



What Is the Purpose of Crying?

José Laguna



José Laguna. Theologian, and a musician. He is a member of the theological department of the Cristianisme i Justícia. He is the author of several booklets published in this collection.

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Roger de Llúria, 13, 08010 Barcelona (Spain)
www.cristianismeijusticia.net
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info@fespinal.com
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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CRYING? MOURNING AS POLITICAL CRITICISM

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INTRODUCTION

Refuting the cliché that crying is useless, this booklet maintains that, given our current context of insensible neoliberal globalization, public expression of suffering is an essential form of political criticism.

From a strictly physiological viewpoint, crying is simply an instinctive response to physical or emotional pain, and tears help to lubricate and cleanse the eyes. But apart from these biological tasks, crying also serves as a complex emotional paralanguage (Kottler 1997). By crying we manifest our internal pain and distress, and we inform those around us of the commotion affecting our inner world. We can go still further, beyond the individual aspects of crying, and ask about its sociopolitical nature. We find not only that our weeping reveals to others our interior affliction, but also that our crying together with others and for others turns our mourning into a sign of empathy, protest, criticism, outcry, and resistance.

The passage from tears of resignation to political outrage will be determined by when, where, and with whom we cry. As we will see, all societies establish proper times and places for public lament, but it is precisely in the breaching of those normative borders, designed to keep grief at bay, that mourning administers its critical sting to impassive cultures. Crying at the wrong time or in the wrong place contradicts the absurd ideal of exponential social progress that has no time to lose and no pain to mourn. This booklet defends the need to establish times and places for mourning in bellicose societies that are obsessed with production and oblivious to suffering. Establishing disruptive moments for public expression of crying requires us to apply the brakes to the accelerating rush toward globalitarianism and to offer hope to the hurting lives of those who refuse to leave their pain behind in the silent gutters of history.

TIMES FOR CRYING

According to the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot; a time to cry, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance... (cf. Eccl 3.1-8).

According to this conservative vision of Qoheleth, the cyclical nature of events requires some temporal restraint: we cannot spend all our lives crying! Psychologists warn that when mourning lasts longer than necessary, it may be a symptom of some unresolved pathology. How long, then, is it reasonable to continue crying? When should we stop sobbing and regain our customary composure and good humor? When we are grieving irremediable losses, such as the natural death of a loved one, we need to take time to go through the five phases described years ago by the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But how long should the mourning last for the unjust death of little Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy whose lifeless body washed up on a beach in Turkey on September 2, 2015? When should we stop mourning? Because it is one thing to cease grieving and stoically accept the reality of sufferings that are inevitable, but it is something very different to falsely end our laments for what never should have happened. Crying for a foreseeable loss can perhaps be brought to closure with therapeutic mourning, but crying for a horrible injustice can find closure only with reparation. The mourning remains open until justice is done; no soothing consolation is possible.

Dying Before One's Time

We do not all die in the same way or at the same time. There are those who die “at the end of their days,” full of years and surrounded by their loved ones. But

there are also those who die “before their time” in the most absolute solitude, their hopes dashed, drowned in seas that, far from taking them to the promised land, become their common graves. Is there someone who will dare to say that little Aylan’s time had come? Will someone have the audacity to declare that he came into this world with the time and day of his death inscribed in the DNA of his existence? Aylan Kurdi died before his time, and with his death, his life and his future were obliterated. It was not his destiny to drown in the Mediterranean. No, it was not his time, nor was it the time of his five-year-old brother Galip, nor the time of his mother, Rehan, who also died engulfed by the waves. There are persons who die before their time, but their deaths cannot be likened to those deaths that we accept under a common denominator of resignation, saying “In the end, we all have to die some day!” Yes, it is true: sooner or later we all die, but the difference between dying “full of years” and dying “before one’s time” is immeasurable.

There are little ones who die because they cry from the moment of birth. Bishop José Cobo, the Spanish Episcopal Conference’s advocate for migrants, referred to these when speaking of the death of a 24-month-old Malian girl on the dock of Arguineguín in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria:

She died from crying from the moment she was born. She was asphyxiated by the dream of finding a home, and she had the *audacity* to pursue that dream alongside her mother in a small boat with 29 other women and children. She was not old enough to understand borders or ideologies, nor the legal quotas that reassure some. She was just a little girl who hugged and cried, and who deserved a decent place in the world, just like the many children who are born on this side of the beach that served as her grave.

[...] The Canary Islands, Ceuta, our southern coasts, and so many other parts of the Mediterranean have left almost 2,000 dead in this year 2021. They are children of God. This earth is also theirs; our common home belongs also to them. Our task is simply to know where our hands are—are they touching the earth? Or are they covering our ears to make us feel safe, at the cost of not hearing the crying of so many? (2021)

Is it morbid to continue crying for Aylan after so much time has passed? Or is it cynical and outrageous, instead, to forget that suffering and turn the page? The political nature of crying is marked by the decision either to cease crying or to continue mourning beyond the times stipulated by the clock of progress, which views the victims as inevitable collateral damage. The persistence of crying challenges the necropolitics that seeks to build history with its back turned to suffering. It is imperative that crying remain present in the public arena and that it continue to lay claim to places and times for mourning. Uninterrupted mourning allows the memory of the victims to remain present as a perennial demand for responsibility.

Uninterrupted Mourning

Those who consider uninterrupted social mourning a masochistic pathology should remember the recent commemoration of the victims of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. By 2021 twenty years had passed since the attacks on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and the U.S. Capitol, but Americans took to the streets to give public expression to the pain they still felt. Hour after hour on that day, the names of the 2,977 murdered victims were read out in an endless litany, one after another. No media outlet or social psychologist questioned the mental health of the American people who, after two decades, had had more than enough time to pass through the phases of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, and who should therefore have come to accept a present weighed down with absences. The renewed tears of family and friends as they recalled their loved ones—tears the TV cameras conveyed to all corners of the planet—were not seen as a morose expression of unhealed wounds, but as a loving attempt to keep alive the memory of lives unjustly taken.

Who is still crying today for Aylan, Galip, Rehan, Mamadú, Arazu, Shiar, Tarek, Snaid, Ayse, Halil, and so many others? Who is commemorating publicly today the names of each of the anonymous victims murdered on fratricidal borders, in strategic wars, or as casualties of gender violence and avoidable famines? Their memory, their causes, and their hopes demand also that their names be pronounced slowly, one by one.

Uninterrupted mourning refuses to offer a single tear on the altars of globalization, progress, history, or universal reason. Crying challenges Hegel's contention that "reason cannot be eternalized in the wounds inflicted on individuals, because particular objects are lost in the universal object" (1972). Perhaps reason cannot be eternalized, but tears can, and some of them *must* be eternalized. The arrogant stories of victors who aspire to survive on the shelves of universal history conceal the persistence of those troubling tears that call into question the alleged heroism of their deeds. Marguerite Duras expressed indignation at the accounts of World War II victories that concealed the widespread weeping and that tried to bring mourning to a hasty close:

On April 3 De Gaulle spoke this criminal phrase: "The days of crying belong to the past. The days of glory have returned." [...] De Gaulle says nothing about the concentration camps; it is extraordinary to behold the extent to which he avoids talking about them, the extent to which he shows himself clearly averse to integrating the people's pain into the victory, and all for fear of devaluing his own role. [...] De Gaulle has declared national mourning for the death of Roosevelt. America must be treated with great care. France will mourn Roosevelt, but our people will go unmourned. (1985, 41-43).

The “Mad Mourners” of the Plaza de Mayo

The Argentine mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo are a clear example of mourning sustained over time and refusing to leave public space. Since 1977 this group of women has met every Thursday in that emblematic square of Buenos Aires to denounce the kidnapping, robbery, torture, and disappearance of their children and grandchildren during the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla. The constancy of their uninterrupted mourning has had concrete results, such as reunification of some relatives and international recognition of their struggle. But what we want to stress here is the way they turned crying into permanent political protest. They have refused to give closure to their pain and to confine their mourning to institutional frameworks that promptly seek to apply salve to the sting of an ever accusing wound:

[...] Little by little they tried to get us Mothers to accept the death of our children. [We were told that] they must be exhumed in the cemeteries, to confirm that they are all dead, without anyone telling us who, how, when, and why. [...] We do not forbid mothers to rescue the bodies if they wish to, ... but [they should not do so] with a white handkerchief. We are against posthumous tributes because that is how politicians cleanse themselves, those who agreed with the dictatorship [...]. In [the faculty of] architecture there were 145 missing young people, and it was proposed that their names be inscribed on a wall [...]. It seems they were taken away for studying architecture. No, gentlemen! You’re missing the main point: they were revolutionaries! That’s why they were taken away! We reject tributes, plaques, monuments. We keep saying that our children are alive, and we say it with ever more strength! (Bonafini s/f)¹

Keeping collective mourning constantly present is vital to neoliberal societies that seek to normalize suffering under the category of “unavoidable accident” (Díaz-Salazar 2004). As we said above, those normative frameworks that prescribe the socially acceptable doses of crying view bereavements that extend over time to be symptoms of individual pathologies that are mired in unresolved processes of denial. It may just be the case, however, that on the shores of unjust suffering the healthiest thing is not to stop crying: “In Argentina, the crazy women of the Plaza de Mayo are an example of mental health because, in these times of obligatory amnesia, they refuse to forget” (Galeano 2009). Julio Cortázar was also able to see the healthiness and the political nature of that constant crying when he wrote in 1982 from Paris: “When the hacks and the assassins of the Argentine Junta began calling the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo ‘crazy,’ [...] they

1 Hebe de Bonafini, president of the association of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. Statements taken by Gerardo Romo Morales (coordinator), 2016, 67-69.

did not realize that they were launching an immense flock of doves that would cover the skies of the world with their message of anguished truth” (2014).

As Jorge Picó has observed, the “mad mourners” of Argentina are the present-day avatars of the choruses in classical Greek tragedies, those women whose cried unsettled the unalterable order of the polis. Drawing on his knowledge of drama, Picó reminds us of *Seven against Thebes*, the tragedy of Aeschylus in which “crazed women” challenge the political and religious discipline demanded by virile, self-contained virtue:

The chorus of Theban women, with their anguished appeal to a divine presence, their mad dashes, and their tumultuous cries, are gripped by a fervor that keeps them bound to the most ancient idols, the *archaïca brété*. [They cry out,] not in temples consecrated to the gods, but in the middle of the city, in the public square... This chorus embodies a feminine religiosity that is categorically condemned by Eteocles in the name of a different religiosity, one that is virile and civic (Vidal-Naquet and Pierre Vernant 1987, 36).

“Las locas,” the “crazy women,” remind us that our social body, our polis, is built on a necropolis. It is not insignificant that our “fatherland” is the place where our common ancestors, the *patres*, are buried. Our “tragic” citizenship is forever surrounded by poorly sealed graves.

Times for Mourning, Spaces for Peace

Crying that demands time for remembrance has the ability to illuminate unparalleled times. Tears open up unknown sociopolitical horizons. By claiming time for mourning, the inconsolable weeping of Priam was able to stop the war between Greeks and Trojans. The *Iliad* recounts how Achilles, after killing Priam’s son Hector, was moved by the tears of the elderly father and so granted him twelve days to mourn and celebrate his son’s funeral:

The two wept bitterly—Priam, as he lay at Achilles’ feet, weeping for Hector, and Achilles now for his father and now for Patroclus, till the house was filled with their lamentation. But when Achilles was finally sated with grief and had unburdened the bitterness of his sorrow, he left his seat and raised the old man by the hand, in pity for his white hair and beard. [...]

“But come now, tell me promptly and in detail: how many days do you want to pay obsequies to the divine Hector? I am willing to bide that time and contain the forces.” And Priam answered, “Since, then, you suffer me to bury my noble son with all due rites, do thus, Achilles, and I shall be grateful. You know how we are pent up within our city; it is far for us to fetch wood from the mountain, and the people live in fear. Nine days, therefore, will we mourn Hector in my house; on the tenth day we will bury him and there shall be a public feast in his honor; on the eleventh

we will build a mound over his ashes, and on the twelfth, if there be need, we will fight.” The divine Achilles, with protective feet, said to him in turn: “So shall that also be done, old Priam, as you request. I will suspend the fight for as long as you ask me.” (Homer, Canto XXIV, lines 599-604)

The patient persistence of crying challenges the cruel policies that create history on perpetual battlefields. Achilles’ necropolitics naturalizes suffering and death as the inevitable toll of military power that seeks to expand borders atop countless corpses. With their cries, the Priams of all times come forth to build sites where the memory of suffering is an ever troublesome presence for the imperial economic powers and their warring. Taking time to mourn forces the clocks of market and war to come to a halt, if just for a moment.

Even if shells are not flying around us and we hear no air-raid sirens, the need to maintain uninterrupted mourning in seemingly peaceful societies is based on the conviction that we live in contexts of constant war. Low-key Third World War, hybrid conflicts, and fourth-generation warfare are different names for the new war scenarios that in no way resemble the old military campaigns. In the gray zones of undeclared wars, even ordinary citizens become the projectiles of belligerent political strategies. These are conflicts in which the battlefields are whole societies, the weapons are the citizens, and the military strategies are disinformation, computer sabotage, hardening of borders, and control of basic resources like water, food, electricity, gas, and medicine. Without any of the clamor of classic wars, these hidden battles are producing millions of victims even today. In these new warlike scenarios of social attrition, the presence of mourning creates moments of truce that aspire to become permanent.

A New Heaven and a New Earth, Because All Is not Well

The mournful choruses that refuse to vacate public spaces are the discomfiting reminders that “all is not well,” in the words of Josep María Esquirol (2021). And precisely because all is not well, we continue hoping—while weeping, we add—for new times and new places. The book of Revelation promises that the day of final judgment will inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth, in which God himself “will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev 21,1-4).

The time of justice is not the same as the chronological progression marked by clocks. Historical progress—were such a thing to exist as simple inertia or mere mindless evolution—can in no way grant redemption. The simple fact of progress produces no hopeful future for the victims who long to be vindicated. Only God can dry the tears because only God can present himself as Judge and establish the *other time* of the absolving sentence. “Time, in the world, dries all tears; it is the forgetting of this unforgiven moment and of this pain that nothing can compensate” (Lévinas 1947, 154).

Tears point the way toward “God’s time.” Until God definitively dries all our tears, we must maintain our inconsolable weeping for the collective murder of little Aylan. We must protest against the pitiless powers that want to turn the page and go on feeding the monster of fratricidal progress built upon fields and seas of forgotten corpses.

The political aspect of our approach to activist crying does not disregard the passive—at times mystical—aspect of crying that also resides in tears. Whenever people mourn, the intimate memory of an encounter is hidden within their call for redemption, reparation, or consolation for the victims. The reasons for waiting and hoping that we cited from Josep Maria Esquirol are not exhausted in our hope for a redemptive future; we hope because all is not well, but also “because every (good) encounter calls for re-encounter” (2021, 153). Every act of crying entails the longing for a first encounter. Religious experience thematizes this relationship as divine “re-ligation” or “re-bonding.” In her *Treatise on Tears*, philosopher Catherine Chalier anchors the origin of all tears in that founding moment when God created human beings in his image and likeness; she envisions all tears as remnants of the fleeting memories of that original bond between human and divine that constituted us as living beings:

[...] The tears are not the irrepressible confession of a weakness or still another indignity; on the contrary, they signify an awakening to heightened awareness of the possibly dire consequences of being a creature, while recovering for a moment—and this is essential—that astonishing biblical proposition that announces to man and woman that both have been created in the “image of God” (2007, 36).

The experience of non-believers also reveals the relational dimension of crying as a longing for a radical Alterity—or for the “Other,” in the language of Lévinas. Whether the experience is religious or purely anthropological, crying always presents itself as a relational reality. Even the hidden tears that are shed in absolute privacy always invoke a presence or an absence. Even if we cry alone, we do so always in front of someone human, divine, unknown, obscure, or longed for.

Tears are far from being self-indulgent, as we sometimes say to expel them from our lives and show a certain hardness. Tears are actually always directed to someone other than oneself, even if that someone remains stubbornly absent and silent, or even unknown. They appeal to that someone, to his justice or his forgiveness, to his mercy or his help. In other words, they search for a face-to-face encounter, even in the abyss of despair, and they do so, very often, without any clear awareness of this search (Chalier 2007, 69).

Political crying is mystical because it calls out, albeit unconsciously, for an Other who is able to listen and respond.

PLACES FOR CRYING

Societies often establish spaces for crying. Just as there are politically correct places to die (hospitals, private homes, nursing homes, etc.), there are also places where crying is well thought of (wakes, funeral homes, churches, etc.). In both cases, the intention is to remove from public spaces experiences that we find especially disturbing.

We are deeply disturbed when we learn of people dying from hunger on the streets of poor countries or when we see the victims of environmental disasters or violent conflicts. In the same way we are shaken to see someone crying in public. Tears disturb us and challenge us when we see them outside the spaces to which crying is confined by social convention. I make no pejorative judgment regarding the places and rituals considered suitable for crying. (In all cultures we find mourning rites that socially modulate the moments and intensities of permitted crying.) What we want to treat here is the rupture of the social order that occurs when there is spontaneous public crying in “crying-free” spaces. The inappropriate irruption of crying moves people to wonder about the *why* and the *wherefore* of the crying and to ask *against whom* it is directed.

The Body that Cries

The first home of tears is the human body and, more specifically, the body of the newborn child. Crying is the first word we address to the world. We begin our life with a wail that announces a radical demand for care. We enter life demanding that someone take care of us, and, in a way, our persistent crying throughout our lives is simply a variation of that same appeal for care. For the psychotherapist J. K. Nelson, crying is the foundation of social bonds (2005): the demand for attention that is intrinsic to the act of crying—a demand not necessarily present

in other emotional expressions—generates binding behavior; it is, in a way, the mortar that builds the political community.

Crying is a demanding emotion because we cannot remain impassive to the crying of others. Even if we decide to ignore it, crying will still insistently demand our response. It is precisely this demand for response that feeds the political potential of tears. Crying creates the tension of a responsibility that is always waiting to be assumed.

The bodily anchorage of crying also gives testimonial value to its authenticity. Like all human expression, crying can also be perverted; it can subvert the seed of truth that we spontaneously attribute to it. We are not naïve; we know that “crocodile tears” exist, but they are the exception to the rule that when we cry, our inner being speaks in truth. We do not *decide* to cry—just as we do not decide to laugh. Crying appears as an emotional tsunami that escapes our control as it gesticates in the uttermost depths of our body. The body takes command of our expression in extreme situations, those that connect us with our most radical impotence. Crying is being able to do something when nothing else is possible:

We laugh and cry only in situations for which there is no other response. In other words, no other response is possible for those so affected by a word, an image, or a situation that the only thing they can do is laugh or cry—even when others have no idea why they’re laughing, or think they’re foolish or sentimental and should behave differently.

[...] Not-being-able-to-do-anything-else does not mean that one has exhausted one’s patience and strength or that one is extremely unhappy with something or someone; rather, it means that one has reached a limit that prohibits both in fact and in principle any possible explanation (Plessner 2007, 153-154).

Because crying is inscribed in the crevices of our corporeal reality, it is less susceptible to being manipulated than are other, more ethereal emotions. The body does not lie. Psychology teaches us that, no matter how much our *psyche* tries to convince us that all is going well at some critical moment in life, our *soma* is responsible for sending out warning signals to rescue us from self-deception. With their mooring in the body, tears occupy the place of truth; they exist on that frontier of death where, in the words of Irene Vallejo, there are no reasons to lie:

A Roman tradition tells that the beautiful Lucrecia was spending the night alone when the son of King Tarquin the Proud knocked on her door seeking shelter from the rain. Intimidated, Lucrecia allowed in the powerful visitor. At dawn, when it was still dark, he entered her bedroom with a sword and raped her. During the day she waited for her husband to return and, with cold eyes, told him what had happened. He had a dagger in the folds of his tunic, and when she finished her account, he committed suicide. After the death, his relatives led a revolution that overthrew the king, exiled the rapist, and gave birth to the Roman republic 27 centuries ago. The chilling lesson of this legend is that Lucrecia stabbed herself with

the dagger to prove the veracity of her words. She had to speak from the frontier of death where there are no more reasons to lie. (2021)

At the Foot of the Cross or Hidden Away in a House

Crying at the foot of the cross is not the same as crying while hidden away in a house, with the doors closed for fear of the Jewish authorities (cf. Jn 20:19). To define the political nature of crying, it is important to specify where it takes place.

The Gospel of Saint John relates the scene of the women disciples gathered near the cross, accompanying the agony of Jesus (Jn 20,25). Those weeping, as they took a public stand in favor of the tormented victim, were Mary his mother, Mary Salome, Mary Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and the beloved disciple. In contrast to the flight of the other disciples and the elusive answers of Peter, who watched the women and cried from a prudent, self-exonerating distance (cf. Jn 18:17,25-27), the eloquent tears of those who remained with Jesus until the end made them accomplices of the fate of that man condemned as a seditious blasphemer. Crying publicly and compassionately in support of the victims while standing *alongside them* challenges the power that unjustly condemns them; it denies the validity of the social and legal structures that establish rigid borders between the guilty and the innocent.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate asking for authorization to bury the body of Jesus (Jn 19,38). But crying does not have to ask permission to approach the victim; it pours out despite the prevailing power and often against it. By their compassionate crying, the women had already sent a message to Pilate: they did not recognize his power, nor did they have any use for political demarcations establishing which lives deserve to be mourned and which do not (Butler 2006). Crying as political expression challenges the pejorative construal that makes the phrase “cry like a Magdalene” sound ugly. Far from encouraging resigned sobbing, the weeping of Mary Magdalene indicates the proper place for political criticism in the cartography of pain: at the foot of the cross.

In a time like the present, marked by a globalization that destroys a sense of belonging, it is essential that we reinforce the spaces for crying. Globalization is a delocalizing system in which goods and finance move freely across national borders. Neoliberal capitalism—the visible face of the new economic globalitarianism—circulates freely with no local roots, taking no responsibility for the suffering, always local and concrete, that is generated by its transactions. The global market knows nothing of suffering or crying. Vindicating the public presence of crying means being politically committed to pointing out the places of suffering. By crying loudly at the foot of the historical crosses that our society continues to erect, we mark clearly on the map those places of suffering that cynical policies conceal beneath administrative euphemisms. Today national borders have become vales of tears with biblical resonances: refugee camps, border walls, humanitarian corridors, detention centers—they all mark places where multitudes

weep because they suffer unjustly. Acts of political resistance join that mournful chorus and with compassion accompany those sufferings. Once the corpse is lowered from the cross, Pilate can finally breathe easy—one less problem! To continue crying on the Golgothas of history is to keep alive the memory of unjust sentences and to remind the modern-day imperial Pilates of a pending responsibility that they cannot renounce by washing their hands.

There are very good reasons why totalitarian regimes violently repress public expressions of crying. Tears irrigate the ground of the always imaginable alternative reality not subjugated by power, thus making new beginnings possible:

Tears are a way of expressing solidarity in suffering when there is no other form of solidarity left.

[...] This tradition of biblical faith [Jeremiah's prophecy] is perfectly aware that affliction is the gateway to historical existence and that accepting that things have an end is what allows other things to begin. Naturally, kings think that the gateway of woe should never be opened, because it serves to bring down fraudulent monarchs. [...] The great enigma of biblical faith (which is at the same time its great intuition) is the conviction that only pain leads to life, that only affliction leads to joy, and that only acceptance of the end of things allows new beginnings.

[...] The alternative community knows that there is no need to resort to deception; it knows that it can remain in solidarity with the dying because they are the only ones who hope. Jeremiah, faithful to Moses, understood what the insensitive will never realize: that only those who cry and grieve can truly experience their own lives and keep moving forward. (Brueggemann 1983, 71-72)

The testimony of grief-stricken crying at the foot of the cross anticipates the exculpatory verdict that God will dictate in raising up Jesus. The definitive Judgment of God invalidates the sentence of guilt decreed against Jesus. In the resurrection Jesus is declared innocent, as are all the unjustly condemned who have been crucified throughout history. With the resurrection of Jesus justice is done—hopefully—for all of them. Compassionate, inappropriate, untimely crying sustains this hope as memory and exigency. Deranged crying breaks out of the social boxes created to contain it, thus inaugurating novel topologies and chronologies in which victims can live and find hope.

From Lament to Outcry

For crying to be expressed as political criticism, it has to occupy public space. For tears to affect the *polis*, they need to move from the private settings to which we tend to confine them to the collective domains where the institutional dynamics of justice and the common good are played out. The politicization of crying requires moving from individual lament to collective outcry; it requires shifting

from personal expression of discontent to joint declaration of demand. Tears become political when we cry with others.

In his work *Tragic Sense of Life*, Unamuno expresses the power of shared tears. Sharing the grief of Solon of Athens at the death of his son, he criticizes the impertinence of those who affirm that crying is useless:

It is quite clear that crying is useful, even if only to give relief, but we easily understand the deeper meaning of Solon's response to the impertinent. I am convinced that we would resolve many things if we all went out into the street and brought to light our sorrows. It could be they would all turn out to be one common sorrow. We would come together to weep and to cry out to heaven and to call upon God. Even if he wasn't listening, he would certainly hear us. What is most holy about a temple is that it is where we go to cry in common. A *Miserere*, sung in common by a multitude struck by misfortune, is worth as much as a philosophy. Curing the plague is not enough; you have to know how to mourn it. Yes, you have to know how to cry! And perhaps that is the supreme wisdom. For what purpose? Ask Solon. (1983)

The collective manifestation of grief needs no further explanation. According to Judith Butler, the mere fact that bodies come together, even in silence, is already a political expression, a highly significant corporeal performativity (2017, 15). Crying becomes politicized—an insistent complaint is made—to the extent that it is collectivized. Crying in common empowers our tears. The neoliberal logic of our consumerist societies promotes the atomization of individuals; it fosters privatized pity as a way of keeping at bay the collective outcry that would question and destabilize. We live in societies that are quite worthy of pity but are strangely quiet. The elderly death-camp survivor Stéphane Hessel, by loudly urging young people to be indignant,² invited them to move from lament to outcry and thus transform the resigned, politically correct mourning that shores up the present system into an indignant scream that rails against the tenacious *status quo*.

The account in the book of Exodus of the liberation of the Hebrew people can be read as an example of the *politicizing transition* from lament to outcry. Theologian José Ignacio González Faus has provocatively stated that in Exodus we hear news of God because of a labor conflict. The abject enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt was what called forth the liberating intervention of God in favor of his people, at the expense of Pharaoh. Without amending the power of this suggestive image, I propose to extend it from the sphere of labor conflicts to that of crying.

In verse 3:7 of the Exodus account,³ God beholds the plight of his people and then hears their cries. God sees the oppression before he hears their com-

2 HESSEL, Stéphane (2011). *¡Indignaos! Un alegato contra la indiferencia y a favor de la insurrección pacífica*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino.

3 “Then the LORD said, ‘I have observed the *misery* of my people who are in Egypt; I have *heard* their *cry* against the oppressors. Indeed, I know their *sufferings*, and I have come down to deliver

plaint: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.” But later, in verse 3;9, the verbs are reversed; hearing comes before sight: “The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.” God’s eyes see oppression and tyranny, while the people’s complaints and cries reach his ears. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that the audible expression of suffering through crying helps to avoid the risk of suffering’s being made a pornographic spectacle when situations of injustice are brought to our attention without the compassionate mediation of mourning.)

Beyond the changing priorities between vision and hearing, what ultimately determines divine intervention is God’s recognition of the people’s “suffering.” God is not a trade unionist who analyzes the working conditions of the Jews and then tries to negotiate with the Pharaonic management. Rather, God is simply moved by the suffering of those he loves, and he comes to their aid. Analyses make plans; suffering moves to action.

Public expression of harm suffered inaugurates the path of liberation. God reacts to outcry and complaint, which are nothing more than politicized collective mourning. Lament and outcry are not the same, though both may share the same tears. One can resignedly lament one’s bad luck, but self-pity does not produce or demand a political response. An outcry, however, contains within it a challenging imperative: one always cries out *before* someone. We “cry out to heaven” because we hope there will be a response to our desperate demand. Between the lament and the outcry lies the complaint, which can settle into the inner sanctum of resigned sorrow or, alternatively, present itself as an indictment filed before the court. Therapeutic crying functions as a healing outlet, political crying as a challenging accusation. Individual lament can be satisfied with the relief provided by affectionate consolation. The collective outcry, in contrast, seeks not relief but liberation, which is the demand inscribed in its very expression. The decisive factor in this Exodus story is not that God is an expert in discerning the signs of the times, an analyst who goes beyond the crying of the Hebrews to discover the oppressive regime of Pharaoh. If this were the case, the Israelites’ crying would be nothing more than a notification devoid of content. God does not respond to their cries by leaping over them in order to condemn on his own the awful injustice. Rather, it is the collective crying itself that “informs” God of the oppression that results in great suffering. In the same way that the expert ears of parents know how to interpret the nuances of the seemingly indistinguishable cries of their children (cries that sometimes demand food, other times hugs, cleaning, rest, etc.), God understands and correctly interprets what the people are saying to him through their lament: I have seen, I have heard, I know their sufferings.

them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ... The *cry* of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians *oppress them*.” (Ex 3:7-9) [Highlighting ours]

In the realm of liturgy, theologian Paula Depalma insists that ritual pay attention to cries and laments so that celebrations forge connections between the paschal mystery and the suffering crossroads of life (2022, 173). Liturgical spaces and times should integrate into celebrations the uncomfortable presence of outcry and complaint. Huddled beneath the protective cloak of the Easter experience, liturgical ritual is usually presented as a consoling space where the expression of sorrow can count on the balsamic warmth of lively hope. Complaint, however, breaks through the palliative framework of ritual; it rejects the reasoning of those importunate interlocutors who tried to justify divine innocence by convincing Job that he deserved his suffering. Outcry and complaint enter a plea with God; they take God out of the tribunal and into the elements in order to ask him to give an account for unjustified suffering, even at the risk of being wounded like Jacob (Gen 32).

Lamentation is found in the Psalms, in Hagar's complaint, in Jeremiah's protests, in the tears of Jephthah's daughter's companions, in Job's challenge to heaven, and in the cry of a Jesus abandoned by God on the cross, but lamentation is curiously absent from Christian prayer, particularly in the liturgical realm. (Johnson 2005, 329-330)

The Transversality of Crying

When our tears are joined together, we will perhaps discover that, deep down, we all share the same sorrow, as Unamuno suggests. In a global world that brings together apparently diverse causes and struggles, crying binds us to one another in communal mourning. The uproars at the climatic disasters, the migratory crises, the unending femicides, and the precarious situation of the homeless—they all flow from the same source. They are all tributaries of the same river of structural injustice. The shared outcries are situated at the intersection of all oppressions (Crenshaw 2017).

Acknowledging the depth of the well that produces all tears makes it possible to build dense networks of political power. Judith Butler explains this as follows:

It is imperative that we work across differences and build complex networks of social power. Our stories help us build links between the poor, the precarious, the dispossessed, LGBTIQ+ groups, workers, and all those subject to racism and colonial subjugation. These are not always separate groups or identities but rather are overlapping and interconnected forms of subjugation that oppose not only racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, but also capitalism and the devastation it causes, including the destruction of Earth and indigenous ways of life. (2021)

In moving toward transversality, crying has to break with the patriarchal anchorage that ties it to the idea that feminine nature is weak. The socially accepted masculine imperative dictates that “men don’t cry” or, conversely, that “crying is a woman’s thing.” Even a cursory review of history suffices to refute the cliché of masculine impassivity in the face of suffering. Achilles, Odysseus, Charlemagne, Roland, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola—the world’s literature is full of men who cried inconsolably.⁴ However, this literary evidence of men’s grieving has not dimmed the collective conception that even today continues to draw on the Aristotelian conception, that a key characteristic of manhood is the absence of compassion. As MacIntyre warns:

When [Aristotle] comments on the need human beings have for friends, especially in moments of adversity or loss, he maintains that those who possess manliness are distinguished from women because they do not want others to be saddened by their sorrow. They do not wish to make others suffer by sharing their loss. It clearly assumes that men who act like women in this respect are lacking masculine virtue. Moreover, magnanimous men, who are the models of virtue in Aristotle’s theory, avoid acknowledging in any way their need for help or comfort from others. (2001, 21-22)

This suppression of male crying because of a negative view of emotions can also be related to the internal dynamics of neoliberal capitalism: the market is not interested in having productive males take time off to cry. The public space co-opted by the market must be immune to pain and sorrow so that the assembly line never stops. As an old Flemish proverb says, “No plow stops for the death of a man.”

Suffering, Compassion, and Resistance

We cry when we are personally hurt, but we also identify compassionately with the suffering of others. Crying expresses sincere participation in the suffering of others, but it goes beyond mere empathy or reflexive tears at the sight of afflic-

4 Echoing Tom Lutz’s book, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (2001), Lucrecia Maldonado offers a selection of epic tales and poetic stories in which masculine crying is expressed intensely and without shame. According to her, “crying began to be considered a shameful attitude, especially for men, around the middle of the 18th century, when the Enlightenment elevated reason and logical thought over sentiment and intuition. Romanticism reinstated the value of human sensibility and its manifestations, but later, in the second half of the 19th century, positivism and the Industrial Revolution (especially the latter) called into question all crying, masculine or otherwise, because people who are crying are not reasoning, nor are they producing tangible goods; instead, they are restricting or preventing production, and perhaps even questioning productivity as a concept or value (2007, 13).

tion. The New Testament expresses a radical sense of compassion by using the Greek term *splanchnizomai* (from the noun *splanchna*, which designates the innards of sacrificial victims, the viscera). Several times the Gospels use this verb to refer to the visceral shock felt by Jesus (and also the Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37) when confronted with the suffering of others.

A strict reading of the Gospels reveals only three moments when Jesus is said to be crying: on hearing of the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35), when prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and when praying in agony in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46 and Mark 14:32-42). However, there are many other texts that reveal the compassionate intensity of Jesus' emotion, and we believe we are justified in interpreting them as suggesting the presence of tears. Indeed, Pope Francis does not hesitate to affirm this:

In the gospels, Jesus wept. He wept for his dead friend. He wept in his heart for the family that had lost a daughter. He wept in his heart when he saw the poor widowed mother carrying her son to be buried. He was moved and wept in his heart when he beheld the crowd like sheep without a shepherd. (2015)

Whatever the exegetical details, I am interested in stressing the connection between compassion and crying. Crying and compassion come together in the "truth" with which the body responds instinctively to extreme situations. Empathy can be modulated; it is controllable. But compassion is not; it compels us. Following Joan-Carles Melich, we affirm that morality—that which dictates what we *ought to do*—can be taught; we can be trained in it and even prepared for it. Compassionate action, however, cannot be foreseen, it is our spontaneous reaction to unexpected suffering:

Ethics is not morality; rather, it is morality's *blind spot* because it emerges in situations that call into question the "inherited regulatory framework." Ethics arises in limit-situations, in *situations of radical exceptionality*.

[...] Let us repeat it once more: ethics is the response I give here and now to the suffering of others. (2010, 90, 228)

Compassion stirs our entrails, shakes us out of our indifference, and dominates us completely. "Letting oneself be dominated," writes Helmut Plessner, "is the originating constitutive element of crying. It capitulates before a power against which it can do nothing more" (2007, 157).

Tears that do not flow from unhinging compassion run the risk of expressing "despotic crying," crying that sobs for others but does not share their pain; it is crying that embraces causes but not people. In the world of sociopolitical activism, we often find militants who go out of their way to commit to dozens of different causes. They engage in every struggle, making their own that old Latin proverb, "Nothing human is foreign to me." I am not going to judge those

who give their lives so wholeheartedly (indeed, I value the friendship of many “full-time” activists), but from the perspective of crying, we should realize that a person can feel concern for many just causes, but cannot mourn them all. We can feel pain for the world, but tears emerge when that universal pain touches our body concretely. The migrants who live miserably in refugee camps are no strangers to the great political, environmental, or feminist challenges of our historical moment, but what triggers their indignant crying is surely the absence of future opportunities for their children.

I am not encouraging welfare fragmentation or social indifference that renounces analysis and structured commitments. I simply want to say that, living as we do in a globalized world where, thanks to ubiquitous media, we are permanently besieged by massive suffering, our crying should function as a concrete universal to which we can anchor our commitment. Crying allows us to deactivate our guilty feelings of impotence, which Umberto Eco (1973) says are the great frustration of contemporary men and women, who feel incapable of responding effectively to the infinite wounds reaching them through the open windows of a globalized world. .

With no more backing than my own personal experience, I dare to affirm that people should not commit themselves to more causes than they are capable of crying over. The causes that mobilize us effectively are those that have made us shed a few tears. The experience of crying erects an invisible tower from which we can observe prophetically the ultimate truth of struggles and commitments. Out of the pain experienced at the death of his son, writer Sergio del Molino reflects on the rhetorical laments that do not reach the territory of tears—the place, we insist again, of all truth:

We are good at camouflage, those of us who have crossed paths with pain in its definitive, ineffable version (for example, my friend writing a posthumous text for her daughter, or the last hug I gave my son’s cold body—I’m talking about that kind of pain). We feel like foreigners most of the time, but nobody detects our accent. We seem as normal as everyone else, and we learn to celebrate in silence the fact that the pain has not done us in, that it is good to be alive—until, that is, misfortune is pervasive and apocalyptic hyperbole surrounds us. It is then that we give ourselves away as the intruders we are. We seem too calm, too skeptical, too withdrawn. We know that all that reflexive seriousness dominating society is rhetoric of the worst kind, a badly made soufflé. We know this categorically, instinctively, inexplicably. The terror will soon be forgotten, we think. All these words will echo for a while, but then they will also recede because they come from an anxiety that is calmed with pills, not from the pain that is the source of truths. (2021)

Far from blinding us, tears work as eyedrops that reveal reality: they purify our vision and show us the world as it is. “When our eyes fill with tears,” writes Melina Balcázar, “they reveal what they are truly made for: not to see but to cry and implore” (2017, 135). Crying explains why some theologies and philosophies

attribute epistemological and hermeneutical privilege to the gaze of victims. They don't see what we see. The gaze of victims is fundamental because, as Reyes Mate affirms:

It provides a perspective on reality that the rest of us cannot have: what for us is progress, for them is death. For some people, certain deaths are the misfortunes of progress toward full realization as a country, but for them they are a denial of all those values—call them freedom, respect, recognition—that we profess to pursue. Since their perspective is not the result of a doctoral thesis but the distillation of their own experience, what it tells us is this: either we will put a drastic stop to the logic of this process in which we are all involved, or the crime will end up consuming everyone. (2005, 28)

And Finally, Blow Your Nose!

To conclude this booklet that advocates the politicization of crying in societies that are indifferent, I make Lucrecia Maldonado's affirmation my own. After an exciting tour of the mysterious land of tears, she ends her reflection by justifying the countercultural value of the ordinary act of blowing one's nose. After all, it could be that the political value of crying comes down to its ability to stop time long enough... simply to blow your nose!

“No matter how many tears you shed, you always end up blowing your nose” (Lutz 2001, 362). And so it is. But that period between the start of crying and the act of blowing one's nose is perhaps one of the few opportunities that our current era grants us to turn inward and so be able to observe, beyond the everyday hustle and bustle, not only the particular meaning of our feelings, but also the entire history of human affliction that brings tears to our eyes, and that moves us to tears. This is what gives meaning to our emotional lives, both as individuals and as societies, and possibly also as a species that has not yet lost its ability to feel and to know how to say so with the mysterious, poetic language of crying. (2007, 20)

EPILOGUE: THE TEARS OF GOD THE FATHER

F. Javier Vitoria

The Christian tradition has always been aware of the inadequacy of the concepts and images we use to speak of God, though this does not necessarily mean that we must say nothing about him. To explain this caution about God language, I usually resort to the classic formula attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite: "In relation to God, negations are true while affirmations are insufficient." For those who understand, a few words suffice.

With this reservation in mind, I assert that any language about God that claims to be Christian must consider the *pathos* of God; we can speak of an *empathic God*, even if the term is inadequate. Were it otherwise, we would be falsifying God's relationship with humankind as revealed concretely in Jesus crucified. The Father, far from remaining impassive in the face of Jesus' suffering, suffered deeply with him. Indeed, we can even speak of the Father weeping on the cross of the Son as they emotionally expressed their "suffering together."⁵

In the prophet Jeremiah, Yahweh warned Judah and Israel (who was chosen to be his people, his mark of glory, and his honor: Jer 13:11) about the temptation to arrogance that would lead them to ignore his word and surrender to idols (cf. Jer 13:11-16). When the people did not heed the warning of Yahweh, he felt helpless in the face of their disobedience and said to them: "If you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock has been taken captive" (Jer 13:17).

The cross of Jesus is the sacred site of God's abyssal silence, the place where the Father laments the arrogance of the sinners who have silenced his incarnate

5 Despite all that has been said about impassibility and God, the world of emotions and especially the emotions *of* God have been largely ignored in theology. Nevertheless, a journey through the First Testament, assisted by the invaluable oral tradition of Judaism (the Talmud and the Midrash), has allowed Catherine Chalier to speak to us about God crying (2007).

Word, where he weeps for the suffering and death of his Son. I will take the liberty of attributing the first verses of the *Stabat Mater* to God the Father:

At the cross his station keeping,
Was the mournful Father weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.
Through his heart, the sorrow sharing,
All the bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword had passed.

The passion of Christ is prolonged historically in all those who suffer. “He remains in agony until the end of time,” says Pascal. Christ continues to suffer in those ensnared in this “concentration camp” of a world, above all the many victims of our murderous economic system: the poor, the homeless, the refugees, the starving children, the child soldiers, the victims of child prostitution, the battered women, and so many others. The tears and the laments of the “disposable people” of today affect God as much as did the cries of the slaves in Egypt in times past. And God, unlike Aristotle’s prime mover, is far from remaining impassive in the face of human tribulations; he does not turn a deaf ear. Rather, God, whose love is far greater than any severity, suffers deeply with his people (cf. Ps 39:13) to the point that he himself cries out when he hears his children’s cries of despair: “My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city” (Lam 2:11).

This vision of the Father weeping reminds us of the question that gives rise to this booklet: “What is the purpose of God’s weeping?” Or more pointedly: “Is the image of such a pathetic God, unable to hold back his tears and yet powerless to save his creatures, nothing more than a bit of belated, pitiful consolation as the atrocious abyss of suffering makes even the most faithful run the risk of blaspheming?” (Chalier 2007, 52).

This question of Chillier misses two crucial issues. First, that God’s tears, like his anger on other occasions, are an expression of his invincible love for men and women, for both victims and perpetrators. The Father’s tears provide the most resounding proof that he loves to the last consequences. The only thing that has saved human beings is that extreme Love, namely, God himself bearing the ultimate consequences of the Son’s incarnation, to the point of allowing the suffering of all humankind to reach his very marrow. God does not save human beings by freeing them from suffering and failure; rather, he makes himself present there among them. As Alfred North Whitehead’s beautiful formula reminds us, God is “our traveling companion, our suffering colleague who therefore understands us.” Instead of causing anguished rejection or questioning of God, evil can paradoxically become the decisive revelation of God and clear evidence of the unfathomable greatness of God’s Love.

Second, God's tears remind us of the grace and the responsibility we have because we are created in "his image" (cf. Gen 1:27). For that reason, "we human beings, in fidelity to the image inscribed in our hearts, far from blinding ourselves to present sufferings and current tragedies, must deepen our awareness and understanding of them" (Chalier 2007, 121-122).

Nevertheless, as Pope Francis has deplored, it often happens that "a globalization of indifference has developed":

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. (EG 54)

We need to empathize and sympathize ("suffer together") with those who are suffering. On order to live and love as God does, we need to share the cries of those who have been discarded. Sharpening our vision and becoming aware of the tragedies of our world requires us to alter our vision so as to assume the perspective of a face "which looks at me and out of which I look" (Franz Rosenzweig). Our indifference prevents us from seeing and becoming aware of the reality of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, of children starving in Yemen, of unaccompanied migrant children and teenagers who, burdened with the weight of their shocking stories, wander about our cities, condemned by far-right politicians who see them only as criminals. Their faces looking at us are like eyedrops (cf. Rev 3:18) that cleanse our eyes and allow us to see what before was invisible to us, namely, the (call to) reconciliation of God's daughters and sons (Matt 5:8), "even if we don't know how to take the next step" (Jacques Haers).

The tears shed by the merciful God place on our shoulders the task of alleviating the suffering of this world. The revelation of God on the cross is a permanent invitation for to undertake us this endeavor, to become one of God's "Cyreneans." Like Simon on the road to Calvary, we are called today, more than ever, to carry the unbearable multitude of crosses along the twisting network of rough roads that poor people travel. As Rabbi Moisés Cordovero reminds us, the divinity is "sick with love" (for men and women: cf. Cant 2:5), and people should know that their healing depends on God. We are told that God was "grieved by the misery of Israel" (cf. Judg 10:16) and felt the need to provide relief. Our task, therefore, is to experience the many ways in which the image of God is suffering now in this or that person, and our mission is act to alleviate their affliction. To be sure, no one can seek to be emancipated from their emotions [...] under the pretext of "resembling God" (Chalier 2007, 30).

Since the days of Jesus' crucifixion, Christians have considered the human debris caused by exclusion to be evocative of "*the immense weight of the eternal glory*" of God (cf. 2 Cor 4:16). God's permanent "exile" finds no other earthly abode than that wasteland where the superfluous people of the global village are

dumped and forgotten. In reality, they constitute God's sacrament, his most eloquent word and presence, his earnest plea for us to interrupt once and for all our long, fratricidal history of violence and exploitation. In those who are uprooted and dispossessed, the glory God bestows on all human beings is eclipsed; they have been deprived of their rights as children of God made in his image. But the God of glory continues to live freely in them, demanding their liberation.

That was the understanding of some of the witnesses at Auschwitz. Etty Hillesum, a young woman of faith, wrote in her diary:

If God doesn't keep helping me, then I will have to help God. Little by little, the entire surface of the earth is becoming a great concentration camp from which few escape. It is a phase we have to pass through [...]. I will always do my best to help God, and when I succeed, well, then I'll do the same for others. (2007, 135-138)

Finally, Paul Celan, who was not religious, leaves us this poem called "Tenebrae" (2002, 125):

We are near, Lord,
near and at hand.
Handled already, Lord,
clawed and clawing as though
the body of each of us were
your body, Lord.
Pray, Lord,
pray to us,
we are near.
Wind-awry we went there,
went there to bend
over hollow and ditch.
To be watered we went there, Lord.
It was blood, it was
what you shed, Lord.
It gleamed.
It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Our eyes and our mouths are open and empty, Lord.
We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.
Pray, Lord.
We are near.

Cristianisme i Justícia (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a study center that was created in Barcelona in 1981. It brings together a team of volunteer scholars and activists who desire to promote social and theological reflection that will contribute to the transformation of social and ecclesial structures. It is part of the network of Faith-Culture-Justice Centers of Spain and also of the European Social Centers of the Society of Jesus.

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Cristianisme i Justícia

Roger de Llúria, 13. 08010 Barcelona (Spain)
+34 93 317 23 38 • info@fespinal.com
www.cristianismeijusticia.net

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