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Manuel Losada-Sierra

# A CRY FOR JUSTICE

The Victims of History in  
Levinas and Metz



**A Cry for Justice:  
The Victims of History in Levinas and Metz**

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# A CRY FOR JUSTICE:

## The Victims of History in Levinas and Metz<sup>1</sup>

Manuel Losada-Sierra<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The naturalisation of suffering refers to both its domestication, which robs it of its power to shock reason and opposes idealism, and its teleological history, in which suffering is just inherent in and necessary for history. Against this naturalisation by Western thinking, this book argues that the suffering of victims of history has a place in philosophy and, indeed, obliges philosophy to respond. Moreover, it asserts that the victims' suffering is the intersection of philosophy and theology beyond idealism and dogmatism. In facing this challenge, these disciplines meet to raise victims' suffering as a problem for thinking and a question to be answered philosophically. This book shows how, beyond ontological thinking, the divine identity of the end of history, and the Hegelian teleology of history, there is a new scenario for philosophical thinking. Between the thinking of totality and the ultimate revelation of God, it is necessary to account for victims and the categories that make it possible. Therefore, this book is a claim about the relevance of the marginalised to philosophy and against the intellectualism that ignores the singular and the contingent.

**KEY WORDS:** History; memory; victims; Levinas; Metz

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# UN CLAMOR POR LA JUSTICIA:

Las víctimas de la historia en Levinas y Metz

Manuel Losada-Sierra

## RESUMEN

La naturalización del sufrimiento se refiere tanto a su domesticación, que lo despoja de su poder de conmocionar la razón y que se opone al idealismo, como a su historia teleológica, en la que el sufrimiento es inherente y necesario para la historia. Contra esta naturalización en el pensamiento occidental, este libro sostiene que el sufrimiento de las víctimas de la historia debe tener cabida en la filosofía y, de hecho, la obliga a responder a él. También se afirma que el sufrimiento de las víctimas es el punto de encuentro entre la filosofía y la teología, lejos del idealismo y del dogmatismo. Frente a este desafío, estas dos disciplinas convergen con el fin de plantear el sufrimiento de las víctimas como un problema para el pensamiento y como una pregunta que requiere una respuesta filosófica. De esta manera, se muestra cómo, más allá del pensamiento ontológico, de la identidad divina del fin de la historia y de la teleología hegeliana de la historia, emerge un nuevo escenario para el pensamiento filosófico. Entre el pensamiento de la totalidad y la revelación última de Dios, es necesario dar cuenta de las víctimas y de las categorías que lo hacen posible. Por lo tanto, este libro se convierte en un reclamo sobre la relevancia de los marginados para la filosofía y en contra del intelectualismo que ignora lo singular y lo contingente.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** historia; memoria; víctimas; Levinas; Metz

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# **FOREWORD**

Greek thought has passed on to Christian theology, and thereby to global history, a form of thinking in which the oneness of things is at the beginning and end of every thought. At the climax of Greek philosophy, Plotinus described the One beyond being from which each soul emanates and to which it longs to return. The flight of the soul is a journey back towards its origin; an origin which, once obtained, will reabsorb that soul, making it once again indistinguishable from the One from which it came.

Where, in this schema, which is something like the essence of Greek philosophy, is the soul that suffers? Is the suffering person to content herself with the thought that the One is as entirely undisturbed by her suffering as by everything else that happens in the

world below? Can a theology that insists on the indifference of the divine One be anything other than a theology of cruelty?

Christian theology, steeped as it is in Greek concepts, nonetheless pays more attention to the wretched of the earth than ever did Greek philosophy. But inasmuch as these wretched are caught up in a divine plan of salvation, does the dialectic of suffering and redemption really find anything in individual suffering other than material for a providential order? Is it suffering that matters, or is it that this suffering be taken up and used in an economy of glory? The price paid for history understood as progress seems to be indifference to the widow and the orphaned one.

In confronting this indifference at the place where Western theology, philosophy and ethics meet (indeed become indistinguishable from each other), Dr Losada-Sierra takes on an essential task. After Auschwitz, can we any longer claim to be ignorant of what this history of indifference is capable of? Two thinkers that have been particularly attentive to this shadow cast by Auschwitz over Western thought are Emmanuel Levinas and Johann Baptist Metz. Neither Levinas, nor Metz believes that we can think as we did before without contributing in our own small way to

the long, indeed ever-growing, transcript of the victors of history.

Drawing on the philosophy of Levinas and the political theology of Metz, Dr Losada-Sierra shows that we can overcome our indifference to suffering by hearing the cries of the victims of history. Correcting Athens with a return to Jerusalem, both Levinas and Metz seek to infuse their thought with a Biblical awareness of the widow and the orphan. When we respond in this way to the call of the marginalised, theology and philosophy can meet in a thinking that goes beyond the idealism of dialectical conceptions of history altogether. If dialectical history—history considered as progress—echoes theodicy in providing a justification of evil, then we must seek another theodicy. We must not seek to rationalise evil away; rather, to look it full in the face by not turning away from those who have suffered it. Instead of focusing on future resolution, we must remember past injustice.

But is memory enough? A purely passive remembering would reproduce the indifference of philosophy to the suffering of the marginalised. The victims of history do not quietly call to us to take note; they loudly cry out—demand—for justice to be done. Through a masterful reading of Levinas and Metz that puts these

two very different thinkers in conversation with one another, Dr Losada-Sierra demonstrates that it is our response to the cry of the suffering that is important. Memory of past suffering must lead to responsibility in the present. Beyond the idolatry of thought, which, at best, only wants to know about the other, response to the other is practical responsibility for her. Responsibility is an ethical-political practice that cannot be reduced to the abstraction of the concept; it must always begin again.

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