

# An educational consideration on the pandemic: endure...and progress

Towards the end of the 15th century, Alexander VI decided to expel the powerful Colonna family from the Papal States, perhaps to make way for his own family. The Colonna family took refuge in the Neapolitan Court, where the poet Sanazzaro dedicated a poem to them, which included the line «*Flectimur, non frangimur undis*» (we are bent, not broken, by the waves). This verse led the family to change its coat of arms and motto. To the traditional silver column, positioned in the centre, gallant and steadfast, a rough sea was added from which, out of the flanks, bunches of reeds emerged<sup>1</sup>. As for the motto, the poet's verse was incorporated. The message was clear: the Colonna family was declaring, we would say using the now famous words<sup>2</sup>, «I will endure, standing up to all» and «I am the reed that bends, but always remains standing». In effect, they knew to lay low and resurface once the storm had passed, as, after the death of Pope Borgia, they returned to Rome, where both their lineage and palace remain.

Enduring or resisting is a part of strength. Around 50 years ago, talking about resilience started to become all the rage. It is a scientific term that defines certain materials characterised for bending under pressure, but that subsequently return to their prior form. The word was adopted by psychology, where Rutter<sup>3</sup> defined it as reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of a stress or adversity. The pandemic we are suffering has led to us rediscover the fact that we are vulnerable, dispelling the common illusion of considering ourselves gods, and to see that human beings react in very different ways to the same difficulties. Therefore, it is logical that we insist on enduring and on improving our resilience.

However, this approach is insufficient: really it entails not merely overcoming difficulties, but rather the importance of striving to develop our capabilities that are, as yet, undiscovered. In *Meditación de Europa*, Ortega said: «in truth, what has happened isn't

important; the main thing is to know, whatever the situation may be, to take advantage of it»<sup>4</sup>. And, *to take advantage (adelantar)* is defined by the Real Academia Española as «progressing in virtue, studies, the arts, etc.». Dealing with the tough consequences of the pandemic does not end with *endurance*, but rather we must reflect on how we *progress*.

This reflection is difficult because, as Pascal says, we seek the hustle and bustle that stops us from thinking, «which is why prison is such a terrible torment»<sup>5</sup>. Surprisingly, although the virus has not imprisoned us, it has given us plenty of opportunity to ask ourselves, as in the case of Iván Illich before his untimely death<sup>6</sup>, if we have lived as we should have.

It may sound outrageous today to talk of a *proper* way of life, as we live in a liberal culture in which we worship limitless freedom, initiated with Horace's saying «*sapere aude*»<sup>7</sup> (dare to know), which was adopted by Kant as the motto for the period of Enlightenment<sup>8</sup> and that would return in the defence of unprecedented freedom. The pandemic has helped us to become aware that we are the kings of nature, gifted with intelligence and freedom not enjoyed by other living creatures, but also that we are *constitutional* kings that must respect the requirements of human nature and all the rules of creation, which are more extensive than these natural laws impossible to disobey. We have been living in an atmosphere in which everything seemed possible and in which we were going to create a Heaven on Earth, a world without misery, injustice, pain and illness. I have no doubt that these goals must be fostered, and Christians have collaborated on achieving them in the most clear and effective way. However, many years ago, Cardinal Ratzinger said that that was to ignore human nature, as suffering is not the only burden of which humans must rid themselves; and in fact those people are mistaken who want us to believe that: «it is possible to be human without self-control, without patience to renounce and the fatigue of overcoming difficulties, and that neither sacrifice is required to meet the commitments accepted nor effort to patiently bare the pressure between what we should be and what we actually are»<sup>9</sup>.

Making the decision to move on from *enduring* to *progressing* is important. As such, it is worth considering the request that Socrates made to his friends moments before being poisoned: «when my sons are grown up...punish them if they seem to care about riches or anything more than virtue»<sup>10</sup>. Socrates pleaded that they not forget the ideals that had guided them through life. Perhaps this is the time to reflect on whether or not we lead a proper way of life. Perhaps this is also a chance to ask ourselves if we are led by a kind of education that is obsessed with employability and instructivism, one forgetful of virtue, or if we, in fact, seek that our children become good people who are not solely focussed on mass consumption, financial squandering and fun. In such case, it is essential that we strive to teach our children to overcome social pressures and to seek a

deeper meaning of life, trying to find the Absolute that is the foundation of the existence of absolute moral values, which explain the importance of love, overcoming selfishness, hate and envy, as well as fostering the gift of self, the source of supreme happiness, even in undertaking truly heroic acts, as we see so many people doing behind the scenes in this crisis.

**José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín**

Editor of the **revista española de pedagogía**

These few words cannot conclude without a heartfelt reminder of all those close the journal who are no longer with us. I would also like to thank those who have made it possible for this edition to go online and to be distributed to our subscribers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See PALLISER, B. (1870) *Historic devices, badges and war-cries*, London, 37 and 74.

<sup>2</sup> Texts from the song *Resistiré* by Dúo Dinámico, 1988, lyrics by Carlos Toro, which became a popular anthem in Spain during the pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> See RUTTER, M. (2012) Resilience as a dynamic concept, *Development and Psychopathology*, 24, 336.

<sup>4</sup> ORTEGA Y GASSET, J. (1966) *Meditación de Europa*, Madrid, ed. Revista de Occidente, 28.

<sup>5</sup> PASCAL, B. *Pensamientos*, Madrid, Austral, Miguel de Cervantes Library, no. 139.

<sup>6</sup> See TOLSTOY, L. (2004) *La muerte de Iván Illich*, Online books, 53.

<sup>7</sup> HORATIUS, *Epistularium liber primus*, II, 4.

<sup>8</sup> KANT, E. (1784) *¿Qué es la Ilustración?*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> RATZINGER, J. (2013) *¿Por qué permanezco en la Iglesia?*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 89. 1971 Original.

<sup>10</sup> PLATO *Apology of Socrates*, 41d.