

# *What is “Justice”? Some Fragments of Reflections and Practice*

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*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
(The Lord’s Prayer)*

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. (The Apostle’s Creed)*

I used excerpts from the above prayers as a lead-in to my reflection. Searching on the internet, I found that the word “justice” originated from the Bible. “It has many shades of meaning, and it is not easy to use one synonym for translating this Hebrew or Greek word. In the Old Testament, the concept of ‘justice’ consisted of one element, which is relationship, including the relationship between God and man (Ps. 50:6; Jer. 9:24), as well as human relationships (Deut. 24:13; Jer. 2:3)” (unattributed source).

God created all things; He created human beings in His own image, and God’s will is to be “done on earth as it is in heaven”. First of all, God is Love. God is also “the God of Justice”. As God loves us, He endows us with “kindness, conscience” and “forgiveness”. However, if we act in defiance against God’s will, the concept of “justice” implies “praising the good and punishing the evil”. The process and result of good versus evil can be found in many passages of the Bible.

Jesus often used very strong words to teach His disciples and followers, and His teaching was accompanied by actions of healing the wounded and rescuing the dying. He taught and converted a multitude of followers.

Many passages in the Bible describe both the manifest and hidden ugliness of human nature. Sometimes, “justice” is dispensed in an indirect way, and it is not easy for people to accept that judgment or dispensation. What is “justice”? From the past up to now, “justice” has been associated with various “isms” of different sociological schools or political theories. There are many views about “justice”, and some of them are quite specious. In an age of plural values, and when materialism is prevalent, it is difficult to discern the truth.

### **The Catholic Church Returns to the Distinctive Tradition of Assisi**

In March 2013, the whole Church joyfully welcomed the new Pope who took the name “Francis” as his official title. From the day of his inauguration, the Holy Father has desired for the Church to be the “Church of the poor”.

Looking over the activities of our Holy Father in the past two years, one finds that he received mostly the representatives of grass-roots people, i.e. the unemployed, the poor, the handicapped, the sick and the homeless. However, when he received the clergy, he strongly criticized his own Church, and began to “snare tigers” (hit out at the high-ranking). He appeared in the slums of several countries, embracing homeless children. When he gave a speech at the European Parliament in November, 2014, he even more urgently asked the politicians to protect human rights and dignity. What greatly surprised me was that Pope Francis, as the leader of the Catholic Church (a code word for conservatism), received and even embraced a transsexual Catholic!

The Holy Spirit has guided us to return to the tradition of Assisi, so that we could realize that the basic standpoint of “justice” was to stand with the poor, the sick, the handicapped and those in most need of help, that is to say, the “weakest group of people.”

### **“Vested Interests” in the Church of China**

For Chinese Catholics who have suffered so much, how they long for “justice” to come!

Whether it is “persecution” (from the Catholic Church’s standpoint) or “sovereignty” (from the Chinese government’s standpoint), the inharmonious relationship between the Catholic Church and the Chinese authorities can be traced back to the periods of the Eight-Nation Alliance (1900), the establishment of Communist Rule (1949) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The conflicts in the above periods of time were just like chess pieces on opposite sides; they belonged to two sharply contradictory ideologies.

Besides Catholicism, the Communist Party also exercises control over other religions and civil organizations. Such control is like an instinct of Chinese communists. I do not expect that the Communist Party will soon give up its control over religion and popular civil organizations.

In the past three decades, it was distressing to see that some of the disputes, even sinister things, came from within the Church, from the Church’s “own people.” Complex and confusing issues abound. Over a period of 30 years the focal points of conflicts changed as well. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, the most important issue was the “essence of religion.” The question as to how pure/solid one’s faith is arose within the Church. The problem was attributed to the atheistic Communist government’s strict control and suppression over the Church. However, as the situation continues to unfold, it seems that such a condemnation of the Communist Party is not the complete story.

The Communist Party exercises its control of the Church according to the principle of “independence, self-rule and self-management.” The control is exercised over the establishment of seminaries, the division of dioceses, selection and consecration of bishops, the construction of bishops’ residences, etc. Even more detailed control covers the ordination of priests, the reception of foreigners and financial management, as well as the payment of salaries for the priests. The control is comprehensive, ranging from spiritual to material affairs. But in fact, the liturgical prayers and hymns used by the official Church are exactly the same as those of the universal Church. The teaching materials for courses of philosophy and theology in the seminaries are basically consistent with those of the seminaries in Rome. The “Chinese Missal” and

the “Liturgy of the Hours” are the same as those used throughout the world, and Catholics can say “long live the Pope.”

On the surface, the hallmark of the official Church is that it is not controlled by “external hostile forces” (i.e. the Roman curia). However, as far as I know, all the officially-recognized bishops, having received either the explicit or tacit approval of the Communist Party, quickly found the means to contact the Vatican or the Apostolic Nuncio before their consecration. Except for a few, most of them obtained the Vatican’s approval. This shows that all the people in the official Church, including the Communist Party itself, did not think that the Vatican was an “external hostile force”! Only those who could not obtain the approval of the Vatican placed the blame on the Church.

Since the Communist Party is too occupied with other matters, it sometimes keeps a tight rein on the Church and sometimes gives free rein to the Church. Similarly, some local governments keep the Church on a tight leash, and some are more relaxed. This is closely linked to the political climate at a particular period of time and in particular places. Therefore, each local church has plenty of room to maneuver.

However, the problem lies in the strong “official” consciousness within the Church itself. I wonder if this is due to fear caused by past persecutions, or if the persons concerned are double-faced and have other plans. Furthermore, some people went even further than the communist party. For example, one wonders if the two incidents which took place in 2010—the Eighth National Assembly of Catholic Representatives and the illicit consecrations of bishops, held before and after the Congress—were, to a great extent, the result of actions taken by “Bishop” Ma and one high-ranking Catholic layman. Did they approach the communist party and make trouble out of nothing, leading to the creation of a hostile relationship between the communist party and the Catholic Church?

Since the Communist Party is “hunting the tigers”, my understanding is that whether they want to control “religion” or are considering how to control it, depends on “whether they could make any side profit, and how much the side profit should be.” I think that if the Communist Party cannot gain any profit from the local church, it would not have the motivation to exercise control.

My assumption is that there is a "side profit" involved in Church affairs. These include the disposal of the Church properties, ordinations to the priesthood, the consecration of bishops, the choice of persons to take up government posts, etc. As some of those with "vested interests" (including both licit and illicit bishops) gradually become the new dignitaries (or yearn to become dignitaries), they inevitably have to fawn upon the rich and the powerful.

The two meetings (National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) in the Communist Party's political system are always open to religious constituencies. It was originally a platform for dialogue between religions and the Communist Party (I have personally witnessed some democrats and independents introduce controversial proposals at these meetings). What about the performance of Catholic representatives at those two meetings? They not only missed the opportunity for dialogue, but they also fell into secular traps (I know the niece of one "bishop," who boasted that her house in the suburbs of Beijing was given to her by her "Bishop Uncle"). Some Church personnel with "vested interests" have sunk to such a deep level that only God can save them from it.

Almost forty years have passed since Mainland China adopted the reform and open-door policy. Even the difficult problem of the "recognition of Taiwan as an inalienable part of Chinese territory" has been solved. Why have some less difficult problems like "Church affairs" (we can look to examples in other Communist countries) remain unsolved, and why has "justice" not yet come?

As a Chinese citizen, I have written to the Communist Party, praising their efforts at fighting corruption and building a clean government. I have also suggested that they push the religious and civil organizations to fight against corruption. I believe that this can be a starting point to settle the long unresolved problems in the Catholic Church in China.

Since 2011, I have been sending a postcard every month to 14 Liu Yin Jie, Beijing (address of CCPA), with the words: "Get Rid of Things, Return to the Fold, Sanctify Yourselves!"