

## Interview with Carlos Adelantado, International President of New Acropolis



### Introduction

New Acropolis is an international organisation that promotes an ideal of timeless values. Its aim is to contribute to the development of individuals and societies through its work in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. New Acropolis is present in over 50 countries across the five continents and has more than 400 centres worldwide.

Its action in the world is based on three founding ideals:

The ideal of universal fraternity, promoting respect for human dignity, beyond any differences of gender, culture, religion or social background.

The ideal of knowledge, encouraging the love of wisdom through the comparative study of philosophies, religions, sciences and arts.

The ideal of development, enabling each human being to realize their best qualities and values, as a solid basis for a better world.

The president of New Acropolis, Carlos Adelantado, explains how these shared ideals can be achieved.

### **What are the main challenges facing New Acropolis at the moment? What goals would you like to achieve?**

a) On a philosophical level, our main goal is to restore the timeless importance of the concept of philosophy.

Today, philosophy is an undervalued word. It lies forgotten at the bottom of a drawer along with other things that are regarded as rather uncomfortable. However, it is natural to ask ourselves questions about why certain things have happened to us or are going to happen to us. From this point of view, philosophy is a much needed tool. It provides a coherent meaning to existence, and helps us to become aware of the important role that each human being can play in the

creation of their own life.

- -I would also like fraternity to become more present and evident in everyday life.

It's about learning how to give more value to what unites us than to what apparently separates us. To look beyond the superficial and ever-changing reflections of individuals and events.

The great philosophers have always taught that the more we develop our inner perception of what is essential, the more we will experience an outer fraternity.

b) We want culture to be more present in society.

I'm not just referring to an increase in the number of cultural activities, but to the great ability that culture has to unite nations and to enable people to understand different mentalities. Because an important function of culture is to lift up our consciousness and open our hearts.

I am convinced that, unfortunately, some of the attitudes of intolerance and aggression towards certain individuals or particular segments of the population are due to a lack of culture caused by not knowing about other forms of expression of human activity.

c) With volunteering, our aspiration is that each volunteer should develop qualities within themselves, at the same time as they are giving unselfishly for the common good.

Every effort, every act of service for the good of others, can help us understand the meaning of life in a more conscious way; and at the same time, we experience the growth of our inner strengths: solidarity, self-esteem, hope for a better future, empathy... and many others. But, the major effect is an increasing sense of freedom and willpower.

So my great hope is that volunteering actions should not only be good and useful, but that the individuals who act as volunteers can connect more deeply with life.

### **What is the experience of the more than 400 centres of New Acropolis around the world in these difficult times?**

On a personal level, I'm very happy with the way New Acropolis is developing, because it shows that the application of philosophy helps people face their fears and uncertainties.

We are finding that the people who are now coming to our centres are showing greater interest and a genuine desire to understand life and the human being. It is as if the mirrors which had reflected reality until now had been shattered into a thousand pieces; and suddenly, either we see nothing, or we perceive a different reality. In either case, this becomes the driving force that urges us to walk towards self-knowledge.

We have seen how useful the new technologies can be, as they have allowed us to continue with our work despite the difficulties. But it has also become clear that nothing can replace the quality of human contact. This is why, in the ancient world, the practice of philosophy always

took place in schools, in groups, where the use of dialogue as a teaching tool was fundamental and the challenge of learning to live together in harmony was accepted by everyone.

### **There are people who mistrust organizations**

That is true and often with good reason.

However, I believe that an organization can be very useful, because it brings people together and coordinates their different efforts and wills. But of course we should never forget the dangers that can arise from certain deviations in organizations.

For me, a deviation is to impose a particular and personal opinion, without any possibility of dialogue or comparison; to depart from the aims and principles for which the organization was founded; and to take advantage of its structure and operation to achieve renown and social prestige.

Something that I think is very positive is the large number of people who have been part of New Acropolis over the years. Every year, thousands of people benefit from our philosophy courses, cultural activities or volunteering actions. Some of them join our organization, others prefer to help out from time to time, and others don't want to join at all. But all these people have seen for themselves our efforts to work towards a better society.

### **There are also people who disagree with you. How would you answer those who criticize New Acropolis?**

That they have every right to do so, they are within their rights.

In view of the marvellous diversity and complexity of human nature, one cannot expect to be liked and accepted by everyone. It would be totally unreasonable.

I also believe that criticism can be very constructive if it can be separated from the ill-will and negative feelings that often go with it.

We shouldn't overdramatize this issue, because it is natural for rational beings to analyze, discuss, compare arguments, subject them to examination and, finally, to choose. If that right to criticism were to be eliminated, we would be limiting human freedom and eliminating an important part of philosophy, because critical thinking, in the sense of subjecting life itself with all its conditioning factors to analysis and consideration, is totally natural for philosophers.

### **And how can you explain that there have been detractors, especially in the past?**

We do indeed have to go back to the past to find these types of misunderstandings. In fact, because of my age, I have not had direct experience of some of these situations myself.

But, as I see it, it has always been a problem of a lack of understanding. Perhaps it is due to the complexity of this School of Philosophy in the Classical Tradition, which tries to combine theory

and practice in its activities, as a philosophical ideal that aspires to improve the world and human beings, and which from the beginning saw itself as a movement that had the potential to expand internationally.

Even many members of New Acropolis in those early days, whom we have to thank for their efforts and their dedication, did not have a very good understanding of the profound characteristics of New Acropolis. They didn't understand that it was something that came from the remotest past and was therefore something totally new and unrelated to anything known until then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mistakes were made which have been gradually corrected. And this attitude of self-correction is valid now and at any time in the future, because the spirit of self-criticism can never be absent from the philosophical life.

To this we must add that, when anything new appears, it needs time to adapt to its environment, as well as time to reveal its true potential and the social benefits it can offer as it develops.

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that there will always be people in society who "make a living" out of criticizing and denigrating others in a sensationalist way.

Anyway, the reactions to our philosophical proposal are nothing new for a school of philosophy with deep roots which we could describe as "esoteric". It is a constant which has been repeated throughout the centuries.

### **How important is the esoteric aspect for New Acropolis?**

The term "esoteric" means "going more within". So it applies to everything which is hidden, which is inner, while the "exoteric" refers to what is external.

In New Acropolis we understand by "esoteric" the inner aspect, the being of things, that which is hidden from our sight but is essential.

All things and all living beings have an external, visible part, and an inner part which is their foundation. For example, a building has walls, doors and windows which are visible. This would be the exoteric aspect. But it also has a structure consisting of columns, beams and floors which form its skeleton, what supports it, the "esoteric" part which is not visible from the outside.

In the universe we see planets, stars and galaxies. They are bodies made of matter, in some cases gaseous matter, so they are the exoteric aspects. The reason for their existence, the life that animates those bodies, their purpose, would be the esoteric aspect.

As individuals we perform actions every day that have an outward practical purpose, but behind our external attitudes are the true driving forces of our actions. These driving forces, which are of a metaphysical nature (in the sense that they go beyond the physical level), make up the esoteric part of human beings.

That is why, in New Acropolis, we speak of a philosophy of causes, which can also be called natural or esoteric philosophy, because we are interested in understanding the reasons behind

things, their hidden causes, which we can perceive by using our reason or our intuition. To do this, we need to develop a greater degree of sensitivity and a greater capacity to connect and fit together the elements around us.

### **Why is the same value given to Eastern and Western philosophy in New Acropolis?**

Why not? We cannot deny the philosophical legacy of what we call the East, of cultures like India, Japan, Tibet, China, and others, as well as the contribution of Western philosophy. The problem is that there is still a lot of latent racism, and not only in the physical context. Intellectual vanity and racism are much worse than physical racism, and even worse is the spiritual arrogance and racism of believing oneself to be in sole possession of the truth.

### **What is the role of the so-called Living Forces in New Acropolis?**

These are groups made up of members who choose to dedicate time and effort to directly support the vital functioning of our centres. They also offer levels of inner and outer experience, where people can put knowledge into practice and do exercises that help them to progress along the path of philosophy as a way of life, as the classics of both East and West recommend.

The Living Forces are about bringing to life the forces we have within us, as well as getting to know and learning to utilize the forces of life. These are important matters, so it is natural that there should be certain conditions of entry for members of these groups, such as honesty and common sense (to mention just two). Not everyone is admitted, and this can give rise to a sense of frustration and certain hostile attitudes in those who are not accepted. But this is a risk that cannot be avoided.

### **Returning to our world, what do you think is the most fundamental error of our times?**

From my point of view, the greatest error continues to be the confusion between means and ends.

A clear example is economics. Economics should be seen as a useful and necessary means for the creation and preservation of structures, but never as an end in itself.

It should help to improve educational opportunities and ensure that education becomes accessible to an increasing number of people in the world. It should help to alleviate the burden of heavy, mechanical and repetitive work. It should help to provide human beings with opportunities for development in all areas of life.

The desire to possess, to accumulate wealth, results in harming others, in encouraging excessive competition and the exploitation of other people in order to obtain bigger profits. It is disastrous from the human perspective and from the perspective of planning for a better future.

In New Acropolis, for example, we finance ourselves mainly by the monthly subscriptions paid by all our members, by the sale of our books and by small internal workshops which help us to achieve self-sufficiency. They are small sums which allow us to keep our premises open and

take on different cultural and volunteering projects.

Despite the fact that economics currently rules everything and is steering the course that humanity is following, we do not think that it represents the only force of progress for nations and individuals.

### **What is your opinion about materialism?**

For a long time this has been the dominant idea that has moved the world. And it is the idea which has ended up imposing itself in the fields of politics, science, economics, education and also, unfortunately, morality. It has penetrated the hearts of our homes and the brains of people. The materialistic mentality rules the life of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the planet.

Is that good or bad? Probably it is an experience that humanity as a whole needs to go through. Perhaps it is necessary to follow the path of materialism to its end so that other aspects of human existence can be revalued.

Right now, it is not unreasonable to recognize that materialistic scientists have encountered their great stumbling block: to explain how consciousness has been able to emerge from the random evolution of matter. We know a lot about the behaviour of matter, but we do not know the REASON WHY.

The systems of education, politics and economics that are based on materialism have also failed. People, in general, are no happier in spite of having more material possessions and more comforts (in some areas of the planet much more than in others). It has to be recognized that it has not been possible to eradicate hunger, poverty and the tremendous inequality that reigns on our planet.

### **Can politics and philosophy be combined?**

Philosophy can be combined with any facet of the human being: with art in its intuition of the beautiful, with science in its desire to come closer to what is true, with religion in its expression of the good, and with politics in the need for justice.

In order for human beings to live together harmoniously in society, the rights and duties of citizens have to be clearly established, and this is where the concept of justice comes in. Ever since ancient times, both Confucius and Plato (amongst others) were concerned with this search for justice, and Plato's dialogue "The Republic" is perhaps the most significant text in this regard.

This is demonstrated by the many criticisms it receives, as well as the great praise and innumerable references we can find in works of later writers, from contemporaries of Plato down to our own times.

Personally, I don't believe that the intention of the Athenian philosopher was to achieve the creation of an ideal society formed by perfect human beings, but to offer some reflections and

possible solutions to the many problems of the different regimes of the Greek cities of his times. In fact, in a later dialogue, "The Laws", he modifies some of the arguments from The Republic.

### **In some intellectual circles, Plato is considered to be totalitarian**

I think it is also fair to say that, for the vast majority of researchers and unprejudiced intellectuals, Plato is considered a very wise philosopher, a sage. In ancient Greece, the concept of the sage was very broad: it implied being a philosopher, a mathematician, a scientist, a doctor of the soul, a poet, a political adviser... A concept of "*totalitas*", or wholeness. This is what Plato has in mind when he proposes a training for citizenship based on a holistic education that would incorporate the different aspects of human nature.

Those who criticize Plato forget to mention the duties which the great philosopher stipulated for the governing class.

Plato's advice continues to be valid today, such as his stipulations that the RULERS:

- Must have demonstrated their love for the common good by selfless voluntary service, and their love for virtue by an exemplary private life.
- Should not own property, but only have the use of it. In other words, they would not be able to use their position to enrich themselves.
- Should not manipulate the people through populist rhetoric.
- Before being appointed, they would be tested to ensure that they have sufficient moral and intellectual capacity.
- The exercise of power is to be understood as a sacrifice.

And there are other requirements as well...

What do we demand of our politicians? What criteria do the parties follow to select their candidates? It's a good question.

### **Can democracy be improved?**

Without any doubt, just as everything that exists on the face of the Earth can be improved. In my opinion, we should make a real effort to achieve more for the common good, beyond the partisan interests of one sector or another.

The sometimes almost irrational confrontations between different factions give rise to many policy changes, which slow down the progress of the whole. The desire of politicians to discredit their adversaries, the lack of ethics when fulfilling electoral promises, the misappropriation of funds and the dubious financing of many of the parties, along with the unqualified nature of some candidates is something that leaves a lot of room for improvement.

We also need to focus on the improvement of education, because it is the system that stands most in need of it, since citizens can elect their representatives periodically at the polls. In order to be able to think and to decide, we all need to receive a continuous education. And, above all,

education is needed in order to lead others.

The founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Ángel Livraga, taught that systems are good if the human beings who form part of them are good. And they cease to be good when the human beings who make them up become corrupt and inefficient.

### **What is the approach of New Acropolis towards religion?**

It is the same approach as that which was taken by schools of philosophy in all ages, that is, of absolute respect for the different religious forms, but those forms cannot be imposed or be dogmatic.

For most people, belonging to a religion is the result of the geographical place in which they were born, and their family environment. But as individuals develop their own capacity for introspection and reflection, sooner or later they will begin to think about their views on what we can call The Sacred.

Those views should be absolutely personal and free, because they involve the mind, the heart and the consciousness as a whole. And I believe that even those who call themselves atheists have some kind of relationship with the Sacred within themselves.

Some will find the established religious forms useful, others will adopt their own forms; for some it will be a connection based on objective elements, and for others it will be a highly subjective encounter. It is a good exercise of being tolerant of all views.

The point is that no one can own the spirituality of others.

### **Why is the symbolic aspect of life so important?**

Perhaps it is part of the connection with that intelligible and higher world which Plato referred to. We have to bear in mind that logic and its mechanisms have their limitations, which are natural for a linear world. But in a non-linear reality, the characteristics of time and space change and, consequently, the consciousness is affected in a different way: there is an increase and expansion of the consciousness which results in a deeper and more subtle understanding of reality.

I'm not talking about the subconscious or the unconscious, but (if you will allow me the expression) about the supraconscious. A higher dimension of consciousness, where knowledge can be perceived without the intervention of the senses and where the experiences we have on that plane are under the complete control of the individual. Symbols help us to use analogies that connect them with higher ideas.

### **Why do you think people use symbols? They are present in the business world, in society, in the transcendent dimension and even in everyday life.**

To start with, I can say that there seems to be a need to belong to something, and that leads to



the use of anagrams, symbols and emblems as a means of recognition. They are used by employees of large and small companies, clothing and footwear brands, sports and cultural associations, financial corporations, etc. The use of symbols is something that has been and continues to be present at all times and in all places.

Perhaps we all know, in a natural and innate way, that we need to achieve ever higher, intuitive states of consciousness, which will enable us to go beyond the limits of the conceptual plane.

Another reason may be that the symbolic world constitutes the great evolutionary difference that distinguishes human beings from other kingdoms: the symbolic imaginarium is present when we get married, or when we graduate. When someone is born and comes into the world, we give them a name, and we say goodbye to them at the end of their life, all in a symbolic way. People wear rings, necklaces, clothes and colours... Even tattoos, which are so much in fashion at the moment, are an approach to the world of symbols. And something as human as laughter and tears cannot be understood without acknowledging their symbolic background.

We can also see that there are symbols that have an identical meaning in all civilisations throughout history: the open or closed hand, the wheel as a symbol of construction or of the cyclic nature of life, fire in relation to wisdom, the eagle as a messenger, the sun as the king of heaven...

One thing that has struck me in this respect is how much interest there has been recently in series and films featuring this kind of symbolic language.

In New Acropolis as well, we use symbols related to the activity we are doing: sports, volunteering, artistic workshops, martial arts, and philosophy itself. In our school of philosophy we spend a lot of time studying symbols of the sacred in the different civilisations.

And in our philosophical celebrations of the seasons of the year, we also use symbols related to spring, summer, autumn and winter.

### **What advice would you give to someone who feels that their life has no meaning?**

The first piece of advice would be to learn to ask themselves questions. If someone is able to ask themselves questions but they don't find any answers, perhaps they are not searching in the most effective way, or in the right place.

I would advise them to look within themselves and not outside, because there are answers which cannot come from the external world. They should try to perceive the values they have within themselves and, as they gradually develop those values, they will naturally find some points of connection with life.

Because this leads to another question, which is equally important: if life has meaning (and let us assume it does), how can that meaning be perceived? With what kinds of senses? It is obvious that we need to develop some latent powers: for example, the ability to perceive the meaning of life.

## **And where is true strength to be found?**

For me, there is no doubt that it is to be found in the development of consciousness (as an end), and in education (as a means for achieving it).

Jorge Ángel Livraga always maintained that education is the use of culture to accelerate human evolution, to bring about a transmutation of the human being. He insisted that education is not about twisting or forcing people's natures, but about freeing them from the yoke of the instincts and from psychological and spiritual narrowmindedness. Because it is these factors that imprison human beings and are the cause of suffering.

And it is possible to achieve this, because every human being is born with certain latent potentials and qualities, which they can develop if they are educated in the right way.

Jorge Livraga said that the true art of teaching consists in informing without deceiving, instructing without politicizing and educating without deforming. Its aim is to enable human beings to become conscious, happy and useful citizens, who know how to use their hands, their hearts and their minds.

And perhaps we can also actualize elements that are higher than the rational mind, such as imagination and intuition, which can enable us to encounter that world which is inhabited by the greats ideals, the archetypal ideas, the purest dreams.

## **It must be difficult to become a teacher in New Acropolis**

It is a question of proving one's abilities, completing certain studies and achieving merit.

Here I need to explain briefly that New Acropolis is an institution of an educational nature, which is officially recognized as an international not-for-profit organisation.

Since it is a private, legally recognized institution, it can create its own models of academic training, although it always follows the same logic as that of the public institutions.

In this way, our academic levels are inspired by the models used in European universities. It is what is known as the Bologna system, which is being applied in many countries.

In this sense, universities in the Bologna system use two types of degrees: those known as 'official degrees' and those known as 'institution-specific degrees'.

Following the model of institution-specific studies, and in view of the fact that our programme of studies is very wide-ranging, we have structured our academic levels into: Expert Diploma, Specialist Diploma, and two levels of Master's Degrees.

Our teachers are qualified at one or other of these levels.

In addition, and no less importantly, they must be clear examples of compliance with the Code

of Ethics to which we all subscribe. If there has been a proven infringement of the Code of Ethics, the person concerned cannot belong to the teaching faculty and will be removed from it.

**What do you think New Acropolis has achieved to date and what does it still have to achieve?**

Of all the successes that have been achieved over the 65 years of life of this philosophical ideal, I would highlight the fact that harmonious coexistence and fraternity have become a reality for thousands of young people across the five continents. New Acropolis is made up of women and men of all races, of different cultures and religious beliefs, or none, and of all social backgrounds. For us, the fact of being human transcends any other sectarian consideration.

Our work is about providing knowledge, with an eclectic and non-dogmatic approach, and has been recognized in several countries as being “in the public interest”.

What do we still have to achieve?

We have to find the right way of being correctly understood. We have to ensure that our voice is able to resonate in many more hearts, so that everyone who is looking for us can find us.

**How would you like to end this interview?**

I would like to end by talking about philosophy, because we know that in a curved universe beginnings and endings converge. And I reaffirm the need for philosophy and its usefulness.

Philosophy is about establishing a true relationship between the objective knowledge we have of the world, and the subjective nature of our inner being (which is not for that reason less real, but rather is “another reality”).

A TRUE RELATIONSHIP is where actions reflect a way of feeling and thinking. And that feeling and thinking must be aligned with the synthesis of our objective and subjective experiences, that is, our experience of life.

This implies that, with the right attitude, the particular philosophy of each human being will improve with time, because our experiences of life can also become increasingly deeper and more subtle.

New Acropolis is a field of inner and outer experimentation, which offers the possibility of individual improvement and collective improvement. New Acropolis is a world full of possibilities. Just like life itself. It is philosophy in action.

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