

Article

Dialogues on the Issues of Theodicy in Late Ming Fujian

Qinghe Xiao 

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China; xiaoqh@pku.edu.cn

Abstract: This paper aims to illustrate the dialogues on the issues of theodicy in late Ming Fujian. The Catholicism that entered China in the late Ming dynasty had a competitive relationship with indigenous religions in terms of their meaning systems. Catholicism emphasized the omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipotence of God, which created tensions and contradictions with the reality of phenomena such as the suffering of good people and the existence of evil. In the late Ming period, scholars, believers, and missionaries in the Fujian region engaged in deep exchanges and dialogues on theodicy, reflecting the significant attention and consideration given to the problem of evil. This paper first analyzes the dialogues on theodicy between the Fujian scholar Ye Xiang-gao (1559–1627) and the missionary Giulio Aleni (1582–1649). Next, it explores the discussions on the problem of evil between ordinary believers in the Fujian region and Giulio Aleni in their daily lives. Finally, it examines how anti-Catholics used the problem of evil to criticize Catholicism, and it also identifies the characteristics and impacts of Catholic theodicy in the late Ming and early Qing periods.

Keywords: Catholicism; theodicy; the problem of evil; Fujian; late Ming and early Qing

1. Introduction

In the eighth month of the eighth year of Emperor Kangxi's reign (1669), under the emperor's instruction and support, Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688) submitted a memorial to the court requesting the exoneration of Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666) in the calendar case (历狱案 1666–1669). After a joint trial by the Six Ministries, the main perpetrator, Yang Guangxian, was sentenced to death. However, considering Yang's old age, Kangxi pardoned him and his elderly wife. Following the trial, officials from the Six Ministries posed an intriguing question to Verbiest:

“If the Lord of Heaven (Deus/God) encourages people to do good to receive happiness 福, why is it that those who do good do not receive happiness in this life, and those who do evil, and harm others are not immediately punished? Why is it that evil people often enjoy wealth and lifelong happiness, while good people often suffer from poverty, hardship, and illness? Does this not lead people to doubt that there is no sovereign over heaven and earth, or to suspect that the sovereign is unjust (Verbiest 1669, p. 1)”.

The officials argued that the phenomenon of good people suffering and evil people enjoying happiness in the world suggests either that there is no sovereign over heaven and Earth, or if there is, that the sovereign is unjust. This question highlights the significant problem of evil in religion known as theodicy.

This so-called theodicy is a theoretical system developed to resolve the contradiction between God's omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipotence and the existence of evil (Meister and Moser 2017, p. 1).¹ Theodicy exists in various religions, each addressing the problem of evil differently. Generally, solutions can be approached from two perspectives: denying the existence of evil in the world, such as considering evil as the privation of good rather than an entity or substance (Augustine 1961, 2003; Aquinas 1924, 2003); or acknowledging the existence of evil but suggesting that evil in the world has a particular purpose, or believing that rewards and punishments are fulfilled in the afterlife, even though there may be retribution in the life, thus allowing for the existence of evil.²



Citation: Xiao, Qinghe. 2024.

Dialogues on the Issues of Theodicy in Late Ming Fujian. *Religions* 15: 851. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070851>

Academic Editor: Yuehua Chen

Received: 15 June 2024

Revised: 5 July 2024

Accepted: 12 July 2024

Published: 15 July 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

During the late Ming period, Catholicism in China engaged in exchanges and dialogues with local Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism regarding the retribution of good and evil. The Catholic theodicy provided a more satisfactory response to concerns about the problem of evil by local scholars and believers, which played a positive role in expanding the influence of Catholicism and in missionary efforts. However, criticisms by the anti-Catholics used the problem of evil to launch attacks against it. This article takes the Fujian region as a case study to analyze the dialogues and discussions on theodicy between late Ming scholars, believers, and missionaries. It also examines the criticisms of Catholic theodicy by its opponents, thereby discussing the characteristics and significance of Catholic theodicy during the late Ming and early Qing periods.³ The problem of evil in theodicy primarily includes natural evil and moral evil (Aquinas 2003, pp. 75–80; Weingartner 2003, p. 7; Keller 2013). This article focuses on discussions of theodicy in the Fujian region, specifically addressing issues such as the existence of natural evil, why good people suffer, the relationship between evil and free will, the first ancestor's sin, and other related issues.

2. Meaning System, the Problem of Evil and Theodicy

According to the perspective of the sociology of religion, religions can provide believers with a relatively coherent meaning system. This system can explain various anomalies, especially providing explanations for the suffering or unfair encounters that believers may experience, thereby helping believers avoid crises of meaning or faith. A religion's meaning system integrates all individual and collective experiences into a single, universal explanatory system, which scholars often refer to as a worldview.

Meaning is different from the things or events themselves; it is the understanding and recognition of things or events conferred by the explanatory system, thus involving value judgments. Therefore, to some extent, becoming a religious believer is not only about joining the organization of that religion but more importantly about accepting the meaning system provided by that religion and using it to explain natural or social phenomena, providing meaning and truth support for the world they experience.

In other words, a person may choose a particular religion partly because they find that religion's meaning system more reasonable or better at explaining their experiences of society and the world. Religions also socialize their meaning systems into worldviews and values, and through sacralization, they gain normative power. As Peter Berger (1929–2017) pointed out, a meaning system is both explanatory and normative (Sun 2001, p. 57).

In the process of propagation, religions promote their meaning system through various means, thereby attracting potential believers to accept these systems. Therefore, a coherent meaning system is particularly important for the spread a religion. In an open religious market, the religion that can offer a more effective meaning system may achieve greater success in competition.

In the religious context of the late Ming period, Catholicism was able to attract the attention and conversion of scholars such as Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), partly because it provided a more effective meaning system. This meaning system could address the life crises that believers encountered or offer explanations for the life difficulties they faced. Xu Guangqi, for instance, regarded the Learning of Heaven (Catholicism) as “real heart, real knowledge, real practice”. Before converting to Catholicism, Xu Guangqi had once converted to the cult of the Three-in-One Teaching; similarly, Yang Tingyun (1557–1627) and Zhang Xingyao (1633–1715?) had believed in Buddhism, then both converted to Catholicism. For them, choosing Catholicism involved a process of comparison between religions. They chose Catholicism because its meaning system seemed more reasonable.

Yang Tingyun compared Catholicism with Buddhism, identifying 30 similarities (such as concepts of heaven and hell). However, Yang Tingyun believes these similarities existed because Buddhism had “borrowed” or “derived” them from Catholicism. He also noted differences between Catholicism and Confucianism in aspects such as “one God” and the “immortality of the soul”, considering Catholicism to be more detailed and nuanced than

Confucianism. Zhang Xingyao compared Catholicism with Confucianism, and concluded that Catholicism complements, supplements, and surpasses Confucianism. He points out that there were 20 similarities between Catholicism and Confucianism, 21 areas where Catholicism supplements Confucianism, and 15 areas where Catholicism surpasses Confucianism. For Yang Tingyun and Zhang Xingyao, the meaning system provided by Catholicism is evidently more reasonable compared to those of Buddhism and Confucianism.

However, the problem of evil may pose a threat to a coherent meaning system because it reflects the contradiction or tension within Catholic thought. If not handled properly, this can undoubtedly affect the competitiveness of Catholicism. As the officials from the Six Ministries pointed out, if this issue remains unresolved, it may lead people to question the core of Catholic doctrine, namely the existence of God, or to question his fairness, implying that God may fundamentally not exist.

3. Dialogue between Ye Xianggao and Giulio Aleni on the Problem of Evil

In a broad sense, any religious explanatory system addressing the problem of evil can be considered theodicy. In Christian history, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) once converted to Manichaeism because of its effective solution to the problem of evil. After conversion to Christianity, Augustine illustrated that evil is the privation of good, rather than a substantive entity. However, due to the influence of original sin, humans are incapable of doing good on their own and thus require the grace and redemption of God (King 2019, pp. 155–93; Evans 1990, pp. 1–16). Both natural evils and moral evils (sin) in the world are, in fact, the consequences of human fallibility. Natural disasters and moral wrongdoing inevitably raise questions about suffering. This leads to the key question of theodicy: why do devout and virtuous people suffer?

In *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* 天主实义, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) discusses the related content of theodicy, such as why God would create poisonous insects. Ricci believes that these so-called “evil creatures”, while harmful to the human body, are beneficial to the human spirit as they serve as warnings for humans to fear God. Furthermore, when God initially created the world, all things were not harmful to humans. However, due to the sin of the Adam and Eve, “the creatures also began to oppose humans (Ricci 1965, p. 508)”.

In the late Ming period, Catholic missionaries such as the Jesuits systematically introduced theology concepts to believers such as the doctrine of God, Christology, and Mariology (Standaert 1998; Criveller 1997), and this incorporated medieval scholastic philosophy, thereby providing a relatively rich intellectual resource for addressing the problem of evil. However, Catholic writings were divided into two categories: for believers and for non-believers (mainly literati). In the later writings, which were a blending or synthesis of Christianity and Confucianism (Starr 2016, p. 39), missionaries seldom mentioned Christology, and therefore rarely used Christology to address theodicy issues.

3.1. Discussion on Natural Evil

In 1625, Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), a Jesuit missionary, was invited to Fujian by Ye Xianggao, the retired Grand Secretary of the Cabinet. In 1627, Aleni engaged in discussions on theodicy and other topics with Ye Xianggao, Cao Xuequan (1574–1646), and other Confucian scholars.⁴

After refuting Buddha, Taiji 太极, Li 理, and Qi 气 as creators, Aleni proposed that God is the sole creator of heaven, Earth, and all things, and rules over them. Ye Xianggao expressed doubts about this idea. He believed that there is no spirit 神 before the existence of the body 身, if there is no body then the spirit does not exist. Similarly, there is heaven and Earth before the existence of the Lord 主 (Aleni 1966, p. 442).

This reflects Ye Xianggao’s simplistic materialistic ideology, similar to Fan Zhen (?450–515)’s view, which is that the blade comes before the edge. Ye Xianggao understands God as similar to the human spirit, capable of governing and controlling the thoughts and

movements of the body. God can govern and control heaven and Earth, and their relationship should be similar to that between spirit and body.

Aleni provided a detailed explanation, stating that God existed before heaven and Earth. Heaven and Earth are like a palace, which must have a master creator before its formation. Since heaven, Earth, and all things cannot exist independently and cannot create themselves, there must be a creator, and that is God.

According to Aleni, since the creator surpasses the realm of Li and Qi, creating and dominating heaven and Earth, then everything in the world must be the work of God. If so, Ye Xianggao keenly asked, “Are good and evil also the work of God?” Aleni responded to this question with a denial. He pointed out that “the transformations and manifestations of all things were endless 万物之化生无穷” and were all within the omnipotence of the Creator. However, evil cannot be simplistically attributed to God. Aleni pointed out

“Indeed, God is supremely good, and humans are created by God, inherently inclined towards goodness. If there are deeds of evil, they are indeed created by humans themselves. Those who commit evil are defying the command of God. How can it be said that both good and evil are the work of God? Instead, individuals naturally prefer goodness and abhor evil. It is through this preference that God administers rewards and punishments to encourage and discipline humanity for generations to come. This principle is reflected in the classics of your esteemed nation, where it is said that performing good deeds brings happiness, while committing evil deeds brings calamity. This aligns perfectly with the doctrine of retribution for good and evil (Aleni 1966, pp. 445–46)”.

Aleni indicated that God is supremely good, and humans are created by God and bestowed with a divine mandate. When individuals perform good deeds, they are following the divine mandate; when they commit evil deeds, they are defying the divine mandate. Therefore, it can be said that goodness in individuals comes from God, while evil cannot be said to come from God but rather from individuals themselves. God then administers corresponding rewards and punishments based on individuals’ good or evil deeds. Aleni believed this principle aligned with the Confucian doctrine of retribution for good and evil.

Ye Xianggao likely accepted Aleni’s response, acknowledging that God is the source of all goodness and that “those who commit evil indeed sin against God themselves”. However, Ye Xianggao still had doubts about God’s creation of all things, as some elements of nature seem to serve no apparent purpose for humans. He asked why creatures like various harmful species with claws, fangs, and venom exist if they do not serve to benefit human and may even cause harm. He wondered about the purpose of such creations in the world (Aleni 1966, p. 449).

Ye Xianggao here actually raised a crucial question of theodicy, which is how to understand the existence of evil in the natural world. Ye Xianggao was aware of the contradiction between the evil in nature and the omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience of God. God’s omnibenevolence should not permit the existence of evil in the natural world. Aleni’s explanation was that everything created by God is inherently good and beneficial to humans. However, due to humans’ limited understanding and shallow wisdom, they may fail to recognize the inherent goodness of these elements in nature and may not know how to utilize them for good purposes.

Aleni pointed out that even those creatures perceived as harmful or useless may have alternative uses. For example, he mentioned that certain insects, such as ants and maggots, which may seem useless, can be utilized in medicine. Aleni mentioned that in his hometown, there is a highly venomous snake called the “wei bai la 未白刺”, from which a medicine can be derived to cure various illnesses and poisons. Scorpions, though capable of inflicting harm, can be kept in glass containers and exposed to the sun to extract their venom, which can also be used to counteract poisons (Aleni 1966, p. 450).

Furthermore, Aleni highlighted the interconnectedness of the food chain, where seemingly useless organisms play a role in sustaining other life forms. He gave the example of “sparrows feeding on insects; if humans consume sparrows, then the insects are not con-

sidered waste either” (Aleni 1966, p. 450). Therefore, these seemingly harmful or useless creatures are indeed beneficial.

Moreover, Aleni believed that fierce animals like elephants and tigers do not harm infants, and even lions and bears can be tamed by humans. Instances where these animals cause harm to humans are often due to humans initiating harm towards them, causing them to “harm people in self-defense”.

Like Matteo Ricci, Aleni believed that some of the evils in the natural world serve a deeper purpose. He suggested that although they can harm the human body, they actually benefit the human inner spirit (Aleni 1966, p. 451). Aleni pointed out that these so-called “extraordinary harms” such as fierce animals, earthquakes, and floods are not meaningless natural occurrences but are used by God to warn humans. They serve to make people “fear the wrath from above, refrain from frivolous behavior, repent, and seek forgiveness. Thus, temporary calamities lead to eternal happiness”. Therefore, these sufferings are actually a form of “warning” that encourages people to avoid indulgence and misconduct, take responsibility for their actions, and aspire to transcend the illusory world in pursuit of true happiness (Aleni 1966, p. 451). This explanation closely resembles the Confucian concept of the Mandate of Heaven 天命.

In addition to serving as a warning to humans, Aleni also believed that the evils in the natural world are actually punishments from God for the sin of the first humans. According to the Bible, after the first humans sinned, they suffered various hardships. Aleni also pointed out, “Originally, nothing could harm humans, but when the first ancestor disobeyed the commandments of the Lord, creatures began to harm people, and their harm became rampant”. The reason for this is “to represent the authority of God, to punish the guilty, and to warn those without guilt (Aleni 1966, p. 452)”.

From this perspective, Aleni employed two strategies in explaining the evils in nature. Firstly, he did not believe that true evil exists in nature because God created all things for humans, and thus everything is inherently good. It is just that human understanding is limited, and they may not comprehend the usefulness of things that seem harmful or useless. Secondly, he acknowledged the existence of evil in nature, but attributed it to God’s punishment for human sin or as a means to warn and remind humans. Therefore, what is perceived as evil actually serves a good purpose. This aligns with the notion articulated by St. Augustine that everything created by God is good (Augustine 1961, p. 148).

3.2. Discussion on the Suffering of Good People

Ye Xianggao believed that “the Creator creates all things for the sake of humans, and there has never been anything that is not beneficial to humans. Those who suffer harm bring it upon themselves, which is perfectly reasonable”. He agreed that it is rational for God to use the evils in nature to punish sinners, but he also acknowledged that good people suffer harm as well. So how can this be explained? Ye Xianggao turned to the Confucian concept of Qishu (气数), which is akin to the Mandate of Heaven, suggesting that it is the decree of heaven that things happen as they do. The issue Ye Xianggao raised is essentially a classic problem in theodicy: how to explain the suffering of the good. Ye Xianggao believed “If this doubt is not clarified, I fear that it will not be possible to dispel the doubts of the other people, and thus they will not be able to be converted to Catholicism (Aleni 1966, p. 453)”.

Ricci once cited a Western adage: “Good is accomplished in its fullness (of good), but evil is accomplished only in one time (of evil) (Ricci 1965, pp. 528–29)”. In other words, “Good is never fully achieved; only when it is fully achieved can it be considered pure goodness (Li 1965, p. 353)”. Aleni also pointed out “If someone lacks even one-tenth of goodness, they cannot be considered a pure good person. Sometimes, individuals may maintain appearances of virtue in public but engage in immoral behavior in private; or they may start with good intentions but end up doing evil; or they may be evil but perform deeds that resemble goodness; or they may appear virtuous but lead others into sin. On the other hand, for someone to be considered evil, it only takes one act of evil. Why? Because

goodness requires fullness, while evil only needs one time (of evil) (Aleni 1966, p. 453)". According to Aleni's understanding, becoming a good person is extremely difficult, while becoming evil is much easier. Therefore, Aleni refuted Ye Xianggao's assertion that suffering is experienced by good people, as he believed that the one who suffers may not be a good person. This explanation bears resemblance to the Buddhist concept of karma, where the fortune or misfortune experienced in this life is a result of one's own deeds, though Christianity believes that the consequences are primarily in the afterlife.

Aleni further emphasized that judging whether humans are good or evil requires considering both their outward actions and their inner intentions. While people often only observe outward behavior to distinguish between good and evil individuals, God can discern the innermost thoughts of people. Therefore, someone perceived as good by worldly standards may not necessarily be considered good in the eyes of God. Aleni asked "Who knows that those envied by people might actually be condemned by the Lord of Heaven? Those who appear to be gentlemen on the surface but are actually villains behind the scenes—who can tell them apart (Aleni 1966, p. 454)?" Like St. Augustine in his later years, Aleni held a negative view of human nature, which is evil (Pan 1997, p. 531). Thus, the suffering experienced by so-called good people is seen as a punishment from God.

Aleni's explanation evidently left Ye Xianggao dissatisfied. If, as Aleni suggested, what people deem as good may not necessarily be so, and if it is believed that the suffering of ostensibly good people is a deserved punishment, then this might lead individuals aspiring towards goodness to feel disheartened, possibly even hindering their pursuit of moral excellence. Ye Xianggao further questioned whether virtuous individuals might be punished by God due to hidden faults, then how should those individuals widely recognized as wicked be punished? In reality, these blatantly wicked individuals often receive worldly rewards instead of punishment. "Or instead of punishing them directly, punish their descendants? If not, could leaving them with an eternal infamy be considered a form of punishment? Or perhaps the daily inner turmoil they experience is punishment enough (Aleni 1966, p. 455)?"

The doubts raised by Ye Xianggao actually reflect three types of retribution views in Confucianism, namely retribution on descendants, bad reputation after death, and troubled conscience. These three views are quite representative in Confucianism, especially the former two, which had a significant impact on traditional society. Retribution on descendants is closely related to ancestor worship and is to some extent influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, explaining the fortunes and misfortunes of descendants in the present world through the merits and demerits of ancestors. In the late Ming dynasty, Wen Xiangfeng believed that a bad reputation after death indicates that the spirit of those who bear it have dissipated, while conversely, a good reputation indicates that the spirit is eternal (Xiao 2022, p. 110).

Aleni first denied retribution on descendants because Christianity supplies an ethics of individual responsibility, emphasizing that individuals bear their own good and evil, otherwise it would be unfair. However, in order to reconcile with the doctrine of original sin, Aleni believed "Regarding the happiness or misfortunes passed down to descendants, it can only be said to be the remnants of rewards or punishment from ancestors; but the merits or demerits of the descendants themselves cannot be replaced (Aleni 1966, pp. 455–56)". Christianity believes that the impact of original sin on individuals is also a continuation of the punishment of ancestors, but it cannot be said that the sins of ancestors are borne by descendants for punishment, and the punishment individuals receive comes entirely from their own sin. Secondly, Aleni accepted that bad reputation and troubled conscience can be part of retribution, but they are not the main part of retribution, only a continuation of it, that is "not the main retribution but only its remnants". Aleni clearly aligned with Confucianism in recognizing that bad reputation and troubled conscience are part of punishment, but the main punishment still comes from God.

Ye Xianggao actually raised another important issue in the theory of theodicy, namely how to deal with moral evil. Aleni pointed out that fortunes and misfortunes, as well as the

status of being noble or humble in reality, are all temporary, so one should not question the justice of God just because so-called evil people seem to be happy. This is because humans consist of flesh and “spirit” (soul), and when humans die, their bodies return to dust, while the spirit is immortal.⁵ Moreover, the human spirit is bestowed by the Lord of Heaven, which is called nature, so after death, humans must “return to their roots and receive judgment”. This judgment is for everyone, “since the beginning of heaven and earth, there has been no person born who does not receive from God the commandments to do good and expel evil, and there is no person who dies without returning to the Lord of Heaven to receive reward or punishment. This reward or punishment, it should be known, is small during life but immense after death (Aleni 1966, pp. 456–57)”. This judgment takes place after death, so Aleni pointed out that the retribution of good and evil or reward and punishment is primarily fulfilled after life, not during life.

In reality, when good people suffer, it is because they have slight evils, so God sends punishment. Once this punishment is completed, only pure goodness remains, and after death, they will receive eternal reward. Similarly, when evil people prosper, it is because they have slight goodness, so God rewards them. Once their goodness receives complete reward, only pure evil remains, and after death, they will receive eternal punishment. As for those who are evidently indulgent in evil and refuse to repent, that is, those who are purely evil, God will surely bring heavy punishment upon them.

Furthermore, just as God uses natural evils to warn people, God also bestows worldly happiness upon evil individuals for a purpose, namely “to stimulate their hearts with kindness, so that they may know grace and change their ways, never to commit wrong again”. If evil individuals persist in their wickedness, “the deeper the grace they receive, the heavier their guilt becomes, and there is no forgiveness to be had. It is only right for them to receive eternal punishment. Moreover, not only will they be punished after death, but even during their lifetime, they will often suffer greatly (Aleni 1966, p. 458)”.

Therefore, whether it is natural evils or moral evils, or the suffering of good people and the happiness of evil people, they all come from the will of God. Though the rewards and punishments of God may vary in severity and timing, they are precise and exact, and there is never such a situation “where someone is clearly evil that the Lord of Heaven does not know and does not punish accordingly (Aleni 1966, p. 458)”.

3.3. Discussion on Evil and Free Will

Aleni, through the use of Christian theodicy, particularly the thought of the will of God, provided a more reasonable explanation to Ye Xianggao’s doubts. The core of Aleni’s explanation lies in the notion that Ye Xianggao or people’s doubts about the justice of God arise from human limitations, namely the inability to comprehend the will of God behind these seemingly unjust phenomena. Of course, this explanation also raises new questions, such as whether God intentionally sets traps for humans, since God clearly knows that humans will sin, why does not he intervene in a timely manner to prevent it and allow them to sin, only to be punished in the end?

Ye Xianggao’s doubts are quite profound. He questions why, since God knows that human beings will inevitably commit sins, does he still allow them to do so. He expressed this as: “If humans do good and evil, rewards and punishments cannot be avoided, then why does God, when creating humans, not ensure they commit more good and less evil? If goodness is difficult to attain, why not appoint virtuous rulers? If all rulers were benevolent and righteous, then wouldn’t the world be at peace for all eternity (Aleni 1966, pp. 458–59)?”

Aleni explains that God, being perfectly good, endowed humanity with goodness as well. He says, “When Lord of Heaven creates humans, he endows them with understanding to discern good and evil. He also grants them the ability to desire and avoid, allowing them to choose freely. Each individual possesses knowledge and ability and is free to act according to their own will (Aleni 1966, p. 459)”.

It is precisely because humans have free will that they can make choices between good and evil, and it is through this freedom that corresponding rewards and punishments can be justly administered. If humans did not have free will, they would not be responsible for their actions' consequences. If God forced humans to do good, then the merit for that goodness would belong to God, not to humans, and humans would not deserve reward. In other words, humans' goodness and evil must be related to their will. This is also the fundamental difference between natural behavior and moral behavior. For instance, fire can produce heat, and the sun shines, but neither fire nor the sun can be rewarded because heat and light are inherent to their nature, not a result of their conscious choice.

Aleni further pointed out that although humans have free will, why do they often choose evil over good? This is because of the influence of original sin, which has corrupted human nature. Additionally, humans are also influenced by inherited traits (what he called Bingqi "禀气") and local customs. Missionaries often attributed external factors leading to human sin to the "three enemies" (the flesh, the devil, and worldly customs). Aleni's explanation here is quite similar to the concept of the "three enemies". Aleni believed that under the influence of original sin and the three enemies, humans are unwilling to do good. He said "Considering humans' inclination towards evil, it would not be reasonable for Lord of Heaven to compel them towards good. Each person has their own inclinations towards good and evil, and each should receive corresponding rewards and punishments. Therefore, it is unreasonable to say that Lord of Heaven does not intervene (Aleni 1966, p. 460)".

Ye Xianggao still found Aleni's explanation perplexing. According to Ye Xianggao's understanding, since God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent, he should make the world a perfect one, free from various sufferings and injustices such as the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked, and there should not even be the existence of evil people. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) had a similar thought, arguing that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds (Zhang 2010, p. 433; Jiang 2005, p. 199). This view is clearly outside of common sense.⁶

Ye Xianggao then questioned Aleni, asking, "If the Lord of Heaven creates humans for good, but they tend towards evil, and Lord of Heaven has the power, why doesn't he eradicate evil completely? This would preserve goodness in the world. Is it because he cannot do it, or because he does not want to (Aleni 1966, p. 464)?" In other words, Ye Xianggao believed that God should make the world a better place.

Aleni pointed out that the Lord of Heaven is omnipotent, but he chooses not to eradicate evil completely because everyone is a sinner. If the Lord of Heaven were to eliminate all evil people, there would likely be no one left escaping his judgment (Aleni 1966, p. 464). Aleni also pointed out that the Lord of Heaven is just, but he is also merciful. Therefore, the Lord of Heaven tolerates evil people out of his compassion, hoping for their repentance.

It is evident that Ye Xianggao and Aleni had different visions on this point. Ye Xianggao believed that evil people should be destroyed by God for the sake of the righteous, reflecting God's mercy towards the righteous. On the other hand, Aleni believed that God does not destroy evil people to give them a chance to reform and start afresh, demonstrating God's mercy towards sinners.

The fundamental difference between the two lies in their judgment of reality. Ye Xianggao, based on his simple moral beliefs, saw the existence of evil people as evidence of cruelty or injustice towards the righteous. Aleni, on the other hand, based on Catholic doctrine, saw everyone as a sinner and believed that humans should not feel morally superior to others, as only God has the authority to judge (Song 2019, p. 188).

Amid the perilous political environment of the late Ming dynasty, Ye Xianggao, the leader of the Donglin Party, had a certain "obsession with purity" in terms of morality. This is also considered by scholars as a significant reason for the intense political factional strife during the late Ming period (Li 2021, p. 125). Ye Xianggao insisted that every effort must be made to eradicate evil, otherwise it would be unfair to the righteous. For Ye Xianggao, the existence of evil in reality is an undeniable fact, and he questioned, since God exists, why tolerate the presence of evil? Therefore, Ye Xianggao raised this question to Aleni:

“While the retribution of good and evil is known to be certain, who can truly see it clearly? Moreover, a wicked person harms many righteous ones, so why not punish them openly, to serve as a deterrent? Similarly, the righteous must also receive their due reward openly, to inspire others to do good and refrain from evil (Aleni 1966, p. 465)”.

3.4. Discussion on the Retribution of God

Ye Xianggao believed that if retribution is primarily fulfilled in the afterlife, then this theory of retribution would have little impact in the present world. This is because individuals only directly experience rewards and punishments in the present world, which leads them to have a concrete understanding of divine governance. If rewards and punishments are embodied in the afterlife, they would not directly affect human behavior in the present world.

Aleni offered the following explanation: whether rewards and punishments are embodied during one’s life or afterlife, they are determined by the will of God. Aleni believed that God does not immediately reward or punish for each good or evil deed, because “if one good deed is rewarded immediately, and one evil deed is punished immediately, then within one’s lifetime or even within one day, where good and evil are mixed, immediate rewards and punishments would demonstrate a lack of divine authority, leading to disorder and confusion (Aleni 1966, pp. 465–66)”. Furthermore, performing one good deed is not sufficient to be considered pure good, while one can repent and amend for a single evil deed. Therefore, immediate rewards or punishments are unnecessary. Aleni stated that “Performing a single good deed does not make one pure good; it requires constant self-discipline and perseverance until the end to be considered a pure good person. Similarly, committing a single evil deed does not immediately classify one as wicked; if one reflects and reforms in the future, they may not fall into the category of the wicked (Aleni 1966, p. 466)”.

Aleni also drew upon Confucian non-utilitarian ethical views to argue that using rewards to encourage goodness or to reward virtuous acts may lead to impure motives for doing good. He stated “If one follows goodness merely for the sake of rewards, the doer of good cannot help but harbor thoughts of worldly happiness, which taint the purity of their moral character. Therefore, true virtue requires purity of conduct, devoid of desires for worldly happiness, and should be performed solely to fulfill one’s duty towards God, in order to achieve genuine virtue (Aleni 1966, p. 466)”.

It is important to note Aleni’s reference to “worldly happiness 世福” here. For Catholics, worldly happiness is not considered “true happiness” 真福, as individuals may perform good deeds for the sake of “true happiness”. Matteo Ricci emphasized that “benefits do not harm virtue”, which means one can pursue good and avoid evil for the sake of benefits in the afterlife. There is a distinction between these two statements: doing good for worldly happiness can lead to impure motives, but doing good for the afterlife benefits is acceptable. However, both worldly and afterlife happiness are seen by Confucians as impure motives. Confucianism advocates doing good without ulterior motives, which Matteo Ricci strongly criticized in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*.⁷

Aleni provided explanations from two perspectives regarding why God does not use worldly happiness or misfortunes for reward or punishment, or why God tolerates the existence of evil.

Firstly, worldly happiness and worldly misfortunes are not sufficient for reward and punishment because worldly happiness are not true happiness, and worldly misfortunes are not true misfortunes. Compared to true happiness, worldly happiness is insignificant. Moreover, what the sages desire is not worldly happiness; only true happiness can fulfill the wishes of the sages. Additionally, poverty and adversity can refine one’s character; if worldly happiness were to be bestowed, it could lead to arrogance and indulgence, thus potentially causing more harm. Similarly, worldly misfortunes are trivial; death is considered the greatest misfortune, yet evil people are not afraid of death, so worldly misfortunes are insufficient to punish them.

Secondly, eternal happiness and eternal misfortunes after death are true and significant enough to reward good and punish evil. They can also judge the good and evil done in one's lifetime, thereby demonstrating true fairness and reasonableness. However, Aleni also acknowledged that in order to avoid the lack of motivation caused by the uncertainty of rewards and punishments after death, there are still rewards and punishments in this life. Therefore, "within the clear and visible realm, the Lord of Heaven provides manifestations to show people, such as granting great virtues with honors, fame, and longevity, while extreme evil is punished with calamity and misfortune. These occurrences serve as repeated reminders and frequent warnings (Aleni 1966, p. 468)".

In response to the perilous political environment in which Ye Xianggao lived, particularly during the cruel persecution of Donglin scholars by the Eunuch party in the Tianqi period (Zhang 1999, pp. 200–1), Aleni repeatedly emphasized that this is a form of refinement for the virtuous. "If we consider why wicked people often oppress the good, I believe it is because gold must be melted in fire to reveal its true brilliance. As Saint Augustine said, the Lord of Heaven allows the wicked to exist in the world either to await their repentance or to forge the good into pure virtue. If someone becomes tarnished by their trials, then it is not true virtue. Gold is tested by fire, and virtue is tested by hardship. Is this not true? Those who die upholding righteousness and justice, as the Scriptures say, are truly blessed. They do not die in vain, because they have attained the Kingdom of Heaven. Such profound mysteries cannot be comprehended by human reasoning (Aleni 1966, p. 468)". Aleni's explanation seems to resonate with the Confucian concept of the Mandate of Heaven.

Theodicy in Catholicism is closely related to Catholic doctrines and thoughts, such as the doctrines of God, judgment, free will, good and evil, the soul, heaven and hell, the three enemies, (original) sin, and Christology. Catholic theodicy is a comprehensive meaning system that allowed missionaries to reasonably explain and address questions about the problem of evil posed by figures like Ye Xianggao, thereby increasing its appeal to the scholar-officials.

After discussing with Giulio Aleni, Ye Xianggao remarked "The teaching of the Lord of Heaven shines like the sun and moon at noon, illuminating the minds of people. When individuals are immersed in old tales and scholars eagerly pursue novelty, it is no wonder they diverge in their paths. Your discourse, sir, is like parting heavy fog to behold the azure sky, clear and without doubt (Aleni 1966, p. 493)". Ye Xianggao even said that he himself accepted these teachings (Ye 1997, p. 449), though he did not convert to Catholicism finally. The Ye family later became patrons of Giulio Aleni and the Catholic Church in Fujian. Ye Xianggao's eldest grandson, Ye Yifan, not only donated funds to build the Fuzhou Cathedral but also established the Catholic Benevolence Society 仁会 (Chen 2018, pp. 160–64).

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the theodicy of Catholicism in the late Ming Dynasty shared similarities with Confucianism and Buddhism, but also had significant differences. Catholicism emphasized that good people must endure suffering, viewing worldly suffering as a form of tempering for the virtues. If one does good deeds for the sake of worldly happiness, these motives are considered impure. Salvation is entirely determined by God, and thus, one must endure the presence of evil in this world. These ideas are somewhat akin to the Confucian concept of the Mandate of Heaven. Catholicism views natural and moral evils as the consequences of the first ancestor's fall, a divine punishment for their sins that continues to affect their descendants. Additionally, Catholicism holds that retribution is mainly fulfilled in the afterlife, with heaven and hell serving as places of reward and punishment, and the immortal soul as the object of this retribution. These notions are similar to the Buddhist concept of karma.

These similarities suggest that Giulio Aleni deliberately borrowed or referenced relevant theological concepts from Confucianism and Buddhism (such as enduring worldly suffering) to better persuade Ye Xianggao or convey Catholic doctrines, making it easier for scholars like Ye Xianggao to understand and accept them. However, Catholicism holds that both retribution and reward are determined by God, and a person's salvation is en-

tirely dependent on God. This theocentric theological perspective created a significant gap between Catholicism and local religions.

4. Discussion on the Issues of Theodicy in Daily Lives

The dialogues between Ye Xianggao and Giulio Aleni occurred in the early summer of the Dingmao year (1627) of the Tianqi era. In August of the same year, Emperor Xizong passed away, followed by Ye Xianggao's death due to illness. Before his death, Ye Xianggao did not witness the eunuch faction, who committed many evils, receiving their deserved punishment. Ye Xianggao's intense focus on the problem of evil was, to some extent, a psychological projection of his opposition to the political darkness of his time and his pursuit of justice in the human world.

During the years of the Chongzhen era from 1630 to 1634, missionaries like Giulio Aleni and André Rudomina (1594–1632) were engaged in missionary work in various parts of Fujian. They also had similar dialogues with local believers such as Li Jiubiao, which included discussions on the problem of evil. These discussions often took place within the context of everyday life, and much of the content was closely related to the daily observations of the believers, which is totally different from writings on abstract theological concepts (Starr 2016, p. 28).

4.1. Discussion on Evil People and Natural Evil

On 23 March 1630, during a dinner with believers, Aleni and the attendees discussed the issue of pirates. These pirates had initially been pacified but later resumed their plundering activities at sea. Liu Liangbi, one of the believers said, "The evil nature of those people has since long been formed and can no more be changed (J. Li 2002, p. 58; Zürcher 2007, p. 220)".

However, Aleni disagreed, "That is not true. If you ascribe a man's wickedness to his nature (性), this actually would mean that he is free from sin. You may compare it to fire: fire has the power to burn a whole prairie, and yet it is free from sin, because burning is its very nature. The Lord of Heaven is supremely good. How could it be that he has endowed man with an evil nature? Even those in whom original sin has not been eliminated all are capable of goodness. There only are slight differences in their physical constitution as regards strength and weakness or purity and impurity. Goodness and wickedness, which constitute the dividing line [between people], are caused by practice (習). However, even in an evil man conscience (良心) never has been extinguished. If he is willing to rouse himself and repent, his merit even will surpass that of a good man (Zürcher 2007, pp. 220–21; J. Li 2002, pp. 58–59)".

Giulio Aleni opposed the statement that human nature is inherently evil. If one believes that human nature is inherently evil, then evil people would not need to bear the consequences of their bad actions, just as fire burns naturally and cannot help doing so. Aleni also believed that when evil people repent, their merits 功 can surpass those of good people (Starr 2016, p. 34). Aleni also used the Jesuits' mission in Africa as an example to prove that "human nature can be made good (Song 2019, p. 219)".

Why is evil allowed to exist? This is because the Lord of Heaven hopes for the repentance of sinners. André Rudomina, in his daily sermon, gave an explanation in detail: "Heaven covers and earth sustains us without partiality, and sun and moon shine upon all alike; they make no distinction between the good and the bad. And again, compare it with the fields: good people have their fields, and bad people have theirs, but rain and thaw moisten them all—do these ever choose between good and bad? The Lord of Heaven loves both the good and the bad. That he does not punish sinners right away is because he takes his time, hoping that one day they may abandon evil and return to goodness. Therefore, when you are praying you also must do so for all sinners". (Zürcher 2007, p. 238; J. Li 2002, pp. 74–75)".

On August 2nd, in the fourth year of the Chongzhen reign (1631), a believer named Yu Tigao asked Aleni "If wind, rain, dew and thunder are controlled by the Lord of Heaven,

why does he sometimes let rain and sunshine be out of season, so that the five grains do not flourish? (Zürcher 2007, p. 275; J. Li 2002, p. 119)?” Yu Tigao’s question is actually similar to Ye Xianggao’s view that “the unevenness of good and evil is all determined by God”. If everything in the world is governed by God, then why do natural disasters such as droughts and floods occur?

Aleni’s response was that droughts, floods, and other natural disasters are the means of God’s punishment. “Since the Lord of Heaven loves mankind, he actually wants to let rain and sunshine come at the right times, so that the five grains grow in abundance. But nowadays people often offend against the Lord of Heaven’s commands. How then can you expect all things to happen in compliance with their wishes (Zürcher 2007, p. 275; J. Li 2002, p. 119)?”

Yu Tigao seemed dissatisfied with Aleni’s response and further asked “It is quite appropriate that untimely rain and sunshine serve to punish sinners. But why do they also affect good people (Zürcher 2007, p. 275; J. Li 2002, p. 119)?”

This pertains to the issue of good people suffering. Giulio Aleni’s response to this was identical to his response to Ye Xianggao: “You cannot speak of purely good people if they are not fully endowed with all kinds of goodness. How can that be said of those who nowadays are called good people, but who actually commit not a few transgressions? And if there still are some truly good people, they will know with what intention the Lord of Heaven sends down those punishments; it will make them redouble their effort to fear the Lord and to practice self-cultivation. Therefore, untimely rain and sunshine surely constitute one way by which the Lord shows his love of good people (Zürcher 2007, p. 275; J. Li 2002, p. 120)”.

This brief answer has two layers of meaning. First, what people consider good may possibly not be good because pure goodness is achieved through all kinds of goodness, while evil can stem from a single fault. The so-called good people may have hidden faults or sins, especially since people can only see outward actions, not inner intentions. Second, even if a person is truly good and suffers misfortune or hardship, they should not doubt God but instead become more fearful and self-reflective. In other words, the suffering of good people serves a more significant purpose.

On the ninth day of the same month, a hurricane struck Fuzhou, causing extensive damage to buildings and uprooting trees. A believer named Weng Yunjian discussed with Aleni about the invasion of bandits⁸ and the earthquakes during which the Earth could be rent open and swallow the people. Aleni took this opportunity to explain the reason for the existence of natural evils. He said “Day by day the Lord of Heaven preserves and fosters those people, and yet they do not know how to repay his kindness. But if he occasionally sends down his punishment, they are outraged and accuse him of being unfair. They do not think of the bounties they are receiving every day, and till the end they go on enjoying them, without any merit (Zürcher 2007, p. 286; J. Li 2002, p. 129)?”

Giulio Aleni regarded natural evils as God’s punishment. He also emphasized that wealth and poverty are forms of God’s reward and punishment. “He may use wealth and high status to reward people for their good deeds, or use poverty and low status to make people pay for their faults. That is just one way in which the most venerable Supreme Lord shows how virtue is rewarded and evil is punished. However, while rewarding goodness with wealth and high status [the Lord] wants these to be used as a building site for merit. If the ascent to higher rank and salary only stimulates licentiousness, then wealth and high status are nothing else but the womb of disaster. While letting people pay for their faults with poverty and low status, he wants these to be used as proper tools for grinding [one’s character]. If suffering hardship leads to greater diligence in self-cultivation and self-investigation, then poverty and low status are nothing else but the beginning of happiness (Zürcher 2007, pp. 304–5; J. Li 2002, p. 150)”.

4.2. Dialogues between Giulio Aleni and Yan Zanhua: Poverty, Disability, Premature Death, and the Omnibenevolence of God

In the second eleventh month of the same year, a believer named Yan Zanhua asked Aleni “Don’t we human beings have the power of self-determination 自专? Because of that power even the Lord of Heaven will not force us to do things. It follows that even he does not know our future good and bad deeds. Why? Because these are determined by ourselves. As described by you, his omniscience would seem to imply that all our good and bad deeds are predestined. Are omniscience and predestination not incompatible (Zürcher 2007, pp. 330–31; J. Li 2002, p. 187)?”

Self-determination here means free will. Yan Zanhua astutely observed the contradiction between human free will and God’s omniscience. He suggested that since human actions are determined by free will, they cannot be known by God. However, since God is omniscient, this implies that all human actions are predetermined. This presents a conflict between predetermination and free will. Aleni, on the other hand, argued that there is no contradiction between omniscience and free will. However, he acknowledged that there might be a conflict between predetermination and free will.

Yan Zanhua further asked Aleni about why some people are wealthy while others are poor if they are all created by God. For Yan Zanhua, poverty was essentially a form of “evil”. Since God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, why would he allow some to experience poverty? Aleni responded by stating that worldly happiness is not true happiness, and worldly adversity is not true misfortune; worldly happiness can be a form of sin, while worldly adversity can be a ladder to virtue.

However, Yan Zanhua argued that both wealth and poverty can lead to good or evil outcomes. He said that “Considering that paupers also may be bad, and that well-to-do people also may be good, one naturally would prefer to be well-to-do (Zürcher 2007, p. 390; J. Li 2002, p. 263)”. Xu Guangqi also advocated a similar idea, suggesting that “when people are wealthy, benevolence and righteousness follows”. However, Aleni believed that people should not ask God for wealth and status because both wealth and poverty are ordained by God. People can only obey God’s will, “I do not wish to obey the Lord of Heaven but I want him to obey me’. No sin could be greater (Zürcher 2007, p. 391; J. Li 2002, p. 264)”. In other words, Aleni believed that people should submit to God and be content with what they have.

Yan Zanhua not only felt discontent with the inequality of wealth and poverty but also perceived injustice in people’s disabilities or defects. Yan Zanhua asked why, if Lord of Heaven is omnibenevolent, people are born with disabilities. Aleni pointed out that physical defects come from one’s parents and are unrelated to Lord of Heaven. Yan Zanhua asked if the body has some defect, why does the Lord of Heaven not repair it while it is still in the womb, to make it perfectly beautiful (Zürcher 2007, p. 391; J. Li 2002, p. 265)? Aleni argued that God does not alter them to demonstrate His omnipotence. Yan Zanhua remained puzzled about the usefulness of disabled individuals. Aleni explained that whether people are born whole or with defects, each has its purpose, but people fail to understand it, leading to doubts about God. Aleni further explained that through suffering from disabilities and pain, individuals can achieve merits by enduring and others can gain merits by helping those in need. Therefore, the most effective capital for benefiting oneself and others is none other than suffering. Aleni believed that disabilities and suffering could lead to merits for the disabled and opportunities for others to accumulate merits through compassion and charity. Thus, this is the purpose of God in creating people with disabilities.

Yan Zanhua still expressed dissatisfaction with Aleni’s explanation and asked him further: “The five senses organs of a person are also tools to do good. Now, if some are lacking and incomplete, does it not mean that these tools are also incomplete? If they are deficient, does it not hinder one’s ability to do good? Why would God allow this?” Aleni tested him by asking what the three enemies are. Yan Zanhua replied “The flesh, worldly customs, and the devil”. Aleni pointed out that since the flesh is one of the three enemies,

if it is deficient, but the spirit is intact, this is akin to removing one enemy. Aleni implied that this should be considered a great fortune (Zürcher 2007, p. 393; J. Li 2002, p. 268). In other words, people should not harbor resentment towards God or doubt His goodness because of their disabilities; instead, they should be grateful.

However, Yan Zanhua raised another question: what about those who die prematurely, departing from this world shortly after birth? Aleni pointed out three reasons for premature death, all of which can be accepted without regret. He also categorized those who die prematurely into three groups, each of which should be appreciated. The three reasons refer to the inherent qualities of parents, the balance of nurturing, and the adjustments made by the Creator regarding one's virtue or vice (Zürcher 2007, p. 394; J. Li 2002, p. 269). The three categories include good people, bad people, and infants without virtue or vice. Aleni believed that the premature death of good people allows them to depart from the world early and enjoy heavenly blessings, which is a grace from God. For bad people, premature death reduces their sins, as the longer they live, the heavier their sins become. As for infants without virtue or vice, their premature death means they ascend to heaven after receiving baptism. Even if they are not baptized, they only go to the Limbus (Zürcher 2007, p. 394; J. Li 2002, p. 270). Aleni concluded that regardless of the circumstances of premature death, one should be grateful to God.

4.3. *Dialogues between Giulio Aleni and Li Jiubiao: First Ancestor's Sin and the Omnipotence of God*

In the summer of the seventh year of Chongzhen's reign (1634), in May, Aleni arrived at Haikou Town in Fuqing County. A local believer named Li Jiubiao asked Aleni, "I have heard that when the Lord of Heaven created our first ancestor, he endowed him with an excellent nature. How then could he be disobedient (Zürcher 2007, p. 447; J. Li 2002, p. 341)?"

Li Jiubiao's question is actually related to the problem of evil; that is, if God created the first humans to be perfect, why did they sin? Additionally, since God is omniscient, he should have foreseen that they would sin, so why did he not prevent it? Aleni's explanation was as follows: God creates humans with a nature inclined towards goodness, but he did not predestine them to be good. In other words, God gave humans free will, the freedom to choose between good and evil. If humans were predetermined to be good and had no freedom to choose, it would be like fire being predetermined to be hot or the sun being predetermined to emit light. In that case, any goodness in humans would be solely attributed to God, not to humans themselves, and they would not deserve any reward. Therefore, "That he [God] endowed man with an excellent nature means that he made him capable of opting for goodness by himself, for only then [man's actions] could be followed by reward or punishment (Zürcher 2007, p. 447; J. Li 2002, p. 341)".

Li Jiubiao asked again, "If a vessel is fine, the maker must have been a good artisan; if it shows defects the maker must have been clumsy. Now already right at the beginning, shortly after his creation, our first ancestor became guilty of disobeying the Lord's command, and therefore people have their doubt about his Creator (Zürcher 2007, p. 447; J. Li 2002, p. 342)?" However, Aleni believed that the imperfect first humans reflected God's omnipotence, for their imperfections were transformed into the most perfect, "as if there were a broken vessel, and were made to be a marvelous work of art. Doesn't this reflect God's omnipotence?" Moreover, it is because the first humans sinned that the grace of salvation comes from God's incarnation, "So if all the people of past and present have received his grace of redemption, it actually is due to our first ancestor's disobedience. For us that one episode of his disobedience is a reason to be thankful and to require the Lord's favor. How can it be that man blames the Lord for it, instead of singing his praise (Zürcher 2007, p. 448; J. Li 2002, p. 343)?"

Li Jiubiao also asked "But it has sufficed to contaminate all later generations with original sin. [Apparently] human nature is easily deflected from its original perfection, and I only wanted to find out how this has started (Zürcher 2007, p. 448; J. Li 2002, pp. 343–44)".

According to Aleni, it is because of original sin that human nature has the difference between rigidity and softness, and therefore human beings have the merit of correcting and restraining themselves, and their suffering is very great, and their enjoyment of rewards is very high (Zürcher 2007, p. 448; J. Li 2002, p. 342).

From Aleni's response, it can be seen that due to the evils, defects, or sins in reality, one should not doubt God, but should be grateful, because God allows the existence of these evils for a purpose. Therefore, Aleni's thought on theodicy is centered around teleology, with God's will as the starting point and human merits as the destination. Aleni emphasized that regardless of poverty or wealth, life or death, prosperity or adversity, one should not doubt God, but should instead obey His commandments.

Li Jiubiao asked Aleni, "To obey the commandments is indeed right, but I wonder if we can also pray (for good fortune)?" At that time, Li Jiubiao was still preparing for the imperial examination, tirelessly striving for success and fame. Aleni reminded Li Jiubiao that worldly happiness is not true happiness, and one's wealth and status are determined by God. Whether God grants or withholds wealth and status, there is a deeper meaning behind this. Aleni emphasized that if God bestows, one should certainly be thankful for His grace; if not, one should especially refrain from harboring resentment or discontent (Zürcher 2007, p. 460; J. Li 2002, p. 359).

Li Jiubiao raised another point: "In this world one often sees how good people have to meet with misfortune, while bad people enjoy worldly happiness. That the Great Lord allows this to happen may have a deeper meaning, but the common people are too ignorant to fathom it, and therefore they feel very uncertain about it (Zürcher 2007, p. 460; J. Li 2002, p. 360)". Li Jiubiao was already familiar with Aleni's explanation, which suggested that God allows these phenomena to exist for deeper purposes or intentions. However, for ordinary people, this leads to doubts about God. Aleni responded to Li Jiubiao with a story, the essence of which is that good people suffer because they have hidden faults or minor transgressions: "After his fault has been redeemed what remains is pure virtue, and therefore nothing but eternal happiness will be his lot". On the other hand, the wicked enjoy happiness because of their minor virtues, "but once that minor goodness has been compensated, all that remains is pure wickedness, and therefore he will fall prey to the fires of hell (Zürcher 2007, p. 461; J. Li 2002, p. 361)". Therefore, regardless of the circumstances in the world, one should not harbor doubts about God.

Li Jiubiao further inquired of Aleni, "Recently when reading the *Posthumous Commentary of Master Pang* 庞子遗论 I found that shortly before the Last Judgement the people will be hit by the plague, and that everything will be burnt in a huge fire descending from heaven. If that is done to sinners it is most appropriate, but I suppose that at that time there also must be good people. Why will those punishments descend upon them as well (Zürcher 2007, p. 465; J. Li 2002, p. 366)?" Li Jiubiao believed that only the wicked should suffer from calamities sent down by the Lord of Heaven, not the virtuous. Aleni pointed out that few people are purely virtuous in their lives, so during the end times, disasters such as floods, fires, wars, etc., will serve to purify their sins, and they need not further descend into purgatory.

In his last years, Giulio Aleni resided in Yanping, where he often faced shortages but continued to give generous alms to others, which led to frequent illnesses that concerned his followers. Aleni comforted them, saying "disease is also a gift from the Lord of Heaven; it serves to fortify us and to clean us from our sins-why do you worry (Li 1650, p. 8)?"⁹ Aleni regarded his ailments as punishments from God for his own faults. Li Sixuan also recorded that Aleni always expressed gratitude to God regardless of whether he was experiencing prosperity or adversity.

It can be observed that both prominent figures like Ye Xianggao, leader of the Donglin Party, as well as ordinary believers like Yan Zanhua and Li Jiubiao, engaged in discussions with missionaries on the core issues of theodicy. They keenly perceived the tension and contradiction between the existence of evil and the concept of God, and engaged in deep reflections on the relevant content of theodicy (Starr 2016, p. 28). These dialogues reflect

the high level of attention paid by the scholars and Catholics in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties to the problem of evil,¹⁰ as well as their yearning for justice in the world. Missionaries like Aleni used the theological resources of Catholicism to provide systematic answers to the issues of theodicy and combined them with the theological ideas of Confucianism and Buddhism to provide believers with a more reasonable and comprehensive meaning system (Song 2019, p. 189). This helped to avoid the crisis of meaning and faith that could arise from the problem of evil.

Aleni achieved unprecedented success in missionary work in Fujian (Menegon 1997, p. 260), with anti-Catholics referring to it as “the foolish people are lining up to convert to Catholicism”. As mentioned earlier, Ye Xianggao and his family became protectors of the Church in Fujian, while Yan Zanhua and Li Jiubiao became leaders of the local Christian communities.

The meaning system of religion itself is a kind of value system and thus a set of behavioral norms. Late Ming Catholicism had relatively high demands on believers, especially in fulfilling religious obligations such as attending Mass. In Fujian, the believer Chen Zhaojia once said to Aleni, “When non-believers see how we always say our prayers without fail, how we always recite [texts] and thank the Lord without end, and how we always take the trouble personally to go to church, they laugh at us and say that [our religion] makes us suffer (Zürcher 2007, p. 500; J. Li 2002, pp. 415–16)”. Therefore, even though Catholicism can provide a more comprehensive meaning system, its high demands on behavior (such as loving enemies, obeying the Ten Commandments, removing the seven sins, and the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays) can deter people from converting to Catholicism, and even lead to apostasy (Li 1650, p. 3). Zhu Jizuo once told Aleni, “After listening to your teaching, I yearn for it, but the rules are quite strict, and it’s not easy for me to adhere to them (S. Li 2002, p. 316)”.

5. The Anti-Catholics’ Discussion on the Problem of Evil in Catholicism

The theodicy of Catholicism often regards evil and suffering in the world as manifestations of God’s will, primarily aimed at purifying or warning people. Therefore, whether one is poor or experiences premature death, it is believed one should be thankful to God. From the perspective of social psychology, this theodicy involves attributional and compensatory mechanisms. Through attributional mechanisms, individuals attribute their difficulties and sufferings to their own faults or sins, aligning themselves with the will of God. This attribution helps individuals understand and accept their own circumstances while reinforcing their faith and obedience to God. The compensatory mechanism involves viewing deficiencies and shortcomings in the present life as compensation for enjoying true happiness in the afterlife. This mindset provides individuals with psychological support to endure their current hardships, as they believe in eventual rewards in the next life.

The anti-Catholics, on the other hand, utilize the problem of evil to criticize Catholicism, arguing that the Catholic meaning system is inconsistent and contradictory (Starr 2016, p. 36). For instance, Xu Dashou pointed out that Catholicism believes that all good deeds are “enabled by” God, while all evil deeds are “committed by” humans themselves. Xu Dashou believed this implies that human nature is entirely evil, then why would God create such humans: “As for God, how could he produce such an evil seed to spread among all people? And if humans doing good is merely delusion, why would this God go to the trouble of creating and rewarding Himself (Xu 2000, p. 383)?”

Giulio Aleni once told Yan Zanhua that regardless of the circumstances of an early death, one should be grateful to God. Children have no personal sin, only original sin, and once they are baptized, they ascend to heaven. However, Xu Dashou was quite dissatisfied with this notion, which he considered contrary to “common sense” or “common feelings”. He believed it was Catholicism “deceiving the ignorant, making them fortunate for their child’s early death, and grieving that the child had not been baptized”. “If this is the case, then when a family has a child, they should wish for the child to die young and also wish

for the child to be ignorant, rather than for the child to grow old and wise. Does this make any sense (Xu 2000, p. 393)?”

Chen Houguang perceived a contradiction between natural evils and God’s creation of living beings to nurture people: “Since he creates things to nurture people, yet also creates things to harm people, God’s acts of giving life and taking life are at odds”. He also realized the contradiction between the first humans’ sin, which infects all descendants, and the perfect goodness and justice of God: “Why should the first humans’ sin against God result in the shared suffering of countless generations of descendants? Let’s set aside the side the issue of God’s punishment being overly harsh, this statement also contradicts an earlier claim (namely that Catholicism opposes the idea of retribution upon descendants) (Chen 2000, p. 403)”.

The Catholic Church regards the devil as one of the three enemies, often tempting people to sin. The existence of the devil creates tension with the omnipotence of God. Anti-Catholics found it absurd that the first humans and the devil (namely a fallen angel) was created by God. They mockingly suggested that if Lucifer was indeed the first created being by God and warned about his rebellion, it would imply that God is the source of all evil, which is so ludicrous that it could provoke laughter (Xu 2000, p. 386).

Shi Ruchun pointed out the contradiction between the first humans’ sin, the transmission of original sin, and the omnipotence of God, using it to attack the rationality of the Catholic meaning system. Shi Ruchun argued that if God is truly omnipotent, he should not have allowed the original sin to occur and pass it on to descendants. He asked why, if God is omniscient and omnipotent, he did not eradicate the root of evil from the beginning, allowing it to spread and contaminate humanity. This, according to Shi Ruchun, contradicts the notion of God’s omnipotence, as it seems to allow evil to thrive unchecked (Shi 2000, p. 461).

Shi Ruchun even proposed the idea of “God deceiving the people”, suggesting that God knowingly allowed the original sin to happen despite His omnipotence, effectively allowing humans to fall into sin. Shi Ruchun argued that if God knew in advance that humans would sin but did not intervene to prevent it, instead allowing them to determine their own fate through their actions, then he would be deceiving the people. Shi Ruchun’s questioning extended to the nature of God Himself, as well as His omniscience and omnipotence, suggesting that the concept of God as omniscient and omnipotent may not accurately reflect His true nature as the supreme ruler of the universe (Shi 2000, p. 462).

This shows that anti-Catholics were quite aware of the contradictions caused by the problem of evil and used these contradictions to criticize and attack Catholicism. However, some people believed that Catholicism was more convincing in its theodicy than Buddhism. For example, Zhang Xingyao, a Confucian Christian from Hangzhou in the early Qing Dynasty, chose to convert to Catholicism because he believed that Buddhism led to inequality, where the wealthy could attain salvation, while the poor could not. Zhang Xingyao felt that this was unfair and regretted spending time studying Buddhist scriptures (Zhang 2013, p. 8).

6. Epilogue and Conclusions

Returning to the beginning of this paper, after receiving questions from these officials, Ferdinand Verbiest wrote *A Brief Explanation on the Retribution for Good and Evil* 善恶报略说 to explain the issues related to theodicy. Verbiest believed that the suffering of good people and the happiness of evil people indicates that the retribution for good and evil is not embodied in this life but is mainly fulfilled after life. He believed that the present world is not humanity’s original dwelling place; the actions people take in this world determine their eternal position in the afterlife (Verbiest 1669, p. 1).

The characteristic of Catholic theodicy lies in centering on God’s will, legitimizing the existence of suffering and evil in the world, and inferring God’s purpose behind them. Giulio Aleni and other missionaries repeatedly emphasized that regardless of whether one is in favorable or unfavorable circumstances, one should be grateful to God. Especially in

times of hardship and suffering, one should not doubt or resent God. Therefore, although the late Ming Catholic theodicy explained why God tolerates the existence of evil, its primary focus was on how individuals should act in the face of adversity and evil, essentially transforming the theodicy into the anthropodicy.

In other words, due to the influence of original sin, humans are constantly sinning, so it is justifiable for them to suffer various hardships, and God uses suffering or the evil in the natural world to punish humans. Therefore, missionaries like Aleni emphasized the importance of repentance and reforming oneself. Theodicy, to some extent, becomes a necessary explanation for the ethical or moral norms of believers. For example, Aleni emphasized the importance of loving one's enemies, even emulating the suffering of Christ. As Peter Berger said, theodicy assigns meaning to suffering or evil and normalizes it. Aleni's theodicy belongs to an Augustinian interpretive approach, shifting from the question of God's justice to the issue of human sinfulness (Berger 1969, pp. 77–78). Aleni wrote works such as *The Essentials of Repentance* 悔罪要旨, *Rules for Purgation of Sins* 涤罪正规, *The Meaning of the Mass* 弥撒祭义, and *Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* 圣体要理 to elaborate on this theme (Menegon 2006, pp. 9–102).

Christian theodicy carries a strong otherworldly characteristic, emphasizing that this world is not the "true place" for humans, and worldly happiness is not true happiness. While secular views often see the end of suffering as physical death, Christianity believes that death is not the end, and being "martyred" (dying for the faith) is not a punishment but a reward. Aleni even said "It is certain that meeting with martyrdom leads to true happiness (Zürcher 2007, p. 566; J. Li 2002, p. 516)". "When discussing the rewards received [by the blessed] in heaven ancient sages have stated that special treatment is given to three categories: those who have sacrificed their lives; those who have preserved their virginity, and those who have written books to elucidate the Holy Doctrine (Zürcher 2007, p. 610; J. Li 2002, p. 582)". These statements clearly made Catholicism more likely to be suspected by the authorities or anti-Catholic scholars.

Anti-Catholic leaders like Huang Zhen criticized Catholicism, saying "They humble human nature but exalt Jesus, belittle wisdom and sincerity but glorify God, disregard benevolence and righteousness but emphasize heaven, using life as a prison and death as release (Huang 2000, p. 371)". The notion of suffering for righteousness being misconstrued as dying for God then ascending to heaven directly led anti-Catholics to believe that Catholicism "encourages the ignorant to dare to die" and "teaches people to seek death (Xu 2000, p. 393)". These sentiments reflected a significant tension between Catholic theodicy and indigenous Chinese cultural thought, which had some negative impacts on the spread of Catholicism in China.

Funding: This research was funded by the National Social Science Foundation of China (Normal Project) (Grant No.: 23BZJ053) and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities, Peking University (Grant No.:2306180342).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ There are many philosophers and thinkers who have addressed the problem of evil and offered different systems of theodicy, see Michael L. Peterson ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (second edition), Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017; Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder eds., *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2013; Bryan Frances, *Gratuitous Suffering and the Problem of Evil*. New York: Routledge, 2013; Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs*. New York: Broadman, 2013; Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St Andrews in 2003*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998; Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the*

- Problem of Evil*. London: Continuum, 2006; Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Eedrmans, 1974; John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- 2 The term “theodicy” derives from Christian theology, but it was given a broader meaning by Max Weber and later by Peter Berger. See Peter Beger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969, pp. 53–80; Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006, p. 121. About the theodicy in Christian traditions, see Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, pp. 36–54.
- 3 There is little research on the theodicy of Catholicism in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, although there are some studies on the Catholics in Fujian province with discussion on related topics on this theme (such as the justice of the Lord of Heaven), see Nicolas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume 1*, Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2001, pp. 423–24; Chloë Starr, From Missionary Writings to Chinese Christian Texts: An Introduction, in Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016, pp. 27–38; Song Gang, *Giulio Aleni, Kouduo richao, and Christian-Confucian Dialogism in late Ming Fujian*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019; T. Lapiello and R. Malek eds., “Scholar from the West”: Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1997; Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009; Erik Zürcher, *Kouduo richao: Li Jiubiao's Diary of Oral Admonitions: A Late Ming Christian Journal*. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series LVI, Sankt Augustin–Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2007.
- 4 These discussion and dialogues were recorded by Giulio Aleni in his book *Recording of the Discussion on Learning in Fuzhou* (Sanshan lunxueji 三山论学纪), Taipei: Students' Bookstore (Xuesheng shuju), 1966. As to the time and place of these dialogues, see Lin Jinshui, “On Aleni and Ye Xianggao's Discussion on Learning's Time and Place”, in *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教学研究, 1(2015): 193–198, 223. As to the study on these dialogues, see Wang Huei-chuang, “Aleni's Sanshan lunxueji and Dialogue with Confucianism”, in *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲学与文化, 38:6 (2011): 77–94; Ma Lin, “Cultural Dialogue on the Conception of the Lord of Heaven in Sanshan lunxueji”, in *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究4 (1997): 28–36.
- 5 About Giulio Aleni's arguments on the soul (human nature), see translated and annotated by Thierry Meynard, SJ. And Pan Dawei, *A Brief Introduction to the Study of Human Nature* [Xingxue chushu 性学概述], Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020.
- 6 For example, Voltaire once mocked Leibniz's statement. See Zhu Yanbing, ‘Preface by the Translator’, in Leibniz, *Theodicy*, Beijing: Sanlian Press, 2007, pp. 18–19.
- 7 Whether Matteo Ricci misunderstands the Confucian point, scholars have different opinions, see Xie Wenyu, “The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven and the Differences in Concerns between Chinese and Western Thinking”, in *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 25(2023): 145–55; XIAO Qinghe, “Matteo Ricci and the New Horizon of the Intellectual World in late Ming, A Response to Prof XIE Wenyu's Article”, in *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 25(2023): 156–67.
- 8 In August 1631, the Manchu army besieged the Daling River. Bandits are used here rather cryptically to refer to the Manchu army. Following that, the Wuqiao Mutiny occurred, which caused the Catholic Church to lose one official believer, namely Sun Yuanhua (1581–1632).
- 9 The original text means that Aleni is sick and his disciplines are worried. However, Erik Zürcher understands it to mean that many of the employees are ill and one of them is unhappy. See Erik Zürcher, “Giulio Aleni's Chinese Biography”, in Lippiello, Tiziana, and Roman Malek (eds.), “Scholar from the West”: Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLII, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1997, p. 117.
- 10 The discussions between Ye Xianggao, Yan Zanhua, Li Jiubiao, and Aleni on the issue of theodicy were later compiled by Li Zixuan into the *Discourses of Mr. Ai from the Western Sea*. The criterion chosen by Li was “to alert and move people”. This shows that believers at that time were quite concerned about the problem of evil.

References

- Aleni, Giulio. 1966. *Recording of the Discussion on Learning in Fuzhou* (三山论学纪 Sanshan lunxueji). Taipei: Students' Bookstore (Xuesheng shuju).
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. 1924. *Summation Against the Unbelievers*. New York: Benziger Brothers Publishing Co.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. 2003. *On Evil*. Translated by Richard Regan. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Augustine. 2003. *City of God*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Berger, Peter. 1969. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Chen, Hougung. 2000. Discussion on the Learning 辨学刍言. In *Anthology on the Refutation of the Evil in the Present Dynasty* 圣朝破邪集. Collected in *Series of Uncollected Books in Siku* 四库未收书丛刊, Series 10, book 4; Beijing: Beijing Press, vol. 5.
- Chen, Tuo. 2018. Modifying the texts and reshaping the image: The relationship between Ye Xianggao and Christianity. *Xin Shixue* 新史学 29: 119–64.
- Criveller, Gianni. 1997. *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China: The Jesuits' Presentation of Christ from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Aleni*. Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, in collaboration with Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana.

- Evans, Gillian. 1990. *Augustine on Evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, Zhen. 2000. Preface of Eager to Honor Confucianism 尊儒亟镜. In *Anthology on the Refutation of the Evil in the Present Dynasty* 圣朝破邪集. Collected in *Series of Uncollected Books in Siku* 四库未收书丛刊, Series 10, book 4; Beijing: Beijing Press, vol. 3.
- Jiang, Chang. 2005. *Autonomy and Harmony: Study on Leibniz's Metaphysics* 自主与和谐: 莱布尼茨形而上学研究. Wuhan: Wuhan University Press.
- Keller, James A. 2013. *Problems of Evil and the Power of God*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- King, Peter. 2019. Augustine on Evil. In *Evil: A History*. Edited by Andrew P. Chignell. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Li, Jiubiao. 2002. Diary of Oral Admonitions 口铎日抄. In *Materials of Catholicism in Ming and Qing from the Jesuit Archive in Rome* 耶稣会罗马档案馆明清天主教文献. book 7. Taipei: Ricci Institute.
- Li, Sixuan. 1650. *Biography of Mr. Aleni from the Western Sea* 西海艾先生行略. Paris: BnF, Courant chinois 1018.
- Li, Sixuan. 2002. Discourses of Mr. Ai from the Western Sea 西海艾先生语录. In *Materials of Catholicism in Ming and Qing from the Jesuit Archive in Rome* 耶稣会罗马档案馆明清天主教文献. book 12. Taipei: Ricci Institute.
- Li, Yong. 2021. *Bibliography of Wei Dazhong* 魏大中传. Beijing: Sanlian Press.
- Li, Zhizao. 1965. Preface of Reprinting The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven 天主实义重刻序. In *Matteo Ricci, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* 天主实义. Collected in *The First Collections of the Learning of Heaven* 天学初函; Taipei: Students' Bookstore (Xuesheng shuju).
- Meister, Chad, and Paul K. Moser. 2017. Introduction. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Menegon, Eugenio. 1997. Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans in Fujian. In "Scholar from the West": Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China. Edited by Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek. Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.
- Menegon, Eugenio. 2006. Deliver us from Evil: Confession and Salvation in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Chinese Catholicism. In *Forgive Us Our Sins: Confession in Late Ming and Early Qing China*. Edited by Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink. Sankt Augustin-Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.
- Pan, Fengchuan. 1997. Writings on the Philosophy of the Soul. In "Scholar from the West": Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China. Edited by Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek. Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.
- Ricci, Matteo. 1965. The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven 天主实义. In *The First Collections of the Learning of Heaven* 天学初函. Taipei: Students' Bookstore (Xuesheng shuju).
- Shi, Ruchun. 2000. First Refuting the Learning of Heaven 天学初辟. In *Shenghao poxieji* 圣朝破邪集. Collected in *Series of Uncollected Books in Siku* 四库未收书丛刊, Series 10, book 4; Beijing: Beijing Press, vol. 8.
- Song, Gang. 2019. *Giulio Aleni, Kouduo richao, and Christian-Confucian Dialogism in late Ming Fujian*. Abingon and New York: Routledge.
- Standaert, Nicolas. 1998. *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in the Ming China, His Life and Thought*. Leiden: Brill.
- Starr, Chloë. 2016. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Sun, Shangyang. 2001. *Sociology of Religion* 宗教社会学. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Verbiest, Ferdinand. 1669. *A Brief Explanation on the Retribution for Good and Evil* 善恶报略说. Paris: BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France), Courant chinois 6978.
- Weingartner, Paul. 2003. *Evil: Different Kinds of Evil in the Light of a Modern Theodicy*. Austria: Lang.
- Xiao, Qinghe. 2022. The Other Face of Confucianism: A Study on the Religionization of Confucianism in the Thought of Wen Xi-angfeng. *Journal of Chinese Studies* 75: 81–140.
- Xu, Dashou. 2000. Refuting the Heresy in Holy Dynasty 圣朝佐辟. In *Anthology on the Refutation of the Evil in the Present Dynasty* 圣朝破邪集. Collected in *Series of Uncollected Books in Siku* 四库未收书丛刊, Series 10, book 4; Beijing: Beijing Press, vol. 4.
- Ye, Xianggao. 1997. Preface of the Brief Explanation on Ten Commandments 西学十诫初解序. In *Ye Xianggao, Remaining Manuscripts in Cangxia* 苍霞余草. Collected in *Series of Forbidden Books of Siku* 四库禁毁书丛刊; Beijing: Beijing Press, vol. 5.
- Zhang, Tingyu. 1999. *The History of Ming* 明史. Beijing: Zhonghua Bookstore, vol. 22.
- Zhang, Xingyao. 2013. Preface. In *The Explicit Arguments on the Teaching of Heaven* 天教明辨. Collected in *Materials of Catholicism in Ming and Qing from the Zikawei Library* 徐家汇藏书楼明清天主教文献, book 6; Taipei: Ricci Institute.
- Zhang, Xiping. 2010. *Chinese Elements in Leibniz's Thought* 莱布尼茨思想中的中国元素. Zhengzhou: Elephant's Press.
- Zürcher, Erik. 2007. *Kouduo richao: Li Jiubiao's Diary of Oral Admonitions: A Late Ming Christian Journal*. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series LVI; Sankt Augustin-Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.