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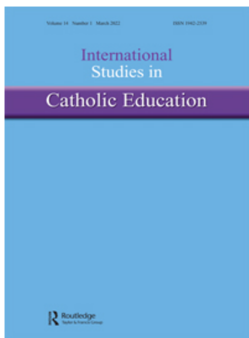

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# A 'learning community' as a social justice model for Catholic education in Thailand

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Inspired by Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* regarding the Church's urgent response to social issues, in his speech to Jesuit alumni in Valencia in July 1973, Fr. Pedro Arrupe reflected on the concept of 'social justice' and its implications for Jesuit schools. He spoke about how Jesuit education could assist students to become 'men and women for others', men and women who can bring about change for the better in their societies. Since then, promoting 'social justice' has become one of the Jesuit educational priorities and has brought about significant reform within Jesuit educational institutions worldwide. This includes the newly established institution of a 'learning community' that addresses educational inequality for poor indigenous students in Thailand. This research paper reflects on how this institution can be a model that promotes justice in education and forms our students to become 'agents of change.' This paper begins by revisiting Fr. Arrupe's concept of 'social justice' and philosophically analyses the learning formation of a new Jesuit institution, called the Xavier Learning Community (XLC). Drawing from this analysis, I argue that the model of 'learning community' may also inspire other Catholic schools to address common social issues in Thailand based on the Christian values of continual conversion, fraternal and sororal relationship, and discernment.

**KEYWORDS:** learning community; social justice; Catholic education; conversion; fraternal and sororal relationship; discernment

## Introduction

Over a half-century ago, in his apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Pope Paul VI invited us to reflect upon the changing world and social problems caused by modernism and consumerism. The Pope addressed his concerns especially toward the poor and the marginalised, who have become the inevitable victims of this unjust economic distribution. However, prior to our search for different possible *solutions*, we must not forget to regard these social issues through our *faith* rooted in the gospel, which 'is not out-of-date' (Paul VI 1971, 4). The gospel has continued inspiring us and remaining new for us despite divergent contexts across the globe. That is why, in terms of social ministries, as the Pope concluded in the letter, the Church has a double function:

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first, to inculcate our authentic moral teachings in all Christians, and second, to commit to concrete actions in promoting this gospel value of social justice.

In 1973, Father Pedro Arrupe SJ, the General of the Society of Jesus, addressed The European Alumni Congress in Valencia, Spain, on the issue of social justice in the context of education. Responding to the invitation of the Pope, Arrupe (1973) emphasised that the Jesuit school's mission is a faith that does justice and commits to this by preparing men and women for others. In other words, the school is not to be regarded merely as a place in which students acquire knowledge and fulfil the state's standards to ensure their future success, but provides *holistic* formation to assist students to become 'agents of change,' those who are 'actively undertaking the reform of unjust structures' (Holman 2014, 142). But this type of education is not without its challenges. We must begin with *interior* reform – or 'personal conversion' in Christian terms – that genuinely leads to the renewal of love and justice in our society.

Up to the present day, Arrupe's reflection on 'social justice' has unceasingly inspired numerous Jesuit educational institutions worldwide to enact this value according to their context.[1] This includes the new model of a 'learning community' that attempted to address the inequality of education which has significantly impacted indigenous students in northern Thailand. This novel institution consists of students from various tribes who live in the same compound and learn together through the reflective approach based on Jesuit education. They are accompanied by Jesuits, lay teachers, volunteers and non-teaching staff from different nationalities and backgrounds. This model, enriched by *diversity*, can *transcend* a spatial limitation of its factual compound and open to further mutual dialogical and reflective learning. This research paper wants to reflect on *how* this 'learning community' resonates with the Church's and Arrupe's educational model of social justice for the poor. Drawing on this analysis, I argue that this model sheds light not only on Jesuit education but also on other Catholic schools in Thailand. The reason is that through this model, schools can be a space for forming our students in line with our Christian values through continual conversion, fraternal and sororal relationship, and discernment.

This paper consists of three parts. First, we will revisit Fr. Pedro Arrupe's notion of 'social justice' mainly in his 'Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice,' as a response to the Church's call to reflect on this issue in current circumstances. Second, we will philosophically analyse how a 'learning community' can be a new Jesuit educational model to tackle social issues in Thailand. Finally, we will explore further how this model can inspire other Catholic educational institutions.

## Revisiting Arrupe's speech on 'social justice' in education

To understand the mind of Fr. Pedro Arrupe regarding 'social justice' in education, the pivotal source is his address to The European Alumni Congress in Valencia. In this speech, Arrupe initially elaborates the notion of 'social justice' by illustrating its intrinsic relation to the Christian concept of 'love.' As he explained, Christian 'love' comes from the term 'charity' or *caritas* in Latin. It refers to our belief that just as God loves us, we are called to love our neighbours. This differs from the modern understanding that associates the term 'charity' with various forms of 'charitable works' which may not be necessarily determined by any religious or moral motives.

Nevertheless, in order to love, we must start with 'an attitude of enduring respect for all men and women' (Arrupe 1973, no.59). This love draws our special attention to care for the poor and the marginalised who are most affected by an unjust society. In

the gospel, Jesus was an example of the person who was moved by his loving compassion and prioritised his mission in serving the most vulnerable. This inspires us as Christians to understand that 'love' must emerge alongside impartial treatment of our brothers and sisters. This just love derives from our faith that we are all God's children and must be respected equally and unconditionally. In brief, 'Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, that is, recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbour' (*Justice in the World 1971*, nn. 6,37).

But to love and strive for justice, we need 'personal conversion' from our sins. However, the notion of sins not only refers to our conventional construe of offending acts towards ourselves and others, but 'it extends also to what might be called the *surface of our being* [my italic], where it disorders our habits, our customs, our spontaneous reactions, our criteria for judgment, our ways of thinking, our will, and our imagination' (Arrupe 1973, n.62). In other words, Arrupe invites us to reflect on the other form of 'sin' that has already existed in different structures of the world that *condition* us from the time we were born and make us *incline* toward them. Corresponding to our Christian faith, we have the theological concept of 'original sin' or 'concupiscence,' derived from the sin of Adam, all personal sins in history and our own. Thus, Christ came to liberate us not only from our personal sins but also from the surface of our being that greatly impacts our lives and motivates us to commit sinful acts. Drawing on this theological argument, to construct 'social justice,' we must reform not only our *personal* life but also the *structures* we inhabit, as Arrupe argued:

> We have always been told that interior conversion is not enough, we must continually strive to improve ourselves and reclaim for God the whole of our being. Now we become aware that what we have to reclaim and reform is also the whole of our world. In other words, personal conversion cannot be separated from reform of structures'. (Arrupe 1973, n.68)

Therefore, in the context of education, the formation we offer to our students at schools must provide them with a learning space to examine both about their *personal* lives and the *world* where they share with others. Hopefully, in the course of this learning journey, students can become 'men and women *for* others' who do not live their lives solely for their own achievements, but simultaneously learn how to love and care for others, especially the poor and the marginalised. Our education must assist students to bring the transformation both to themselves and social structures at large.

But there are some questions. What is the difference between Jesuit education *before* and *after* Arrupe's address on 'social justice'? Had not the Society of Jesus previously assisted students to be 'men and women for others' as well? Why did Arrupe prioritise this issue in his address in Valencia and inaugurate a significant and unprecedented reform in Jesuit educational institutions?

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 and established the first school in Messina, Sicily, in 1548. Afterwards, many Jesuits educational institutions, starting from primary to higher levels, have increasingly emerged across the world. However, it is worth noting that since the beginning, these schools have been open to all students no matter what social and economic status they were from. In a quasi-official list of fifteen reasons why Jesuit schools were established written by Juan Alfonso de Polanco, the first secretary of the Society between 1547 and 1572,

one reason stated was to help those 'poor boys, who could not possibly pay for teachers, much less for private tutors, make progress in learning so that their parents will be able to satisfy their obligation to educate their children' (O'Malley 2008, 53). Therefore, the 'education of the poor' was the concern of the Society since its earliest period. For over 450 years, Jesuit schools have also played a vital role in assisting poor students not only in Europe, but across the continents starting from the Western Hemisphere [i.e. the schools for the slaves' children in South America during the seventeenth century] to the Asian far east.

But had our Jesuit educational experiences over four centuries been *insufficient* as a model of 'social justice'? To answer this question, we need to *revisit* the historical context where Fr. Arrupe's address took place. In further analysis, I propose three reasons why Arrupe's emphasis on 'social justice' in education was plausible, relevant, and even urgent.

First, Fr. Arrupe's speech took place not long after the Vatican the Second Council that attempted to reflect on how the Church could respond to new challenges in the world based on our Christian faith. At this time, all religious orders, including the Jesuits, were invited to look back at their original charism in order to renew their missions in the current context. In *Octogesima Adveniens*, Pope Paul VI explains that these new challenges the Church is facing are from the enhanced modern ideologies that impact the structures of our society. It started with the growth of industrialisation that attracted people to emigrate into urban areas to seek better opportunities for working and living. Nevertheless, in the capitalist mindset, enterprises never cease to compete with each other using new products that satisfy consumers. The failure of some enterprises causes a significant amount of unemployment. Furthermore, other problems also emerged amid the process of urbanisation, such that many people must bear unpleasant living conditions, young people have less intimate time with their parents, and so on.

Reflecting on modern society, this competitive attitude has affected various dimensions of our lives, including education. Schools turn into a space where students are prepared to become potential agents in competitive markets. Consequently, students' learning progress must be regularly assessed by the state's standards. This phenomenon resonates with what Gert Biesta (2009) called the 'educational measurement culture' where institutional success depends solely on the students' 'outcomes.' In this way, students are at risk of being treated as products made in the 'schooling factory' to respond to the demands of their society.

The next questions are: How can the Catholic schools address these challenges of unjust society? How can Catholic educational institutions maintain an identity distinct from other schools? Arrupe's emphasis on 'social justice' perhaps helps to answer these questions. The reason is that this 'social justice' derives from our Christian faith and the Church's teaching as a concrete sign of our love for God and our neighbours. This value helps us to not follow the outcome-oriented culture uncritically. Instead, it enables us to reflect on our special call within our Christian faith in the current context and to assist our young people to become agents of change.

Second, after the Vatican II, the number of clerics and religious was continuously decreasing,[2] and the Society of Jesus during Arrupe's tenure as general was not exempt. During this period, corresponding the Church's emphasis on the significant role of lay people, Arrupe was the first general who explicitly called for a closer collaboration with lay partners in mission. Therefore, Arrupe's address to the Jesuit alumni in Valencia was vital because these alumni and the upcoming graduates

from Jesuit schools were altogether called to be part of the mission of the Church and of the Society. A few years later, after Arrupe's death, the enhancement of lay partners' role became clearly apparent when the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm or IPP (1993) was launched for the first time following the previous publication of *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (1986). IPP was originated by the request of lay teachers whose numbers were increasing in Jesuit schools worldwide. IPP provides common pedagogical guides based on the Jesuit charism that teachers can adapt in their own teaching context.

Third, drawing on Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, which inspires Fr. Arrupe on the issue of 'social justice' in education, the accompaniment of young people is one of the Pope's concerns. Through the process of industrialisation and urbanisation, the family structure has radically changed. As people must work harder, and often in poor conditions, young people lack special attention from their parents. Thus, the Pope called for creative solutions to how the Church must accompany young people. As he said:

> Urban life and industrial change bring strongly to light questions which until now were poorly grasped. What place, for example, in this world being brought to birth, should be given to youth? Everywhere dialogue is proving to be difficult between youth, with its aspirations, renewal and also insecurity for the future, and the adult generations. It is obvious to all that here we have a source of serious conflicts, division and opting out, even within the family, and a questioning of modes of authority, education for freedom and the handing on of values and beliefs, which strikes at the deep roots of society. (Paul VI 1971, n.13)

When Arrupe talks about an 'education for justice' that assists students to be 'men and women for others,' this is an opportunity for the Jesuits to reflect on *how* their heritage of Jesuit education can respond to the Church's concern for young people, including *holistic* formation based on the humanistic tradition that emerged since the sixteenth century. As John W. O'Malley SJ (2015) describes it, this humanistic approach enables students to build up *pietas* (not piety) or an 'upright character' which implies that we not only provide them with mere abstract or speculative knowledge, but also help them to develop their whole persons in their personal growth and in their love for their fellows in society.

Drawing on these three reasons, I argue that Arrupe's speech on 'social justice' in education was both significantly plausible and relevant. It invites us to construe the way in which we can address new social issues through our heritage of Christian faith and Jesuit spirituality which are not something frozen in any specific historical period. In their essence, they are dynamic and require *renewal* in a changing time. It corresponds to what Arrupe said, 'we have preserved something that allow us to renew ourselves continually, namely, the spirit of continual searching for the will of God and a keen spiritual sensibility for discerning the way in which Gods wants Christianity to be lived at the different periods of history' (Arrupe 1973, n.17).

## A 'learning community'

For five decades after Arrupe's address, Jesuit educational institutions worldwide have attempted to implement this commitment to 'social justice' into various forms of education. However, no matter 'how' we decide to put this value into practice, the essential part is that we must first discern this issue alongside the context of

'who' the poor that we want to serve are. In other words, 'if we are to advocate the education of 'men and women for others' convincingly, our institutions themselves need to be seen to be on the side of the disadvantaged' (Holman 2014, 143). In education, without this overarching comprehension of 'who' the students are, we may miss the point of 'how' to genuinely accompany them according to their needs.

In 2017, the Jesuits established the educational institution called the Xavier Learning Community (XLC), located in Chiang Rai, in northern Thailand. Before this, after a long period of discernment, the Jesuits agreed that this form of a 'learning community' would respond to the needs of poor indigenous students who suffer from educational inequality. Nevertheless, this 'educational inequality' cannot be understood without historical background regarding conflicts between the majority and the minority. What are these conflicts?

To begin with, both the majority and the minority are often identified from locations they inhabit, such as that the former are known as the lowlanders and the latter are called the highlanders. In addition, both are also distinguished by the identifications of the civilised and the uncivilised, or the city people and the forest people, respectively. This demonstrates *how* the negative attitude of the majority toward the minority leads to the further project of civilising this minority. Therefore, 'educational inequality' causes unjust treatment not only in terms of economic distribution, but also because indigenous knowledge is simultaneously devalued and replaced by the majority's knowledge. This is why Jonni Odochao (2006), a well-known Karen[3] social activist in Thailand, proposes what he called 'an education rooted in two worlds,' meaning that schools must allocate appropriate time for indigenous students to learn both the modern curriculum and their own local knowledge. However, it is uncertain whether this idea can be put in real practice if those who oversee national policies, mostly from the majority, do not appreciate indigenous knowledge and values.[4]

In this context, during the discernment process, the Jesuits in Thailand must think of certain expectations they want to put into account. First, they must provide all the means for good education and integrate indigenous knowledge and values in learning process. Second, the formation must assist students not only in their personal growth but simultaneously in their aspiration of becoming 'agents of change' who bring transformation into society. This will correspond to Fr. Arrupe's notion of 'social justice' that not only requires personal conversion but also the renewal of the structure itself.

From these considerations, the Jesuits began to promote this educational project to the public and hope that several individuals and organisations would be interested in taking part in this new mission. Before the emergence of XLC in 2017, there had been several meetings with benefactors, Jesuit alumni, representatives from the Bishops' Conference and different religious Congregations, educational experts from the state and Catholic higher education, Jesuit Networks from abroad, and others. Unfortunately, some benefactors particularly from the business sector were sceptical about this project. They argued that this project seems to be *financially unsustainable* as it aims to assist only the poor and indigenous who cannot afford their learning and living cost. They also disagreed about how the new institution would be located *outside the cities* or 'in middle of nowhere,' is an obstacle for the development of an institution.

Reflecting on these critics, it is undeniable that this educational project perhaps challenges us to think of Catholic education beyond the capitalist mindset focusing

merely on loss-profits. It invites us to question how we can genuinely live our faith as Christians and implement the Church's teaching for the most disadvantaged of our society, who are also our brothers and sisters. Fortunately, the project was warmly welcomed and sponsored by several individuals and organisations, including the Church in Thailand, who see the values of this project. Regarding the location, the Jesuits selected an area outside cities because they want a space where these students would feel easily connected to their own indigenous culture of which nature is always part. In addition, they can travel more conveniently to learn from different indigenous villages nearby. In this way, these students can develop themselves as men and women for others yet rooted in their cultural heritage.

With great support within and without the Society of Jesus, the Xavier Learning Community (XLC)[5] was finally born and chose St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary in the sixteenth Century, as a patron. To be able to provide a good formation, we accept students from different tribes and provinces within a limited number of students, about 30–40 students per year. Because they must live and learn together in the same school compound, therefore, aside from the regular classes required for their undergraduate degrees, we also provide a qualitative space and time for students to develop themselves more holistically. Each day, the students share different activities together, such as, morning meditation, cooking, house-cleaning, sports, farming, social volunteering works, reflective sharing, and so on. Overall, what is most striking about the philosophy behind this endeavour is the spirit of a 'learning community' that brings about the transformation of students, and hopefully, the wider society.

Reflecting on the term, 'community,' it is *dynamic* and not limited to a sphere within a certain boundary. Although it is true that XLC has a clear compound boundary, the diversity of its members and their openness to learn *beyond* the compound make this community unique. Looking from *within* the compound itself, this community was privileged by the students we have who come from different indigenous tribes (e.g. Karen, Lahu, Mong, etc), and accompanied by different staff, i.e. Jesuits, teaching staff, foreign volunteers, and non-teaching staff. The diversity of people across cultural backgrounds enriches the community because students can provide their different perspectives and experiences in the learning process both inside and outside classrooms. Looking *beyond* the campus boundary, students have many opportunities to interact with and learn from people outside. With nearby villages, our staff and students regularly volunteer to teach poor students, clean up some public places, and contribute to any other activities that the villagers need. With other indigenous communities, we often bring our students to live in and learn there, or sometimes, we invite those indigenous elders and students' parents to share with us their knowledge and experiences at our campus as well. Finally, we try to build up networking by promoting this social justice model and inviting others to be part of this mission, such as with our benefactors, Jesuit alumni, priests and religious from different dioceses and Congregations, researchers from different educational institutions, and so on.

However, what makes this 'community' a dynamic one that can move beyond the boundary limit is its adjective, 'learning.' What 'learning' means in this context does not simply refer to the activities of acquiring new knowledge. Instead, it begins with an attitude of openness to new and different knowledge, holding that we always can learn something *new* and *more* from others. This perhaps reminds us of the ancient educational figure, Socrates, who educated Athenian young people not by giving direct transmission of new knowledge but challenging their *fixed* thoughts with

various statements and inquiries. Paradoxically, only when these men were genuinely open to learn and became aware of their limitations could they obtain more accurate understanding in their learning process. That is why Socrates was metaphorically compared himself as a 'midwife' (Plato 1961) who assists his students to select as well as to acquire new and better knowledge, or a 'gad-fly' (Plato 2021) that attempts to awaken the Athenians from their 'mental sleepiness' or unthinking habit.

But how can we develop this atmosphere of learning? There are at least two factors: dialogue and reflection. First, the term, 'dialogue,' can be understood in different meanings, however, the essential one is the 'dialogue' that primarily provides a space for authentic listening. This is what Nicholas Burbules (1993), a professor of educational philosophy at the University of Illinois, called 'dialogue as conversation' which does not expect an immediate conclusion or result, but seeks to learn from different perspectives of others. This is unlike other kinds of dialogue, such as dialogue as inquiry or dialogue as instruction, that ordinarily expect common agreements. Nevertheless, it does not mean that certain agreements in this learning community are not important at all, because in certain discussions we do need it. However, what seems to be a priority in this learning context is the *process* of dialogue itself based on 'openness' and 'authentic listening.' This will provide a repertoire of mutual understanding without any prejudice that leads to a more elaborated and constructive discussion on 'social justice.'

Second, aside from dialogue, students need some time for personal reflection. This is a process where they can *stop* and *think* more independently and meaningfully about what they have just learned or discussed with others. To do this, teachers may provide some guiding questions for students to think more deeply, such as: Which topic do you like most in today's class? How does it relate to your own context? When you teach the poor children at the village, how did you feel about it and why? How can you use the talents that you develop in XLC to serve others in your local community or society in general? And so on. Afterwards, students will have some personal time to think or to write down their reflective responses to those questions, and if there is some time, they may share these thoughts to one another. This can be organised in various forms, such as a few minutes at the end of a lesson, during weekends, or a few days before each semester ends. In this way, students can discover the meaning of what they learn whether for themselves or in the relationship with their companions *beyond* just what is being told by other people.

Through reflection, students will avoid becoming passive in following the state's curriculum, especially amid the enhanced educational measurement culture today. As Johnny Go SJ and Rita Atienza (2019) emphasise, the importance of 'reflection' in education is its ability to prevent schools from becoming oriented to mere teacher-centred, textbook-driven, and test-oriented teaching that leads to a one simple right answer. This can cause what we called, 'academic amnesia,' where students forget everything after exams, or 'intellectual constipation,' where students do not know how to apply the knowledge they learn in real life. Therefore, reflection is vital, because it enables students in this learning community to develop their independent and critical thinking, including the issues of social justice.

For more than four years, we have experienced numerous significant changes in our students, staff and those who have an opportunity to become part of this XLC. Many students feel proud to talk about their indigenous cultures and values, whether in discussions or different creative activities (e.g. a drama or musical performances), and they learn to respect and appreciate the beauty of other cultures

as well. Several visitors from abroad become our regular volunteers to teach English and other skills for our students, because they feel that this place is like a family that they hardly ever find elsewhere, especially not in big cities. Some of our first-year graduates, despite their minority backgrounds, become teachers in different Catholic schools both in cities and villages; they do their best to help their students to become 'men and women for others' as they have been formed in the learning community. Overall, we slowly see some fruits of this learning model both in students' own growth and different levels of social structures. Finally, we hope that this model will simultaneously inspire other Catholic schools as we will discuss in the last session.

## A social justice model for Catholic education in Thailand

The 'learning community' was established by the Jesuits, but this model may shed light on how other Catholic educational institutions could address a common concern on social justice in Thailand.[6] This is because this model integrates Christian values based on the Gospel and Church teachings. In this final part, drawing on the experience of this learning community, I will underline and elaborate the three Christian values that inspires this learning community, and hopefully, other Catholic schools as well. These are 'continual conversion,' 'fraternal and sororal relationship,' and 'discernment.'

First, the learning community invites us into *continual conversion* personally and communally. When we look at our Christian faith, the term 'conversion' [from our sins] is significant as it opens us to God's graces to fully fulfil our lives. However, what we mean by 'sins' is not limited only to the personal level but also in theological terms includes the concept of 'original sins,' that exist in structures and have impacts on our lives as humans. Thus, as Fr. Arrupe emphasised, as Christians, our genuine 'conversion' must include our unceasing renewal not only in our own lives but also in structures.[7] This includes when we try to discern about our mission in education.

Similarly, when we look at the model of the 'learning community,' our students are invited into this openness for continual change for the better in their own lives and in relationship with others. The term 'learning' itself needs a certain level of humility and awareness that their belief, knowledge, and lifestyle that had been formed in a certain context may be incomplete. They must be open to be purified and changed. This attitude can be developed through our schooling formation of 'dialogue' *within* a 'community' (i.e. diverse people whether inside or outside schools) and by regular 'reflection' in which we draw out the meanings of our learning experiences. In this way, our mission in Catholic schools will be able to form young people to become men and women *for* others who bring meaningful changes in the future.

Second, the learning community resonates with the evangelical emphasis on *fraternal and sororal relationship*. This means as Christians, we must treat everyone, despite our differences, with love and respect, especially those who are most abandoned in our society. Fr. Juan Alfaro SJ, in his *Christianisme and Justice*, makes the point that despite the Prophet Isaiah's proclamation of God's justice for the poor through the coming messiah, what makes the New Testament different is the *new attitude* in the way in which that Jesus not only came to help the poor, but also to make them his 'brothers and sisters.'

> Our belonging to or our being excluded from the Kingdom announced by Jesus is decided by our attitude in dealing with the poor and the oppressed, those whom

> Isaiah 58:1-2 describes as victims of human injustice and for whom God wants to make manifest his justice. But what is truly new is that Jesus makes these despised, marginalized people his 'sisters and brothers.' He enters into personal solidarity with all those who are poor and vulnerable, with all those who suffer hunger and misery. All those who find themselves in such a situation are sisters and brothers of Christ. They is why what is done on their behalf is done for Christ himself. (Alfaro 1973, 28)

One of the characteristics in the learning community is this attitude of fraternal and sororal relationship that is not based on cultures, religions, or any backgrounds. Despite the diversity of students, staff, villagers, or anyone who get involved in this project, everyone must be treated with respect and love. We know that what the young indigenous need is not only good education but also the appreciation of *who* they are. We do not forget that one of the main factors of injustice derives from disrespectful attitude that leads to dehumanised discrimination, such as the indigenous people in Thailand who are often designated as the 'uncivilised' and the 'forest people.' Without this sense of fraternal and sororal relationship and just treatment of one another, this can lead to the greater destruction of our society, as Arrupe reminds us,

> As a result of our sins of selfishness and our dehumanizing acts, which not only exploit others but also destroy our own human integrity, sin becomes hardened and objectified into ideas, structures, and anonymous organisms that escape our direct control. (Arrupe 1973, n.92)

Therefore, this evangelical attitude of fraternal and sororal relationship is vital for Catholic education no matter what types of institutions we have. We must create an atmosphere in which all students can feel safe, respected, and empowered. In this way, schools can be realms where students, especially those who are from tribal backgrounds, can have more self-esteem and appreciation of their own cultures as well as of those of others. Thus, if they are treated with respect and loved, they will learn to do the same with others in society as well.

Third, the learning community can be an example of a space where everyone is invited to do *discernment*, a vital process that enables us for the next stage of judgment on *how* we respond to social issues. This discernment means an ability to make a distinction between what comes from God and what does not. As Arrupe said:

> This concrete world, from which we must dislodge the injustice imbedded in ourselves and in the structures of society, is in fact a product of the joint influence of the Holy Spirit and of sin. That is why, when striving for justice, we need the gifts of counsel and discernment; we need to be able to distinguish between diverse spirits in order to separate, in each features of the world, what comes from God and what comes from sin. (Arrupe 1973, n.120)

But how can we make a discernment? To begin with, we must be aware that discernment is not *fixed* standards or principles for making decisions. Instead, it is a *process* that quite often takes a good amount of time for consideration. To do this, we acknowledge that discernment is related to the first two values we already discussed above. First, we need continual conversion that enables us to open for *better* or *correct* understanding of the social issue with which we want to cope. The person must have some time to dialogue with diverse people and have some time for deep reflection. In this way, the person will have overarching and accurate 'comprehension'

of the issue as well as 'interior freedom' to judge how to act next. Second, discernment is to search for what in God's will and what is not. And we know that God's will for us is rooted in His just love for all of us as His children. Therefore, we need this new attitude of fraternal and sororal relationship that orients our discernment not based on what is good for my own benefit but on what I can do to help my 'brothers and sisters' who are in need.

Therefore, if Catholic education want to tackle 'social justice,' we need to accompany our students in learning how to discern. This will enable them to make good judgments as to how to act for justice in real life. If they learn how to discern while they are in school, they will have no problems discerning many other social issues even when they already graduate from our schools. In this way, they can genuinely become 'men and women for others' who always search for better ways to bring meaningful changes for their society.

## Conclusion

The commonality between Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* and Arrupe's speech in Valencia was not any fixed and clear rules of *how* we can solve social issues because both of them had an awareness that these social problems can be contextually diverse and complex. However, both documents invite us to reflect on these social issues more deeply through the perspectives of our Christian faith and the Church's teachings. Through this, we can discern and discover how we can act in our own context. A 'learning community' is one of the models imagined after a long discernment of the Jesuits and lay-partners in Thailand and aims to assist poor and indigenous students who are frequently victims of educational inequality. The institution attempts to provide a formation that allows these students to develop themselves fully and become 'agents for change' in the future. Nevertheless, this new 'social justice' model may simultaneously inspire other Catholic educational institutions in Thailand regarding how the Christian values, i.e. personal conversion, fraternal and sororal relationship, and discernment, can help them to serve the poor and the marginalised more holistically and creatively according to their context. In this way, our Catholic education can form students who bring about reform in our society for the better not for worse, and at the same time, can still maintain our Catholic identity as distinguished from other institutions in this modern society.

## Notes

1. There are some examples of how Fr. Arrupe's speech at Valencia has significantly impacted Jesuit educational institutions across the globe. In Latin America, the network of informal schools, namely Fé y Alegría, provides an education for disadvantaged students with vocational training programmes. The network was first established in Venezuela in the 1950s. After Fr. Arrupe's emphasis on social justice, the network has expanded throughout Latin America, and later in Africa, in Congo in Chad. A similar idea inspires the Cristo Rey Network in the USA to assist poor students to pursue their degrees in higher education. In Asia, several Jesuit schools in India assist students from the *Dalit,* who are considered the lowest class or 'untouchable' people (See chapter 33 in *International Handbook of Catholic Education* (Part 2), 2007, Springer, by Cardinal Toppo). Apart from the schools where students can learn face-to-face with their teachers, with the unceasing development of technologies, Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) creatively uses the internet to provide online learning for the marginalised around the world, such as refugees who stay in the refugee camp between the Thailand-Myanmar border.

2. One of the main reasons why the Second Vatican Council took place was to adapt the Church to the modern world. The Council emphasises that '[i]n the present state of affairs, out of which there is arising a new situation for mankind, the Church, being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Matt.5:13–14), is more urgently called upon to save and renew every creature, that all things may be restored in Christ and all men may constitute one family in Him and one people of God' (*Ad Gentes*, Vatican II, no.1). The Council brought about a deeper reflection on the Church's teachings and the radical change of the Church's *structure*, such as ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, liturgical reforms, inculturation, collaboration with laypeople in mission, and others. These reforms inevitably created disagreements among those who preferred the pre-Vatican II 'Church.' Unfortunately, many priests and religious had left their vocations, or even the Church. Nevertheless, we do not deny that other factors affected the decline of the priestly and religious vocations as well, particularly secularisation.
3. Karen is one of the indigenous tribes, mainly inhabiting the highlands on the Thailand-Myanmar border. The Karen has its own language, custom, and culture. Within the Karen tribe, there are four major sub-tribes: the Sgaw (White Karen), Po (Red Karen), Pa-O and the Kayah. Today, there are approximately 4.5 million Karen people in total.
4. One of the characteristics of indigenous knowledge and values is the deep relationship between people and nature. One example from Karen education is called the 'life-cycle of cultivation.' The Karen divides their land into different parts: a housing zone, a watershed area, a forest area, and a land for *Rai Mun Wian*. The latter refers to a common village area divided into seven zones. As *Rai Mun Wian* literally means the rotational shifting cultivation, the Karen collectively cultivate one zone each year and leave other zones for *self-regeneration*. After the harvest, they share raw products with all families in the village and keep some for the poor, especially the widow and the orphan. Interestingly, the Karen use a term, the 'life-cycle,' and each cycle consists of seven years. In terms of education, the elders use the metaphor of the life-cycle of cultivation to educate young Karen in different aspects. First, the metaphor symbolises the anthropological dimension of human life which has also a life-cycle developed from childhood to adulthood. Second, the life-cycle teaches the ethical value that 'each one cannot exist by itself and needs the others' (Santasombat 2004, 116) as each Karen can experience in their community solidarity of cultivation. In short, the metaphor of life-cycle of cultivation can be an effective tool that provides integrated knowledge and values for Karen children throughout their lives.
5. Xavier Learning Community (XLC) is under the Jesuit Foundation for Education, Thailand. The first director was Fr. Pichet Saengthien SJ (2017–2022), and the current director is Fr. Vinai Boonlue SJ. There are 13 teaching staff (4 Jesuit priests, 2 Jesuit seminarians, 2 religious Sisters, and 5 full-time teachers) and 6 non-teaching staff. Each year, there are several teaching volunteers from different countries, such as Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, the USA, and so on. These staff and volunteers currently teach 92 students (26 men and 66 women) from different tribes. Until now, XLC has received financial support from various sources, both individuals and organisations, particularly Jesuit alumni and Jesuit networks both local and abroad. As XLC is not yet a full college, our students have been currently learning from Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) curriculum. Because of that, each semester, XLC receives visits and advice about the teaching programme from the STOU visitors. In addition, XLC closely collaborates with Ateneo de Davao University, one of the Jesuit Universities in the Philippines, to undertake the 5-year research on a cultural-based curriculum as required by the Thai government as part of the process of becoming a future college.
6. The Church in Thailand has actively addressed social justice issues for over decades, such as sex trafficking, refugees, discrimination against indigenous people, and so on. As these issues are the common concerns with the public, media and political groups in Thailand, the Church collaborates more closely with both the state and private social organisations. Regarding the discrimination of indigenous people, the Church has recently put significant efforts into assisting these people. This includes the change of the Church structure of northern Thailand, where the Chiang Rai diocese emerged out of the previous Chiang Mai diocese. This new structure allows bishops, clergy, and other religious to serve the Catholics, particularly those indigenous who inhabit mountainous areas, more effectively. Apart from the structural and pastoral reform, on the 2nd of July 2021, Bishop Francis

Xavier Vira Arpondratana of Chiang Mai led the inauguration of the Asian School of Wisdom (ASW) to promote the local knowledge and values in Asia, including from indigenous communities in Thailand. This demonstrates an effort from the Thai Church to tackle the social issues more sustainably.

7. It is worth noting that John Paul II, the successor of Paul VI, also elaborated on this concept of the 'structure' of sins in the encyclical, 'Solicitude Rei Socialis' in 1987. The encyclical illustrates that apart from political and economic aspects, our analysis of social issues is essentially related to our Christian faith because the social injustice 'opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbour and the "structures" created by them, two are very typical: on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others (*Solicitude Rei Socialis*, 1987, no.37). Thus, when we discuss the concept of sins, 'not only individuals fall victim to this double of sin; nations and blocs can do so too.'

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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