much abused in contemporary culture, but which in Don Bosco’s pedagogy represent the strong points of an educational perspective: “loving the young”, making them understand that “one loves them” (dedicates one’s life to them), and “making oneself loved”; images that derive directly from the Saint’s great intuition that “education is a thing of the heart”.
Other fruitful images are those dedicated to the enduring “relevance of the preventive system” and to the criterion that can make it effective: the “Salesian sacrament of presence among the young” (as defined by the Rector Major) that fosters knowledge, produces sharing, creates exchange and educational passion.
The most recent icon is the heartfelt invitation to all Salesian communities around the world to “be another Valdocco”, to remain faithful to the essential features of a mission born in the 19th century in Turin, but which has universal value in time and space. To be “another Valdocco” means renewing at all latitudes the choice of the field of popular education, spending one’s life for that part of society that in Don Bosco’s time was the “poor and abandoned youth”, and that today takes on the profile of the disadvantaged youth, “at risk”, exploited and discarded by society, of those who inhabit the urban and existential peripheries. “Valdocco” is the symbol of the global “human neighbourhood” to which citizenship must be given, which must discover its active role, for full inclusion/emancipation in society.

Increasingly multicultural environments

The Rector Major’s world tour also makes it evident how the shape of the Congregation is changing, as a result of recent migratory flows from the South and East of the world (partly due to dramatic events/situations) towards the Old Continent and North America; a demographic evolution that crowds emerging countries and burdens the more developed nations; and more generally, because of the tendency of populations to mix on planet earth.



Zambia – April 2022

The Salesian environment (like the whole of Catholicism) is also involved in these dynamics and does not cease to change. Africa and the East are today the areas most generous with vocations and with the highest percentage of Salesians in formation; therefore from mission lands they are gradually destined to have an ever greater weight in the balance of the Congregation.

At every latitude, Salesian houses host young people from different cultures, often of different religions and ethnicities; because Don Bosco’s charism (though born in a particular cultural and religious context) knows no “confessional” boundaries, it also infects those who live and believe otherwise. Thus this multicultural imprinting now characterises many Salesian environments (oratories and schools) in Europe and North America, and is a constitutive feature of the works of Don Bosco’s sons in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Asia, for example, Salesians are in areas where the population is 90% Muslim or Buddhist, within a context that on the one hand deeply challenges them and on the other requires dialogue and discussion. In these lands with different cultures and religions, in these laboratories of anthropological confrontation, there is a whole baggage of reflections and experiences that deserves to be collected and deepened; also to better position a Congregation and a Church called to bear witness to a specific message in an increasingly global world.

New educational challenges

The Congregation has always considered the education of the young as its inalienable task and as a challenge. But it is a challenge that takes on particular features depending on historical moments. Today, according to Fr Artime's dialogues with the young people he met on his world tour, some noteworthy priorities emerge in this field.

On the one hand, education must come to terms with the digital culture that now permeates the experience of the new generations, whose great potential must be understood within the framework of harmonious use to avoid imbalances or penalising consequences. The proposal to set up "digital courtyards", which is circulating in Salesian circles, therefore responds to this need, and does not demonise a tool that is now vital, but accepts it within a constructive approach.

On the other hand, "preparing young people for life" also involves – in the current era – the attention that the new generations must pay to the environmental issue, to the care and protection of a creation endangered by an unwise world system, for which adults have a serious responsibility, but whose immense costs will be borne by the young. Here, then, is another piece that enriches and updates the educational project.

Here and there in Salesian circles (and in the young people who attend them), a greater interest can be seen in "political commitment" understood in a broad sense as a contribution to achieving a more human, less unequal, more inclusive society.



Thailand – May 2022

This is what emerged in particular during the Rector Major’s visit to Peru and the United States, where the educational discourse and social voluntary work are certainly considered by young people as “pre-political” activities, but which must increasingly be understood as a commitment to social justice, to reducing inequalities, to allowing everyone a dignified life. Don Bosco’s motto of forming young people to “be good Christians and upright citizens” takes on a new emphasis here, more congruent with the sensibilities and challenges of today’s times.

Finally, photos

Finally, there are the photographs scattered throughout this extensive chronicle, which speak more than words, testifying to the atmosphere of the long journey,

giving space to faces, postures, feelings. Where the tenth Successor of Don Bosco appears either presiding at the Eucharist or in shirtsleeves surrounded by young people or confreres: the two icons of a Salesian style that sees in his presence with the young a sign of God’s benevolence.

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