The Significance of Robert Bellarmine's Theology for the Contemporary Chinese Catholic Context: A Reflection on his 1616 Letter to all Christians in China

罗伯·博敏神学对当代中国天主教语境的意义：对其1616年致中国全体基督徒书信的反思

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Abstract

St Robert Bellarmine's 1616 letter to all Christians in China carries two implications for Catholics in China. First, it calls for them to preserve and manifest faith through virtuous lives. For Bellarmine, an authentic Christian life begins with faith and progresses in the cultivation of virtues. Second, the letter anchors the Church's mission in her spiritual end rather than on temporal power, thereby reminding Christians to always look up to the heavenly kingdom. Similar themes emerge in Pope Benedict XVI's Letter to the Catholics of the People's Republic of China (2007), which inspires Catholics to serve society by conforming to Christ's humble example. This similarity demonstrates that Bellarmine's theological insights remain relevant to the contemporary Chinese Catholic context.

摘要

圣罗伯·博敏于1616年致中国全体基督徒的书信，对中国的天主教徒具有两重启示。其一，它呼吁信徒以善度生活来持守并彰显信仰。在博敏看来，真正的基督徒生活始于信仰，进而在德行的修养中不断成长。其二，该书信将教会的使命锚定于其属灵宗旨，而非世俗权力，从而提醒基督徒始终仰望天国。类似的主题亦见于教宗本笃十六世《致在中华人民共和国的天主教会的主教、司铎、度奉献生活着及信友的信》（2007年），该函激励天主教徒效法基督谦卑的榜样来服务社会。这一相似性表明，博敏的神学洞见在当代中国天主教语境中依然具有现实意义。

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Bellarmine's lifelong "obsession" with the issue of the rich and the poor, the duty of almsgiving, and of sharing wealth with those in need.

罗伯·博敏一生"执着"于贫富问题、施舍之责，以及与贫困者分享财富之道。

When we talk about Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the image of a great Counter-Reformation theologian of controversial theology usually comes to mind first. Undoubtedly, Bellarmine was one of the prominent theologians who engaged in the disputations with Protestants. At the age of thirty-four, he was appointed to the teaching position of controversial theology at Roman College in 1576, and the discipline was brand new to the Catholic theological tradition (Brodrick, 52). The fruit of his teaching is *Disputationes de Controversiis*, a great work in defense of the Catholic doctrines, for which he is still remembered by Catholics today. However, the defense of Catholic doctrines against Protestantism is one part of Bellarmine's legacy to us. Apart from being a scholar, Bellarmine was also an exemplary shepherd of souls in the Archdiocese of Padua, a hardworking papal delegate in France, and finally a Jesuit saint devoted to meditation on Christ.

For Chinese Catholics, what is the relevance of this early modern saint and scholar? It is not well known that Bellarmine, in the last stage of his life, wrote a letter to all Christians in China to encourage them in faith. This letter was written on 20 May 1616. The Chinese translation available to us was made from Portuguese. Despite not being as famous as Bellarmine's *Disputationes*, the letter still helps us see the significance of this saint in the Contemporary Chinese context.

当我们谈及罗伯·博敏（1542－1621）时，首先浮现于脑海的，往往是一位伟大的反宗教改革神学家、一位论辩神学的巨擘。毫无疑问，博敏是参与同新教论辩的杰出神学家之一。1576年，年仅三十四岁的他被任命为罗马公学论辩神学的讲席教授，而这一学科在天主教神学传统中尚属初创（Brodrick, 52）。其教学成果便是《论辩集》（Disputationes de Controversiis）。这部捍卫天主教教义的鸿篇巨著，至今仍为天主教徒所铭记。然而，以论辩抵御新教，只是博敏留给我们的遗产之一面。除学者身份之外，博敏还曾是帕多瓦总教区一位堪称楷模的牧灵者，一位在法国勤勉履职的教宗特使，也是一位潜心默想基督的耶稣会圣人。

对于中国天主教徒而言，这位近代早期的圣人与学者有何现实意义？鲜为人知的是，博敏在生命的最后阶段，曾致信中国全体基督徒，以勉励他们坚守信仰。此信写于1616年5月20日。目前我们所见的中文译本译自葡萄牙文。尽管此信不如博敏的《论辩集》那般广为人知，它仍有助于我们认识这位圣人在当代中国语境中的意义。

Bellarmine's letter to all Chinese Christians is related to his confrère, the Jesuit missionary Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628). Trigault arrived in Beijing in 1610, just one month before Matteo Ricci's death (Charbonnier, 140-141). But he was sent to Europe as a procurator to recruit missionaries to join the China mission. Arriving in Rome at the end of 1614, Trigault was in Europe until 1619. During his time there, Trigault translated Ricci's manuscript on the history of the Jesuits' missionary work until the 1610s into Latin and published *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (1615). At the same time, he also received papal approval for Chinese priests to say Mass in Chinese. It is believed that Bellarmine was one of the mediators through whom Trigault received the papal privilege (Worcester, 791-92). Trigault's book on the Jesuits' China mission and his personal interaction with Bellarmine may help explain the motive for Bellarmine's letter to all Christians in China: it was through Trigault that the Jesuit cardinal learned that the gate of the Chinese Empire was open to the Gospel. This exciting news motivated Bellarmine to write a letter to greet the brothers in China (Bellarmine, 71).

Bellarmine's letter reflects the spirit of Catholicism during the Catholic Reformation. In response to Martin Luther's *sola fide* that excluded the merit of good works, the Catholic theology of the period maintained that merits brought about by grace can help to renew the justified. The observance of the commandments of God and of the Church has its value in leading the justified to sanctification. For this reason, 'faith is active along with works' and works increase in the justice received through the grace of Christ (The Council of Trent's Decree of Justification, Ch. 10, Denzinger, n. 1535). In other words, while firmly holding that faith is the beginning of salvation, the Catholic doctrine affirmed by the Council of Trent denied that, without suffering with Christ, by faith alone one is made an

博敏的这份致中国全体基督徒的书信，与他的耶稣会同会会士、传教士金尼阁（Nicolas Trigault，1577－1628）密切相关。恰在利玛窦逝世前一个月，金尼阁于1610年抵达北京（Charbonnier，140－141）。此后，他被派往欧洲担任总务长（procurator），为中国传教区招募传教士。1614年底到达罗马后，金尼阁在欧洲一直逗留至1619年。其间，他将利玛窦记述耶稣会直至1610年代传教历程的手稿译为拉丁文，以《基督教远征中国史》（De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas，1615年）为名出版。与此同时，他还获得了教宗批准中国籍司铎以中文举行弥撒的许可。据信，博敏正是金尼阁获得这一教宗特权所经由的斡旋者之一（Worcester，791－92）。金尼阁关于耶稣会中国传教区的著作，以及他与博敏的私人交往，或许有助于解释博敏致信中国全体基督徒的动因：正是通过金尼阁，这位耶稣会枢机主教得知中华帝国的大门已向福音敞开。这一令人振奋的消息促使博敏提笔致信，向中国的信友们致以问候（Bellarmine，71）。

在内容上，博敏的书信体现了反宗教改革时期的天主教精神。针对马丁·路德“唯信称义”（sola fide）之说中排斥善功价值的立场，当时的天主教神学坚持认为，由恩宠所成就的功德能够使成义之人获得更新。遵守天主与教会的诫命，其价值在于引导成义之人走向成圣。正因如此，“信德与善功并行”，善功亦使藉基督恩宠所获得的义德日益增长（特利腾大公会议《论成义法令》第10章，Denzinger，n. 1535）。换言之，特利腾大公会议所确认的天主教教义，在坚定持守信德为救恩之开端的同时，否认人仅凭信

heir and obtains the inheritance (The Council of Trent's Decree of Justification, Ch. 11, Denzinger, n. 1538). Citing Peter's words, "be the more zealous to confirm your call and election through good works" (2 Peter 1:10), the exemplary Christian, according to the Council's vision, must be a child of God with lively faith expressed in good works. This spirit was clearly in Bellarmine's admonishment to Christians in China:

"For gaining eternal life, the belief in God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is not sufficient. We must also live in this world with temperance, justice and piety. Therefore, I would like to admonish you to press forward resolutely along the path the Lord has laid out, renouncing and guarding against all injustice, falsehood and deceit; to cultivate and promote every good works; to make progress in all divine virtues, beginning with faith in God, and treating one another with sincerity and kindness." (Bellarmine, 72)

Living a life of virtue is at the heart of Bellarmine's concern. Following the Council of Trent's integration of faith and good works, he called on Christians in China to live out their faith in Christ and give up everything incompatible with the spirit of faith. Bellarmine always contended that only the Catholic faith would bring people eternal life (Bellarmine, 71). But the main point here is how to make progress in moral cultivation and treat others in a virtuous way, because faith without works is dead. This feature of Bellarmine's spirituality is also affirmed by Brodrick's evaluation of Bellarmine's lifelong "obsession" with the issue of the rich and the poor, the duty of almsgiving, and of sharing wealth with those in need. (Broderick, 385) From 1611, Bellarmine moved to a house near the Roman College and did annual retreats in the Jesuit novitiate of Sant' Andrea every September or October. In this last stage of his life, he concentrated on writing spiritual and devotional works. One

德、不经与基督同受苦难，便能成为嗣子并获得嗣业（《论成义法令》第11章，Denzinger, n. 1538）。以伯多禄的话（"更要努力以善功来坚定你们的召选"伯多禄后书1:10）为基础，大公会议的坚持，模范的基督徒必须是信德活泼、以善功彰显信仰的天主子女。这一精神在博敏对中国基督徒的劝勉中体现得十分明确：

"欲获永生，仅信天主圣父及其圣子耶稣基督尚不足够。我们还须在此世以节制、公义与虔敬度日。因此，我愿劝勉你们坚定地沿主所铺设的道路前行，弃绝并警惕一切不义、虚谎与欺诈；修习并力行一切善功；在一切超性之德上不断精进，以信靠天主为起点，彼此以诚相待、以善相恤。"（Bellarmine, 72）

以德行度生，是博敏关切的核心。承袭特利腾大公会议将信德与善功融为一体的精神，他呼吁中国的基督徒活出在基督内的信仰，弃绝一切与信德精神相悖的事物。博敏始终坚信，唯有天主教信仰能引领人获得永生（Bellarmine, 71）。但此处的重点在于，如何在道德修养上不断精进，如何以德行待人，因为没有善行的信德是死的。博敏灵修生活的这一特质，亦为布罗德里克的评价所印证——布罗德里克指出，博敏一生"执着"于贫富问题、施舍的义务以及与有需要者分享财富的课题（Brodrick, 385）。自1611年起，博敏迁居罗马公学附近的一处寓所，每年九月或十月前往耶稣会圣安德肋初学院进行年度退省。在生命的最后阶段，他专注于撰写灵修与虔敬类著作。1614年退省的成果之一，便是《藉受造物之梯升向天主》（De ascensione mentis in Deum per scalam rerum creatarum）。在这部著作中，他将施

of the results of his 1614 retreat is *De ascensione mentis in Deum per scalam reum creatuarum*. In this work, he compared the almsgiving to the poor to the imperishable rewards in heaven. Although the topic is not central to the work, Bellarmine's comparison reveals how the issue is not alien from his whole spiritual and theological system. "The gold and silver which thou didst choose to see lie in idleness rather than spent on food for the poor, all these things, I say, will bear testimony against thee in the day of judgment." (Broderick, 386) Thus, we can see how the spirit is repeated in his 1616 letter to all Christians in China. For Christians as a minority in a huge country, a virtuous life is the sign of their faith in Christ, and only by living out their faith will they be able to endure the difficulties. Bellarmine's admonition is still valid for Christians today. In non-Christian countries, the witness of the Gospel and faith in Christ are displayed in how we treat those around us and how we live up to the standard of virtues. This is also the first step of spreading the word of God. In their addresses to Chinese Catholics, the recent Popes, from Pope John Paul II to Pope Leo XIV. appreciated the value of bearing the witness of Christ in Chinese Christians' daily lives. Almost four hundred years after Bellarmine's letter to all Christians in China, Pope Benedict XVI issued a letter to China's Catholics, in which he reminded Catholics in China of their mission to live as honest citizens: they need to incarnate the Gospel in their lives and bear witness to it through generous and effective service for the good of the people and the country's development. (Benedict XVI, 2007, n. 15) In a word, Bellarmine's idea of Christians of strong faith, which must be manifested in the progress of virtues, still makes sense for Catholics today in their efforts to put into practice the signs of love and unity.

舍穷人比作在天国获得不朽的赏报。尽管这一主题并非全书的核心，但博敏的这一比较揭示出，该议题与其整体灵修及神学体系并非毫无关联。“你宁愿让金银闲置，也不肯用来为穷人购置食物——这一切，我告诉你们，在审判之日都将起来指证你。”（Brodrick，386）这一精神在其1616年致中国全体基督徒的书信中得到了延续。对于身处一个泱泱大国中的少数群体而言，基督徒以德行的生活彰显其对基督的信仰，唯有活出信仰，方能经受住种种艰难困苦。博敏的劝勉对今日的基督徒依然有效，因为在非基督教国家中，福音的见证与对基督的信仰，正是通过我们如何对待身边的人、如何践行德行的标准来体现的。这亦是传播天主圣言的第一步。从教宗若望·保禄二世到教宗良十四世，近任教宗在致中国天主教徒的讲话中，均肯定了基督徒在日常生活中为基督作见证的价值。在博敏致信中国全体基督徒近四百年后，教宗本笃十六世曾致函中国天主教徒，提醒他们肩负以诚实公民身份生活的使命：他们需要将福音生活出来，并以具体行动慷慨地为人民利益及国家的发展作见证（本笃十六世，2007年，第15号）。总而言之，博敏关于信德坚固的基督徒须以德行精进来彰显信仰的理念，对于今日致力于践行爱与合一标记的天主教徒而言，依然具有现实意义。

Christians do not seek to establish a kingdom on earth, but always look up to a heavenly kingdom in which Christ is the head.

基督徒并不谋求在地上建立国度，而是始终仰望基督为元首的天国。

The second significance of Bellarmine's letter lies in his vision of the relationship between the Church and the State. Being a faithful Christian does not challenge one's identity in a particular society on earth. He made it clear that the Gospel doctrine does not seize earthly kingdoms:

"But now, by a blessing from heaven, they are beginning to understand that the teachings of the Gospel do not take away the kingdom on earth; rather, they promise and grant a kingdom from heaven." (Bellarmine, 72).

In this regard, the end of the Church's mission is not the power of the temporal order, but rather the kingdom of heaven. These words of Bellarmine reveal his theory of the Church's indirect power. According to this theory, there is a distinction between the Church and the state in terms of their ends. The Church has only one spiritual power, not temporal power, because her end is to save souls. Consequently, the Church has an indirect power in the temporal order. For Bellarmine, the pope's spiritual power is only extended to the temporal order on occasion:

"Rather we mean that the papal power is of itself properly spiritual, and therefore directly regards as its primary object spiritual affairs; but indirectly, that is, by reason of their relation to spiritual things, reductively, and by necessary consequence it regards temporal things as its secondary object. To this object the spiritual power turns, as Innocent III says, in particular cases (casu)." (Murray, 496)

博敏书信的第二重意义，在于他对教会与国家关系的见解。做为一个忠实的基督徒，并不会动摇一个人在世间特定社会中的身份认同。他明确指出，福音的教义并不夺取世上的国度：

"然而如今，承蒙上天降福，他们开始领悟到：福音的教义并不夺去地上的国度，反而应许并赐予来自天国的国度。"（Bellarmine, 72）

就此而言，教会使命的终点并非现世秩序中的权力，而是天国。博敏的这番话揭示了他的教会间接权力理论。依据这一理论，教会与国家在各自的目的上有所区分。教会仅拥有属灵的权力，而不拥有世俗的权力，因为她的使命在于拯救灵魂。因此，教会在现世秩序中拥有间接的权力。对博敏而言，教宗的属灵权力只是在特定情形下才延伸至现世秩序：

我们的意思是，教宗的权力就其本身而言是属灵的，因此其首要对象直接就是属灵事务；但间接地——即因其与属灵事物的关联——通过归约，以及必然的推论，它将世俗事务作为其次要对象。正如英诺森三世(Innocent III)所言，在特定情形下，属灵权力会转向这一对象。（Murray, 496）

So what the Church and Christians ultimately seek is God's kingdom and spiritual end. In fact. Christ came to this world not to establish an earthly kingdom, but to promise the heavenly kingdom. He voluntarily embraced the suffering and humiliation, even though he could have avoided them with his power. For this reason, in his letter, Bellarmine encouraged Chinese Christians to be joyful and conform to Christ's example in times of difficulty. Although his letter only arrived in China in the aftermath of Nanjing Incident of 1616, it still brought great consolation to Chinese Christians, as we can see in Paul Xu Guangqi's letter to Bellarmine (Xu, G.). Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI also mentioned undeniable principles: the Church "does not have a mission to change the structure or administration of the State; rather, her mission is to proclaim Christ to men and women, as the Saviour of the world, basing herself – in carrying out her proper apostolate – on the power of God" (Benedict XVI, n. 4). It is through this total dependence on God and conformity to Christ that Christians will be finally elevated. (Bellarmine, 73)

After 400 years, Bellarmine's letter to Chinese Christians remains significant. It reveals a Jesuit cardinal's ardent enthusiasm for the missionary work in China. It also tells us some fundamentals of Bellarmine's theology and spirituality. We see in it the exemplary manifestation of the spirit of the Catholic Reformation, which highlighted the importance of living out the faith by good works. This spirit aims to maintain communion within the growing Christian community and to spread Christ's message in Ming China. Finally, Bellarmine's view of the Church's power and of how Christians should confirm their faith in times of challenge highlights the importance of conforming to Christ's humble example. For this reason, Christians do not seek to establish a kingdom on earth, but always look up to a heavenly kingdom in which Christ is the head. With this vision in mind, Christians would be both faithful disciples of Christ and honest members of society.

因此，教会和基督徒最终所追求的，是天主的国度与属灵的终向。事实上，基督来到这个世界，并非为了建立地上的国度，而是为了应许天国的降临。他甘愿承受苦难与屈辱，尽管以他的能力本可避免这一切。正因如此，博敏在信中勉励中国基督徒在困境中保持喜乐，效法基督的榜样。尽管这封信直到1616年南京教案之后才抵达中国，但它仍给中国基督徒带来了极大的慰藉，这一点我们可以从徐光启致博敏的回信中看出(Xu, G)。同样，教宗本笃十六世在致中国天主教会的信中也提到了类似的原则：教会“不是为改变国家的结构或行政组织，而是向人宣扬基督，世界的救主，在履行其使命时依靠天主大能的助佑”。(Benedict XVI, n. 4) 正是通过这种对天主的全然依赖和对基督的效法，基督徒才能最终获得提升。(Bellarmine, 73)

四百年后，博敏致中国基督徒的这封信依然意义深远。它展现了一位耶稣会枢机主教对中国传教事业的深切热忱，也向我们揭示了博敏神学与灵修思想的一些基本要义。从中，我们看到了天主教改革精神的典范体现——这一精神强调以善功践行信仰。博敏书信的宗旨在于维系不断壮大的基督徒团体内部的共融，并在明代中国传播基督的福音。最后，博敏关于教会权力的观点，以及基督徒在困境中如何坚定信仰的论述，都凸显了效法基督谦卑榜样的重要性。正因如此，基督徒不应谋求在地上建立国度，而应始终仰望基督为首的天国。怀抱这一愿景，基督徒既能做基督忠实的门徒，也能做社会中诚实的成员。

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