

Youth as Pneumatological Agents: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Youth

Joy Qualls and Wayne Choong

Abstract

This chapter advances a youth-centred Pentecostal theology, framing young people as active pneumatological agents rather than passive recipients or future actors. Critiquing generational labels such as “Gen Z” and “Gen Alpha,” it underscores the diversity, agency, and theological discernment exercised by youth across cultural, ecclesial, and digital contexts. Drawing on Scripture, ethnography, and Pentecostal scholarship, the chapter shows how youth co-shape faith practices, leadership, and communal meaning-making. Situating youth agency within the cultural and digital turns, it highlights the dynamic interplay of social structures, technology, and Spirit-led innovation. The chapter serves as a call for a more robust Pentecostal theology of youth – one integrating theological reflection and praxis, empowering youth as co-discerners and co-creators in the global Pentecostal Movement today.

Key Words: digital religion, Pentecostal theology of youth, pneumatological agency, sociology of youth

Introduction

Young people are often positioned as the future of the church, with ministry and scholarship alike emphasising what they *might become* rather than who they are in the present. Within Christian contexts in Asia and the West, this tendency is reinforced by the widespread adoption of generational labels such as “Gen Z” or “Gen Alpha,” which describe cohorts by birth year and assumed characteristics. While these frameworks may offer convenient shorthand, they risk flattening the diversity, agency, and complexity of youth experience into simplistic stereotypes. Pentecostals, like many Protestant traditions, have historically embraced a modernist, systematic approach to theological engagement. Combined with generational frameworks, this has often resulted in the teaching of Pentecostal theology being imposed upon youth rather than explored collaboratively.

A more dialogical model recognises youth as interdependent partners, engaging Scripture, the Spirit, and the insights of older generations in a shared

hermeneutical process.¹ Through this communal theological engagement, gaps that exist between generations can be narrowed, enabling the co-creation of meaning and allowing the Spirit's guidance to shape the church collectively. In this framework, youth are present – as Spirit-empowered agents whose discernment, creativity, and insight contribute to the life of the community today, rather than merely future leaders waiting to be prepared.

This chapter advances a Pentecostal theology of youth that is youth-centred, recognising young people as active pneumatological agents whose engagement with faith, culture, and community is dynamic, significant, and Spirit-led. By framing youth as co-discerners in theological practice rather than as passive recipients, Pentecostal communities are challenged to rethink leadership, discipleship, and ecclesial structures. Acts 2:17 declares, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions,”² emphasising that the Spirit's work in and through youth is not deferred but in the present. This scriptural grounding informs a theology that recognises youth as indispensable participants in God's mission, capable of discernment, creativity, and leadership in both physical and digitally mediated spaces.

The significance of situating this paper within the cultural and digital turns lies in their explanatory power. The cultural turn in the social sciences, drawing on theorists such as Mary Douglas,³ Clifford Geertz,⁴ Michel Foucault,⁵ and Stuart Hall⁶ emphasises the role of culture in shaping identity and social norms. Within the sociology of youth, this turn highlights young people as active meaning-makers capable of negotiating and contesting cultural expectations.⁷ The digital turn⁸ further expands these dynamics, providing arenas for young people to exercise agency, create communities, and (re)interpret religious meaning and practice through digital media.⁹ By situating Pentecostal youths

¹ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (T&T Clark, 2004).

² All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon Books, 1977).

⁶ Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (Hutchinson, 1980).

⁷ Allison James et al., *Theorizing Childhood* (Polity Press, 1998).

⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University Press, 2006); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books, 2011); Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (Yale University Press, 2014).

⁹ Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010); Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2013); Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045625>; Mia Lövhelm, “Mediatization and Religion,” in *Mediatization of*

within these broader socio-cultural and technological frameworks, the chapter foregrounds the conditions under which agency is exercised and theological discernment takes place.

This framework is particularly important in the Asian context, where social, educational, and familial pressures intersect with religious engagement in ways that differ markedly from Western contexts. In Singapore, for example, Pentecostal youths navigate rigorous academic expectations, compulsory National Service, and multiethnic religious landscapes, producing highly differentiated experiences of discipleship. Similarly, in metropolitan contexts across Southeast Asia, young Pentecostals contend with a tension between inherited faith traditions and the culturally hybridised expressions of globalised youth culture.¹⁰ These cultural dynamics suggest that applying Western generational frameworks without contextual adaptation can obscure the diversity of youth experience and misrepresent their aspirations and agency.

This chapter advances three arguments. First, it critiques the pervasive reliance on generational labels as both sociological categories and pastoral heuristics, showing how they flatten youth identity and obscure young people's agency. Second, it develops and extends Pentecostal theologies of youth, by conceptualising young people as pneumatological agents – co-discerners and innovators of faith practices – drawing on both Scripture and ethnographic research. Third, it situates this theological vision within the broader analytical frameworks of the cultural and digital turns, demonstrating how social theory illuminates the forms of agency and discernment practised by young Pentecostals across the globe. Taken together, these arguments move beyond treatments that either reduce youth to cultural consumers or romanticise youth agency, offering instead a grounded account of Spirit-empowered, socially embedded participation in the life of the church.

This endeavour contributes and responds to ongoing efforts to address critical gaps in both theology and the social sciences. In theology, scholars have repeatedly highlighted the limitations of treating youth as objects of formation rather than active co-labourers, demonstrating the need for a pneumatologically informed corrective. Amos Yong,¹¹ for example, has shown how the Pentecost narrative reconfigures family and intergenerational relations through the Spirit's outpouring, envisioning sons, daughters, young, and old as equally empowered participants in God's household. Yet while Yong develops a Pentecostal theology of the family, situating youth within a Spirit-filled family, less attention has been given to youth as theological agents in their own right. This chapter

Communication, ed. K. Lundby (De Gruyter Mouton, 2014),
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272215.547>.

¹⁰ Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, "Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia," in *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, ed. J. Wyn and H. Cahill (Springer, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-15-4_40; Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, ed., *Rethinking Filipino Millennials: Alternative Perspectives on a Misunderstood Generation* (UST Publishing House, 2020).

¹¹ Amos Yong, "Sons and Daughters, Young and Old: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Family," *PentecoStudies* 10, no. 2 (2011): 147-73,
<https://doi.org/10.1558/ptcs.v10i2.147>.

takes up that challenge, extending Yong's trajectory by foregrounding young people as active co-discerners whose Spirit-empowered agency reshapes both ecclesial and cultural life. P. M. (Ronelle) Sonnenberg¹² emphasises the integration of empirical research into theological education to better understand youth agency in spiritual contexts. Sarah Holmes and Ed Drew¹³ critique traditional youth ministry models that overlook the active ways young people shape their faith experiences. Jeremy Myers¹⁴ advocates for liberating youth from assumptions of passivity, recognising them as co-creators with God in the present rather than "underdeveloped consumers." Likewise, Martin Mittelstadt¹⁵ extends Pentecostal theology of vocation, emphasising that all believers – including youth – participate prophetically in God's mission, echoing Acts 2:17's vision of young people as active agents of the Spirit.

Opoku Onyinah et al. reinforce this perspective in *The New Generation and the Holy Spirit*, explicitly noting that they are "careful not to pretend that the present generation can shape the next one – the agent will ultimately have to be the Holy Spirit."¹⁶ This statement underscores the ongoing tension between top-down, adult-centred formation and Spirit-empowered youth self-expression, affirming the need for a youth-centred theological perspective. Collectively, these works highlight a persistent theological and pastoral gap: the need to recognise, engage, and empower youth as co-discerners and contributors to faith formation.

In sum, this study positions youth as present, active participants, whose engagement is simultaneously shaped by and shaping cultural, digital, spiritual, and Pentecostal landscapes. By emphasising a youth-centred theological praxis, the chapter challenges ministers, theologians, and Pentecostal communities to reconceptualise youth not as a demographic category, a generational stereotype, or a future project, but as co-discerners and co-creators in the work of the Spirit today.

Theoretical and Contextual Framework

Recognising Pentecostal youths as active Spirit-empowered agents requires situating their experiences within broader cultural and socio-technical contexts. This chapter frames the theological and sociological dimensions of youth agency through the cultural turn and the digital turn, providing critical insight into how

¹² P. M. (Ronelle) Sonnenberg, "Youth Ministry and the Empirical Turn," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119756927.ch35>.

¹³ Sarah Holmes and Ed Drew, "What is the Point of Ministry among Children, Youth and Families? Examination of Aims and Activities from Different Perspectives," *British Journal of Religious Education* (June 2025): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2513546>.

¹⁴ Jeremy Paul Myers, *Liberating Youth from Adolescence* (Fortress Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Martin W. Mittelstadt, "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation," *Spiritus* 9, no. 2 (2024): 293-315, <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1373>.

¹⁶ Opoku Onyinah et al., "Introduction," in *The New Generation & the Holy Spirit: Building a Spirit-Empowered Future*, ed. Wonsuk Ma et al. (ORU Press, 2025), 7.

youth negotiate identity, meaning, and religious practice in contemporary contexts. It lays the foundation for a Pentecostal theology of youth that is contextually grounded, cross-culturally relevant, and youth-centred.

The Cultural Turn and Youth Agency

The cultural turn in the social sciences, emerging in the latter half of the twentieth century, emphasises the constitutive role of culture in shaping identity, social norms, and interpretive practices. Pioneering contributions by Douglas¹⁷ and Geertz¹⁸ framed culture not merely as background context, but as an active process of meaning-making. Foucault's¹⁹ work on power, knowledge, and subjectivity further underscored that individuals, including young people, are not passive recipients of social norms but negotiate and contest them through everyday practices. Hall²⁰ elaborated on this perspective by emphasising that identity is constructed, performed, and fluid, a concept particularly applicable to youth navigating complex social and religious landscapes.

Within the sociology of youth, these insights have been elaborated to highlight the active, agentive roles of young people. James, Jenks, and Prout²¹ argue that youth should be understood as meaning-makers rather than merely as a transitional life stage. Similarly, Alan France²² emphasises that youth agency is both socially situated and relationally negotiated. This theoretical lens provides a corrective to models that treat youth primarily as objects of socialisation or as recipients of ecclesial ministry strategies. In Pentecostal contexts, this perspective challenges assumptions that leadership, theological insight, or spiritual maturity must accrue linearly with age, instead recognising the immediate and participatory role of youth in shaping faith communities.

Ethnographic observations among Pentecostal youths engaged in “theological tinkering” confirm how religious authority is negotiated and identity constructed.²³ Their reworking and wrestling with biblical teachings through digital culture, cross-cultural flows, and contemporary issues shows that youth are not simply adapting to inherited norms but actively co-constructing Pentecostal culture and theology – often in ways unanticipated by adult leaders.

To clarify what is at stake in youth agency, it is important to consider how meaning itself is constructed. Paul Ricoeur's concept of *emplotment* describes the process by which individuals weave together disparate moments, events, and encounters into narratives that are both plausible and enduring.²⁴ The creation of

¹⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

¹⁸ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*.

¹⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

²⁰ Hall, “Encoding/Decoding.”

²¹ James, Jenks, and Prout, *Theorizing Childhood*.

²² Alan France, *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity* (Open University Press, 2007).

²³ Wayne Choong, “An Ecosystemic Approach to Digital Christianity: How Faith and Identity Formation Evolve among Youth in Singapore,” *Religion and Social Communication* 23, no. 2 (2025), 317–45, <https://doi.org/10.62461/WC040325>.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 31–51, quoted in Stephanie A. Martin, *Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald Trump* (University of Alabama Press, 2021), 168.

these narratives is not incidental to what it means to be human and how people make sense of themselves, create communities, and inhabit social worlds. For Christians, these events are cosmically significant in their meaning. Within Pentecostal traditions, testimony and shared narratives have long functioned as central vehicles of theology, giving experiential shape to communal life. Youth, therefore, are not merely recipients of these stories but are capable of crafting and narrating them in ways that contribute to the shaping of their faith communities.

This connects with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's²⁵ definition of agency as the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak and write in a way that will be recognised or heeded by others in one's community. Agency is both communal and participatory. People derive their agency within community, depending on the interaction of capacity, competence, and recognition. Being a wholly realised person means being able to communicate and then register one's priorities to others who are willing to listen. Such a vision reframes youth not as passive recipients of religious instruction but as co-creators of shared meaning. Agency, then, is not a potential quality that youth must one day acquire; it is already present in their narrative practices and social participation.

The Digital Turn and the Mediation of Faith

Complementing the cultural turn, the digital turn offers insight into how technological infrastructures, media platforms, and digital flows shape the contexts in which culture, identity, and meaning are negotiated.²⁶ At the intersection of digitalisation and religion, Campbell²⁷ conceptualises "digital religion" to emphasise that contemporary faith practice cannot be neatly divided into online and offline spheres.

Turkle²⁸ and Boyd²⁹ highlight how digital environments allow for relational experimentation, identity play, and community formation outside traditional institutional structures. For Christian youths, this can manifest in online Bible studies, TikTok devotional content, or virtual worship spaces that extend the reach and creativity of spiritual engagement. Importantly, these digital practices are not inherently secularising; rather, they constitute legitimate arenas in which the Spirit may be experienced and interpreted. Wayne Choong's³⁰ observations of young Pentecostals illustrate youth-led initiatives such as Discord Bible study groups, evangelism on Instagram, and digitalised prayers, which exemplify Spirit-led innovation within digital ecosystems, reflecting both creativity and theological discernment.

²⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean," *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (2006), 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1479142042000332134>.

²⁶ Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Boyd, *It's Complicated*.

²⁷ Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*; Campbell, *Digital Creatives*.

²⁸ Turkle, *Alone Together*.

²⁹ Boyd, *It's Complicated*.

³⁰ Choong, "An Ecosystemic Approach to Digital Christianity."

The ubiquity of digital spaces also amplifies young people's capacity for religious identity formation, particularly the construction of "storied religious identities," where young believers weave together diverse religious and socio-cultural references into coherent, ongoing narrative projects of the self.³¹ This process reflects the cultural turn's emphasis on youth as active meaning-makers, demonstrating how digital mediation and cultural negotiation function along a reinforcing continuum.

Together, these insights demonstrate that the digital turn, in continuity with the cultural turn, creates conditions for young Pentecostals to exercise theological discernment, engage in creative practices, and participate as active co-discerners. Digital religion thus not only mediates faith but amplifies youth agency, situating spiritual formation within socio-technical, cultural, and Spirit-led networks.

Integrating Cultural and Digital Turns: A Youth-Centred Theology

While the cultural and digital turns are analytically distinct, they are mutually reinforcing when applied to Pentecostal youths. Both frameworks emphasise agency, creativity, and reflexivity, highlighting that youth are active negotiators of meaning in multiple spheres.

Theologically, this continuum affirms and calls for a youth-centred Pentecostal theology that accounts for how young people discern and respond to the Spirit within these complex, interconnected cultural and digital ecosystems. Amos Yong's³² proposal of a pneumatology that is dialogical, contextual, and open to the Spirit's work beyond traditional boundaries aligns closely with the lived realities of Pentecostal youths, who frequently encounter and interpret the Spirit through digital spaces and peer-led theological conversations within platformed environments.

Steven Félix-Jäger³³ further emphasises that Spirit-led creativity and aesthetic experience constitute legitimate theological loci. For youth, this means that techno-mediated artistic expression, digital storytelling, and even meme-making become avenues for theological reflection and spiritual encounter. These practices are not peripheral; they are central to how young people embody, negotiate, and articulate faith. In this sense, youth are not only navigating culture and technology, they are also discerning the Spirit within them, through them, and around them.

³¹ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, eds., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2022); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

³² Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005).

³³ Steven Félix-Jäger, "Inspiration and Discernment in Pentecostal Aesthetics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 1 (2014): 85-104, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02301009>; *Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics*, vol. 16 of *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* (Brill, 2015); and *Spirit of the Arts: Towards a Pneumatological Aesthetics of Renewal* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Collectively, these perspectives call for not merely a youth-centred but a pneumatocentric theology of youth – one that expands its boundaries to include the participation, innovation, and scholarship of youth. Such a youth-centred pneumatology recognises that discernment is not the exclusive domain of clergy or elders but is distributed across the body of Christ, including its youngest members. As Wolfgang Vondey³⁴ argues, the Pentecostal Spirit is essentially playful, liberative, creatively unpredictable. Young people often exhibit these qualities, and a youth-centred pneumatology must acknowledge that the Spirit’s movement often emerges in unexpected spaces – on Discord servers, YouTube livestreams, gaming platforms, and TikTok – where youth gather, share, and seek God.

Youth as Pneumatological Agents

This section advances the argument that young people should be understood as pneumatological agents: Spirit-empowered participants in theological discernment and ecclesial life. It proceeds in three movements: first, by critiquing the limits of generational labels as dominant frameworks for understanding youth; second, by grounding youth agency theologically within Scripture and Pentecostal pneumatology; and third, by examining how such agency is expressed in contemporary cultural, ecclesial, and digital contexts. Together, these movements reframe youth not as passive recipients of formation but as active co-constructors of faith and practice.

Beyond Generational Labels

Generational categories such as “Gen Z” and “Gen Alpha” have become common in scholarship and ministry discourse. While a convenient shorthand, these labels risk flattening the complex socio-cultural, economic, and religious realities shaping youth experiences. In Singaporean Pentecostal contexts, youth trajectories diverge sharply along educational, familial, and socio-economic lines. One young believer may be a high-achieving junior college student from a well-resourced family, actively engaged in church leadership and mission work; another may be in vocational training, working part-time to support household needs, with church serving primarily as a space for emotional support and community. Both fall under “Gen Z,” yet their lived experiences of faith, engagement, and spiritual formation differ profoundly.

Familial religious socialisation further complicates the picture. National surveys indicate that approximately half of Singaporean Christians are raised in the faith.³⁵ If Pentecostal youths mirror this distribution, two overlapping pathways emerge: those nurtured in Christian households, for whom

³⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*, Pentecostal Manifestos 3 (Eerdmans, 2010); see also Wolfgang Vondey, “Religion as Play: Pentecostalism as a Theological Type,” *Religions* 9, no. 3 (2018): 1-16.

³⁵ Kim Parker, “How Pew Research Center Will Report on Generations Moving Forward,” Pew Research Center, May 22, 2023, <https://pewrsr.ch/3BLLK6b>.

Pentecostalism continues inherited faith, and those coming to faith without such scaffolding, often experiencing disruptive conversions marked by Spirit-led encounters and communal belonging. These divergent pathways produce religious identities and participation that resist the reductive tendencies of Western age-based generational categories.³⁶

Cross-cultural comparison highlights this limitation. In Nepal, home to one of the fastest-growing Pentecostal populations globally,³⁷ youth experiences are stratified by caste, gender, urban–rural location, and socio-economic status.³⁸ While digital access has expanded, rural and female youth continue to face barriers, challenging the assumption that all members of “Gen Z” are technologically fluent or digitally active.³⁹ In China, youth within nominally identical age cohorts pursue divergent aspirations and exhibit varied religious orientations. While Western “Gen Alpha” youth may gravitate towards creative, digital vocations, Chinese youth often prioritise stable employment aligned with family expectations, and acquire religious knowledge through peers, community, or media rather than inherited family faith.⁴⁰

These examples highlight a central problem: generational labels compress diverse, context-dependent realities into homogenised categories that obscure rather than illuminate the religious lived realities of youth. The labels themselves

³⁶ Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>; Parker, “How Pew Research Center Will Report on Generations Moving Forward.”

³⁷ I. Gibson, “Pentecostal Peacefulness: Virtue Ethics and the Reception of Theology in Nepal,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 4 (2017): 765–82; see also I. Gibson, *Suffering and Hope: Christianity and Ethics among the Newars of Bhaktapur* (Ekta Books, 2017).

³⁸ D. N. Gellner, S. L. Hausner, and C. Letizia, eds., *Religion, Secularism, and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal* (Oxford University Press, 2020); M. Lawoti, “Cleavages, Conflicts, and Sociocultural Groups,” in *Towards a Democratic Nepal: Inclusive Political Institutions for a Multicultural Society* (SAGE Publications, 2005); Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Nepal, “Youth Vision—2025 and Ten-Year Strategic Plan,” August 19, 2025,

https://moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nitiheru/Youth%20Vision-2025_2.pdf; United Nations Development Programme, “UNDP Nepal Youth Strategy 2018–2022,” 2018, <https://un.org.np/resource/undp-nepal-youth-strategy-2018-2022>.

³⁹ A. Basnet and A. Shrestha, “Nepal’s Digitalisation Journey: Experiences and Challenges in Digital Transformation and the Future Ahead,” 2023, Asia Competitiveness Institute and Nepal Institute for Policy Research, <https://aciperspectives.com/2023/03/13/nepals-digitalisation-journey-experiences-and-challenges-in-digital-transformation-and-the-future-ahead/>; S. Thapa, “Disparity in the Use of Mass Media among Youth Population in Nepal,” *Nepal Public Policy Review* 3, no. 2 (2023), 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.59552/nppr.v3i2.65>.

⁴⁰ L. Chen, S. Zeng, and Z. Tian, “Resonance or Alienation: An Empirical Study on the Influencing Factors of Religious Belief Choices among China’s Generation Z,” MDPI, September 11, 2023, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/9/1161>; Yang Wang, “From Precarity to Stability: Job Preferences among Chinese Youth in Today’s China,” MA Thesis, The University of Chicago, 2024, Knowledge@UChicago, <https://doi.org/10.6082/uchicago.13219>.

find their genesis in Western terminology and definitional structure but even so, they fail to adequately address the complex experiences of young people in these contexts. Antipas Harris, for instance, offers a valuable perspective on the state of Christian youth globally;⁴¹ he also recognises Dimock's⁴² caution regarding fuzzy generational boundaries. Yet, despite these qualifications, much of the discussion is framed around contrasting "Millennials" and "Gen Z." Even with a careful acknowledgement of limitations, structuring arguments this way can risk overgeneralisation. First, it essentialises cohorts, treating "Gen Z" as if all members share traits (e.g., broadly "religiously disaffiliated" yet "spiritually hungry"), flattening internal diversity across ethnicity, class, and familial religiosity. Second, it over-emphasises discontinuity, exaggerating differences between generations while downplaying Dimock's emphasis that variations within generations are often greater than variations between them.

A related institutional problem, common in many Western Pentecostal and Protestant contexts, is the generations-long tendency to organise congregational life along age-demographic lines. Children's and youth programmes are frequently siloed from adult worship; young people rarely worship alongside parents and elders except on special occasions. This weakens cross-generational/cultural engagement and obstructs the co-discernment necessary for shared meaning. When youth cultivate communal life primarily within curated peer spheres, and adult leaders in youth ministries are tacitly treated as being in a "starter" ministry, in training for later "real" ministry, the wider church loses access to the distinctive wisdom, questions, and prophetic edge younger members bring. Segregation by age can institutionalise the notion that young people are not yet full participants in the body of Christ but merely "becomings," rather than Spirit-filled beings through whom God speaks and to whom the church must listen in discerning God's work.

Karl Mannheim's⁴³ sociology of generations offers a corrective: generational identity arises not from chronological age alone but from shared historical and social experiences. Applied to Pentecostal youth, this perspective underscores that faith formation, spiritual innovation, and leadership are shaped by intersecting socio-cultural, familial, and digital contexts – not merely the generational cohort into which one is born. Recognising this complexity affirms youth as active, Spirit-filled, and Spirit-led participants – pneumatological agents within their communities, co-shaping theological understanding, communal practice, and ministry alongside older generations, rather than as passive members of a fixed generational bloc.

⁴¹ Antipas L. Harris, "Global Christianity and Gen Z: A Bird's Eye Exploration of the Contemporary Situation of Faith in Search of Glimmers of Hope for the Future of Faith," in *Voices Loud & Clear*, ed. Kong Hee et al. (Regnum Publishers, 2024), 303.

⁴² Dimock, "Defining Generations."

⁴³ Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," trans. K. W. Rawls, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti (1923, repr., Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

Theological Foundation for Pneumatological Agency

Scripture consistently affirms youth as central to divine activity. From Samuel hearing God's voice while Eli remained spiritually inert (1 Sam. 3), to David being anointed king as the youngest of Jesse's sons (1 Sam 16), to Josiah leading reforms at eight (2 Chron 34:1), to Mary's radical obedience as a teenager (Luke 1:26-38), to Timothy being exhorted not to let anyone despise his youth (1 Tim 4:12), youth are repeatedly centred in God's redemptive work. Jesus himself teaches in the temple at twelve (Luke 2:41-52), and his later admonition of adult-centred gatekeeping with the words, "Let the little children come to me ... for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt 19:14), exemplifies a Kingdom logic that re-centres the last, the least, and the youngest.

Pentecost crystallises this divine logic. Peter, interpreting the Spirit's outpouring, quotes Joel: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy... your young men will see visions" (Acts 2:17). This is not mere inclusion, it is amplification. The Spirit does not reluctantly accommodate youth, but empowers them as prophets and visionaries. Duane Garrett notes the radical nature of Joel's prophecy in his time, as in Peter's (and even today): "in an era in which men (not women), the old (not the young), and the landowners (not slaves) ruled society, Joel explicitly rejected all such distinctions as criteria for receiving the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost lays a theological foundation for human equality without age distinction in being baptised in the Spirit and empowered for ministry. Wolfgang Vondey echoes this "scandalous" Pentecost, in which "the Spirit is poured out not on specific flesh but on *all* flesh ... [which] signals that the church must resist any public pressures, social customs, cultural norms, religious regulations, and demonic powers that seek to suppress the redemption of all," including youth.⁴⁵ Frank Macchia further emphasises that, "Christians at *whatever level of spiritual maturity* find their ministries enhanced with greater power and effectiveness through an experience of *Spirit baptism*"⁴⁶ [emphasis added].

Theological and ministry scholarship on youth ministry affirms this pneumatological perspective. Andrew Root⁴⁷ argues for a relational-incarnational approach where youth are not spiritual projects but persons encountering God in their lived realities. Similarly, Kenda Creasy Dean⁴⁸ insists that youth are not the church's future but its present, capable of articulating and

⁴⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, vol. 19A of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. R. Clendenen (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 369.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Vondey, "The Church as Scandal of Salvation: Pentecost and the Continuity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025), 12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_S7MbViWCM.

⁴⁶ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Zondervan Academic, 2006), 77.

⁴⁷ Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (InterVarsity Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

embodying faith. Amanda Hontz Drury⁴⁹ extends this by showing that testimony functions as a form of adolescent theological reflection. Félix-Jäger⁵⁰ further demonstrates that youth artistry, embodiment, and spiritual practices form authentic spaces of Spirit-led theology. Responding to Amos Yong's⁵¹ call for a pneumatological imagination, this chapter argues that we must take seriously the person and work of the Holy Spirit in and through young people and properly reimagine them as pneumatological agents.

This affirmation is not merely theoretical; it is repeatedly evidenced in revival history and contemporary ministry. As Randy Clark, whose ministry was central to the 1994 Toronto Blessing revival, emphasises,⁵² the Spirit's empowerment of young people is not confined to biblical times or isolated historical awakenings but remains a recurring feature of contemporary revivals. Ed Silvoso as a teenager himself mobilised teenage evangelistic teams that contributed to church growth in Latin America; Billy Graham, at nineteen, began preaching to thousands who would eventually number in the millions; and SoPhal Ung, in his twenties, founded churches and orphanages in Cambodia amidst intense persecution. Joseph Dimitrov provides historical evidence from East-European churches under totalitarian regimes, noting that, "local church revivals sprang out of their youth meetings ... [where] baptisms in the Holy Spirit became the catalyst for witnessing manifestations of spiritual gifts."⁵³ Such accounts resonate with Keener's broader conclusion that "most revivals in modern history began ... among youth not yet set in their ways," with Spirit baptism empowering ordinary young believers, not just "official" leaders, to manifest charismatic gifts and revival.⁵⁴ As Clark, who himself was called to preach at eighteen, stresses, Spirit baptism has consistently functioned as the means of empowerment enabling these young "history-makers" to embody their divine calling.⁵⁵

These examples collectively affirm that youth are active pneumatological agents, capable of discernment, leadership, and innovation. Their participation is not ancillary but central to Pentecostal mission, theology, and community life. In Singapore, Kong Hee (age twenty-five) and Sun Ho (age seventeen), with a

⁴⁹ Amanda Hontz Drury, *Saying is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development* (InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ Félix-Jäger, *Spirit of the Arts*.

⁵¹ Amos Yong, "The Pneumatological Imagination," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507076-18>.

⁵² Randy Clark, "The Next Generation and the Holy Spirit: Keynote Address," in *The New Generation & the Holy Spirit: Building a Spirit-Empowered Future*, ed. Wonsuk Ma et al. (ORU Press, 2025), 14.

⁵³ Joseph Dimitrov, "A Spirit-Driven Ecclesiological Tenacity: Tested and Proven Response to Hostility and Afflictions" (paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025), 7, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmQwh7z5odw>.

⁵⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World* (Baker Academic, 2021), chap. 36, "Humility," EPUB.

⁵⁵ Clark, "Next Generation and the Holy Spirit," 20.

ragtag group of twenty teenagers, founded City Harvest Church (CHC) in 1989 with a vision “to raise up a generation of young people who will take Asia by storm.”⁵⁶ Today, CHC stands as one of Asia’s largest Pentecostal movements, with a growing global network of affiliated churches – a vivid testament to the enduring impact of Spirit-fuelled, youth-led revival movements.

Pneumatological Agency across Cultural, Ecclesial, and Digital Contexts

The pneumatological agency of youth is expressed and shaped within cultural, ecclesial, and digital contexts. Social structures, ecclesial cultures, and digital platform logics all interact to create opportunities for the discernment and negotiation of theological praxis. The following ethnographic case studies – one ecclesial, the other digital – illustrate how young people both obey the Spirit’s prompting and innovate new forms of faith practice, thereby leading the church into deeper theological reflection and broader ministerial imagination.

This conviction rests on the biblical foundation of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28), fulfilled at Pentecost: “Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). As Craig Keener argues, Luke’s intentional reversal of Joel’s sequence – placing “visions” of the young before the “dreams” of the old – signals a deliberate theological emphasis and appeal to the Spirit’s empowerment of youth (see also Acts 5:6, 10; 7:58; 20:9; 23:17-18, 22).⁵⁷ This scriptural foundation provides a theological warrant for attending to the lived practices of young people as loci of Spirit-inspired agency.

Case Study 1: Flagging in City Harvest Church

An instructive example comes from City Harvest Church. While banners and flags have long been used in Catholic and Anglican liturgical processions, the contemporary practice of free-form “flagging” as prophetic worship emerged within late twentieth-century charismatic and prophetic movements rather than high church settings. At CHC, its introduction did not originate from leadership planning but from the initiative of a youth who, discerning what she described as a prompting of the Spirit, began waving a flag during a main service. Field observations and qualitative interviews indicate that this act initially drew hesitation, as it appeared unfamiliar even within CHC’s Pentecostal-Charismatic worship style. (See Pictures 1a and 1b below.)

Over time, however, her persistence sparked curiosity and gradual acceptance. Other youth soon joined in, followed later by adult congregants. (See Pictures 2a and 2b.) This intergenerational uptake reflected not only communal recognition of the Spirit’s activity through young people but also a relational posture of humility among older congregants to affirm a practice first initiated by youth – an instance of Pentecostal openness to the Spirit’s leading across

⁵⁶ Dawn Seow, “Kong Hee: “Every Day Is an Adventure with Jesus,” City News, November 8, 2014, <https://www.citynews.sg/2014/11/08/kong-hee-every-day-is-an-adventure-with-jesus/>.

⁵⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Vol. 1: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Baker Academic, 2012), 876.

generational lines. The church eventually designated a dedicated ecclesial space within the sanctuary for flagging, partly for practical safety reasons when flags were waved in crowded aisles (see Picture 3), yet this pragmatic measure simultaneously carried theological weight, signalling institutional recognition of the practice as a legitimate mode of worship. The executive pastor, Rev. Bobby Chaw, later offered a theological articulation of flagging as an embodied form of prophetic worship consistent with Pentecostal pneumatology. This trajectory – from individual discernment to communal adoption and theological articulation – demonstrates the catalytic role of youth in ecclesial innovation. A lone young person, through Spirit-inspired initiative, opened space for an entire congregation to embrace a richer and more embodied theology of worship.



Pictures 1a and 1b. Photograph by Michelle Toh. Used with permission



Pictures 2a and 2b. Photograph by Michelle Toh. Used with permission



Case Study 2: Digital Christianity and Youth Innovation

A second case of youth agency emerges in the digital sphere, where young believers shift from mere consumers to active creators and circulators of Christian practice. One striking example is a short film project by Agnus (age sixteen) and Yong Jie (age twenty-two). Together with peers, they produced an evangelistic video that was uploaded to YouTube and eventually used by over two hundred youths in their community. While evangelism was the immediate goal, the project exemplified youth as “culture makers.”⁵⁸ Their digital storytelling was more than creative expression; it was theological praxis, a Spirit-led reimagining of how the church bears public witness in a digital age.

⁵⁸ McCann Worldgroup, “The Truth about Gen Z,” 2021, https://www.creativebrief.com/user_files/26028/1685694599_TA%20Gen%20Z.pdf.

Such practices highlight how, online, youth are not simply passive recipients of institutional messaging but curators of meaning, shaping what circulates according to their convictions and communal needs. Theologically, this aligns with a pneumatological vision of the Spirit empowering all believers, including youth, to speak, create, and lead. Digital content on social media platforms thus becomes a site of pneumatological agency, where digital media is redeemed and mobilised for mission. (See Pictures 4a and 4b.)⁵⁹

Innovation also takes the form of everyday “e-vangelism.” On Instagram, youths like Krystal (age sixteen) use their personal accounts to share revelations, testimonies, and reflections on Scripture. These posts invite dialogue, while community-specific Christian-themed digital stickers created by the youth inscribe theological vision and communal identity. (See Pictures 5a and 5b.) Beyond public witness and expression, youth also build community through Telegram and WhatsApp groups (see Picture 6), which function as ritual markers of belonging and belief in decentralised ecclesial space.

This imagination extends further into digital pastoral care and prayer. Shi Ya (age fifteen), for instance, uses Instagram Stories and DMs to check in on peers, encourage them, and pray. In one case, she replied to a peer’s vulnerable post with Scripture and a voice-note prayer, sparking deeper spiritual conversation. Here, pastoral care emerges not from the pulpit but from the palm of her hand. Similarly, Grace (age twenty) describes how her cell group sustains intimacy through WhatsApp prayer chains – sharing prayer requests, sending voice prayers, and organising Zoom prayer meetings. Theologically, such micro-practices of intimacy embody a pneumatology of the Spirit’s presence in digitally mediated spaces, where prayer transcends physical distance and becomes communal intercession across screens.⁶⁰

Taken together, these practices form a youth-led ecology of care in which digital platforms are reconstructed and creatively hacked for ministry. The use of “Christian” emojis (🙏 for prayer, 🕊 for the Spirit), Christian-themed stickers, and the circulation of social media content exemplify what Campbell⁶¹ calls “networked religion” – a context where authority and meaning-making are diffused and youth experiment with hybrid forms of theological engagement. Far from trivial, such spiritually playful yet profound symbolic languages expand the scope of Pentecostal ritual life, integrating faith with the affordances of digital culture.⁶²

The Asbury Revival of 2023 illustrates another dimension of this dynamic. Though it began as an ordinary chapel service at Asbury University, it was youth who livestreamed, recorded, and circulated the event on TikTok and YouTube. Within days, the hashtag #asburyrevival had garnered over one hundred million

⁵⁹ Identification in pictures used by permission.

⁶⁰ Guichun Jun, “Digital Pneumatology: Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit in the Metaverse,” in *Voices Loud & Clear*, ed. Kong Hee et al. (Regnum Publishers, 2024).

⁶¹ Heidi Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religious Practice Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 64-93.

⁶² Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*; see also Vondey, “Religion as Play.”

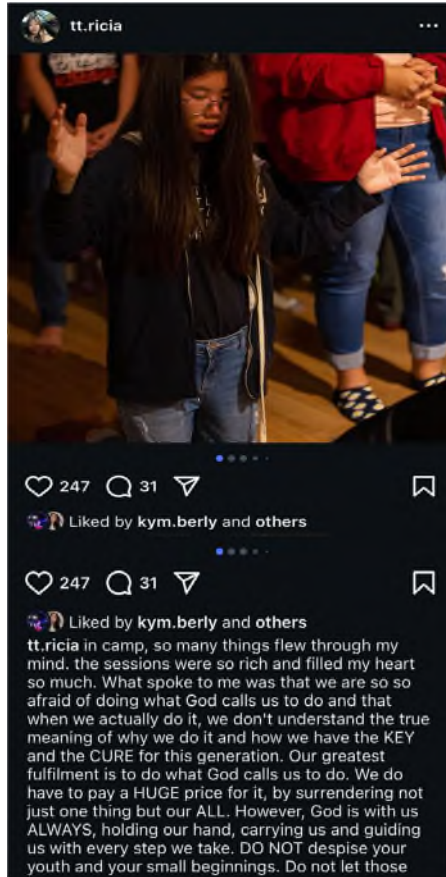
views, while hundreds of thousands joined livestreams, leaving comments testifying to sensing God’s presence “through the screen.” Young people did not merely document revival; they mediated it, extending its affective and spiritual reach digitally across continents.⁶³

Collectively, these examples show that youth are not merely adapting to digitalisation; they are actively constructing *digital Christianity* – Christianity lived, expressed, and reimagined in our present digital age. Their innovations are both creative and theological, marked by relationality, contextual sensitivity, and Spirit-led agency. In doing so, they challenge the church to recognise digital spaces not as peripheral but as vital arenas of theological formation and ecclesial life.



Picture 4a: A young person’s digital prayer journal on X (formerly Twitter), illustrating how youth use digital platforms as spaces for theological praxis, expression, and reflection.

⁶³ Asbury University, “The Outpouring at Asbury University,” Asbury University, 2025, <https://www.asbury.edu/about/revival-history/outpouring/>.



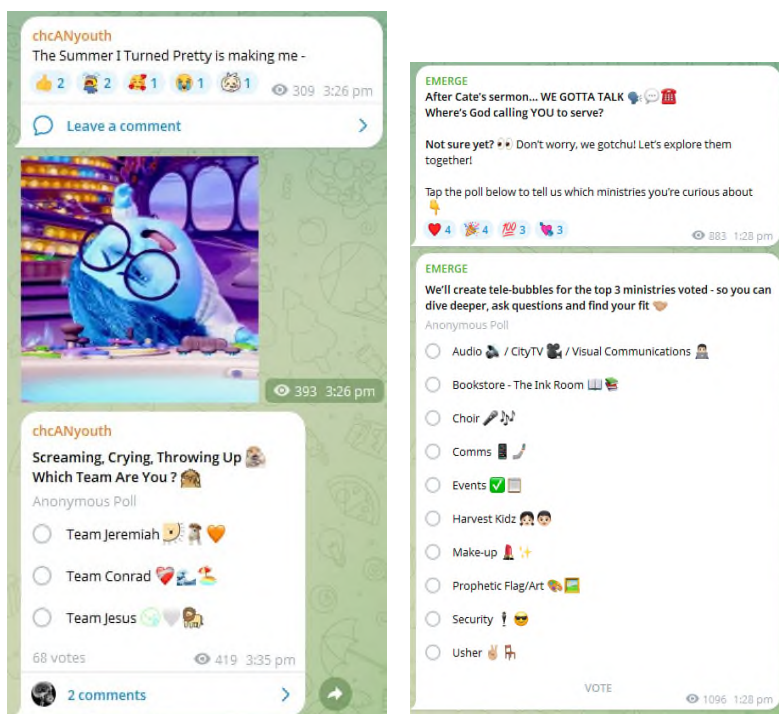
Picture 4b: A young person's Instagram post on camp takeaways: part faith testimony, part digital ministry to peers in her networked publics.



Picture 5a: A youth-created digital sticker capturing a pastor's message on love and "zero anger", circulating faith visually in peer networks.



Picture 5b: Digital stickers by a youth community, co-constructing and circulating faith, values, and meaning online.



Picture 6: Two youth communities using Telegram groups as ritual markers of belonging while co-constructing community in decentralised digital ecclesial spaces.

Sceptics raise two primary objections to youth-led innovations in ecclesial and digital contexts. First, some argue that such practices require adult oversight

to safeguard doctrinal fidelity and prevent excess. From this perspective, youthful enthusiasm must be tempered by ecclesial authority to ensure orthodoxy and avoid what Paul warns as “zeal without knowledge” (Rom 10:2). However, to reduce youth innovation to a problem in need of adult supervision risks neglecting Joel’s and Luke’s vision of the Spirit’s egalitarian outpouring.⁶⁴ Instead, such practices should be recognised as authentic pneumatological agency: subject to communal discernment, yes, but not restricted to adult initiation. Indeed, the very process of discernment can itself become intergenerational, where youth and adults together test and affirm the Spirit’s work (cf. 1 Cor 14:29).

Second, critics question whether digital engagement constitutes “authentic” theological practice. Douglas Estes⁶⁵ has suggested that online worship lacks sacramental depth, while Campbell and Tsuria⁶⁶ observe that institutional leaders often treat digital spaces as inauthentic or inferior to “real” religion. Yet Pentecostal theology locates authenticity not in institutional formality but in the Spirit’s presence and empowerment. Jun offers a robust theological framework to challenge this scepticism, establishing “digital pneumatology”⁶⁷ as the conviction that the Holy Spirit is present and active in digital spaces no less than in physical gatherings. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu⁶⁸ corroborates this from an African perspective, noting that Pentecostals testify to tangible healing through digital participation. Evidence from City Harvest Church’s globally attended online prayer meetings reinforces this claim: participants from India (esp. Mumbai), Singapore, and Japan reported dramatic breakthroughs, including the healing of a man in ICU with internal bleeding, the recovery of a woman from a brain haemorrhage, and the disappearance of chronic knee pain.⁶⁹ These accounts illustrate how digitally mediated spaces can become arenas of Spirit-empowered encounter that transcend geography, with tangible effects on bodies and lives.

Across platforms like TikTok, Zoom, and Telegram, youth are not just broadcasting faith; they are actively shaping it. Short devotional videos, Zoom-based “Worship from Home” sessions, and digital prayer chains become sites of relational theological praxis, where affect, attention, and creativity intersect. Participants engage, comment, and respond, co-constructing meaning and embodying pneumatological agency in ways that ripple across local and global

⁶⁴ Keener, *Acts*, 876.

⁶⁵ Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Zondervan, 2015).

⁶⁶ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, “Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed., ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022).

⁶⁷ Jun, “Digital Pneumatology,” 285.

⁶⁸ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Locked Down but Not Locked Out: An African Perspective on Pentecostalism and Media in a Pandemic Era,” in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, ed. Heidi Campbell and J. Dyer (SCM Press, 2022).

⁶⁹ Dawn Seow, “A God Who Answers Prayers: Testimonies from Prayer Meetings,” *City News*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.citynews.sg/2022/08/26/a-god-who-answers-prayers-testimonies-from-prayer-meetings/>.

communities. The Spirit is experienced as immediate, tangible, and communal, flowing through Instagram Stories,⁷⁰ TikTok testimonies, digital faith-community stickers, and prayers circulating across screens. These practices show that digitally mediated spaces are not secondary to “real” worship but are legitimate arenas of theological formation, pastoral care, and ecclesial innovation.

Jean-Daniel Plüss, drawing on Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen,⁷¹ emphasises the need for “hospitable, dialogical, and witness-oriented communication.”⁷² Extending this principle inward to the life of the church, a hospitable dialogical posture towards youth innovation means welcoming diverse expressions of Spirit-led agency while discerning them in dialogue across generations. As Kärkkäinen envisions in his “world-embracing, multilayered”⁷³ pneumatology, the Spirit blows freely through unexpected voices, including the visions and creations of youth. In this light, both ecclesial and digital innovations by young people are not anomalies to be tolerated but prophetic signs of the Spirit’s ongoing renewal of the church. In a rapidly changing, digitally networked world, the church must learn to lean in.

Propositions from a Pentecostal Theology of Youth

A robust Pentecostal theology of youth that recognises young people as pneumatological agents carries significant implications. While a full treatment is beyond the scope of this chapter, we forward three key propositions across macro, mezzo, and micro levels, for: (1) ecclesial structures and leadership, (2) youth ministry and discipleship, and (3) the young person as pneumatological agent.

Ecclesial Structures and Communal Discernment

If Pentecost constitutes the church as a Spirit-birthing community where “your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17), then ecclesial structures must be shaped for inclusive communal discernment. This requires deliberately amplifying voices that have historically been marginalised or culturally muted – in this case, the voices of the young.

To affirm youth as co-leaders and innovators is to refuse the reductionist rhetoric that casts them merely as the “leaders of tomorrow.” Pentecostal

⁷⁰ Instagram “Stories” are ephemeral and casual posts that disappear after 24 hours, often used for spontaneous or expressive updates.

⁷¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Christian Church among Religions: Toward a Hospitable Encounter with the Other,” in *Conviction in an Optional Society*, ed. Marina Ngursanzeli Behera and Jean-Daniel Plüss (Regnum, 2020).

⁷² Jean Daniel Plüss, “Lessons Learned during 30 Years of Ecumenical Dialogue: What Future Challenges Can Be Expected?” (paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025), 12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm0b5vVopC4>.

⁷³ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Does the Spirit Blow Where it Wills?: Pentecostals and the Struggle of Discerning the Holy Spirit among Religions” (paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025), 1.

ecclesiology demands recognition of their agency in the present. Barriers to this recognition often take two forms. The first is protective paternalism: the assumption that youth must be shielded from the “realities” of the church or the wider social world. Yet, as Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt⁷⁴ argue in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, such overprotection leads not to resilience but fragility, producing generations ill-prepared to wrestle with complexity. Coddling, whether intellectual or spiritual, stunts rather than strengthens the young person’s capacity to discern God’s activity.

The second barrier is the assumption that youth lack sufficient intelligence, experience, or gifting to contribute meaningfully. A robust Pentecostal theology of youth, however, destabilises such hierarchies. As Amos Yong argues, the Day of Pentecost narrative must also be understood ecclesologically, “where the church is constituted as a new set of social relationships ... in which the elders and the youth of the community are joined together in leadership and common cause... all recipients of the Spirit’s gift and empowerment.”⁷⁵ To resist this is to resist the Spirit’s own redistribution of power.

To hold that young people are pneumatological agents requires that their agency be recognised in community. Youth today, especially through digital means, have extraordinary capacity to act, innovate, and engage, but this agency only bears fruit when it is also recognised and heeded by peers and elders alike. Following Kohrs Campbell,⁷⁶ agency involves not only the capacity to act but the competence to communicate and influence within one’s community. Through Spirit-empowered agency, young people become fully realised members of the ecclesial community: participants whose voices, actions, and discernment contribute meaningfully to the life of the church.

Of course, a youth-centred theology must avoid the twin dangers of romanticisation and reduction. To over-celebrate youth agency risks ignoring their immaturity; to reduce youth to passive products of culture and socialisation strips them of Spirit-given agency. Both extremes must be held in tension. Keener, commenting on Saul’s activity in his youth (Acts 7:58), highlights precisely this paradox: Saul’s “youth” was marked by precocity – “advanced and far ahead of his peers” (Gal 1:14) – and yet deeply misdirected.⁷⁷ Youth agency, then, is both potent and fallible, requiring the guiding discernment of the Spirit in ecclesial community.

Youth Ministry and the Turn to Discipleship

If ecclesial structures must embody inclusivity, then the practice of youth ministry must also be reimagined to be more relational. Here we propose, somewhat provocatively, that “youth ministry” should be less emphasised than “youth discipleship.” By this we mean a shift away from programmatic,

⁷⁴ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (Penguin UK, 2018).

⁷⁵ Yong, “Sons and Daughters,” 157.

⁷⁶ Kohrs Campbell, “Agency,” 2.

⁷⁷ Keener, *Acts*, 1450.

pulpit/stage/event-driven, or mass-engagement-centred approaches towards relational accompaniment marked by attentiveness to the Spirit.

This shift requires stepping back from the structural, mass-educational frameworks that often define youth ministry and moving towards dialogical, vocationally shaped apprenticeship. Dallas Willard's⁷⁸ preference for the term apprentice (disciple) and apprenticeship (discipleship) reminds us that the "Renovation of the Heart" and spiritual formation is not a classroom but an apprenticeship (discipleship) in which learners model themselves after Jesus through an ongoing relationship and being *with* him. The contrast is not unlike moving from standardised schooling to vocational training – an intimate, hands-on pedagogy of formation.

Yet such intimacy must not collapse into micromanagement. A Pentecostal model of youth apprenticeship/discipleship requires discernment, not control. Here the practice of spiritual direction is instructive. As Margaret Guenther,⁷⁹ David Benner,⁸⁰ and Larry Crabb⁸¹ argue, spiritual accompaniment is fundamentally about holy listening: attending both to the young person and to the convenient grace of the Spirit already at work in and through them. The aim of discipleship then is less to impose pre-packaged content, and more to midwife the Spirit's ongoing formation and direction in the young person's life.

Youth as Visionaries of the Spirit

Finally, at the micro level, Pentecost affirms that youth themselves are called to "see visions" (Acts 2:17). The pneumatological imagination empowers them not only to receive tradition but to envision new realities that integrate digital, physical, ecclesial, and societal spheres.

Such imagination is not naïve idealism but Spirit-enabled re-visioning. It calls youth to boldness, to dream expansively, and to reimagine realities as the Spirit intends them. Yong underscores that Pentecost disrupts the assumption that age and "the sageliness that comes with that" are privileged mediums for revelatory insight; rather, "youth, or young men, are not inhibited from seeing visions, even in tandem with the elders of the community."⁸² The young person's call to vision is thus not a diminishment of elder wisdom but its complement, a Spirit-driven collaboration of generations.

For youth today, this means resisting the temptation to excuse, discount or diminish what the Spirit desires to do through them. It means embracing hybrid modes of spiritual imagination that are digitally fluent yet grounded in embodied community, prophetically creative yet theologically tethered. A Pentecostal

⁷⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress, 2002).

⁷⁹ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

⁸⁰ David G. Benner, *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Baker Books, 1998).

⁸¹ Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk: The Language God Longs for Us to Speak* (Thomas Nelson, 2003).

⁸² Yong, "Sons and Daughters," 156.

theology of youth calls youth not only to dream big, but also to embody the Spirit's visions in concrete practices of leadership, witness, and innovation.

Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Youth

This chapter has argued for a Pentecostal theology of youth that is unapologetically youth-centred, pneumatologically grounded, and attentive to the cultural and digital turns in academic and contemporary everyday life. Pentecostal young people are not passive recipients of faith, but are active agents of the Spirit, capable of theological insight, communal leadership, and innovative engagement across cultural, ecclesial, and digital spaces. Their voices, practices, and discernment are not merely future projections; they are present contributions to the life and mission of the church in ways that adults alone cannot replicate.

Yet this is not a conclusion. It is a clarion call – a dual invitation for Pentecostal theology and scholarship to more fully embrace youth, as both subjects and scholars.

First, scholars and practitioners must see youth as subjects, not objects. This perspective challenges adult-centred, programmatic models of formation and calls for relational, participatory, and Spirit-sensitive approaches to ministry and theological engagement. For scholarship, this necessitates ethnographic, participatory, and interpretive methods that attend to youth voices, digital practices, and spiritual experiences on their own terms. Surveys, quantitative metrics, or purely observational studies risk flattening the richness of lived faith, reducing youth to data points rather than recognising them as theological agents whose practices, reflections, and innovations carry weight in their own right.

Second, youth must be included as scholars and producers of knowledge. Their theological and pneumatological imagination, research capacity, and critical insight are indispensable to a Pentecostal theology of youth. Creating structural spaces, mentoring relationships, and platforms that elevate youth scholarship are not optional, they are essential. Empowering young theologians and junior researchers is precisely how Pentecostal communities can make theology and praxis converge, allowing youth to shape the church as fully as they inhabit it.

In lieu of a conclusion, then, this is both a summons and a responsibility: to honour youth as present agents of the Spirit, listen to their voices, and make space for their spiritual and scholarly contributions. Youth, as pneumatological agents, are not just the future of the church, they are the church today, and their contributions are indispensable to the ongoing work of God in the world.

Bibliography

- Archer, Kenneth J. *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture, and Community*. T&T Clark, 2004.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. "Locked Down but Not Locked Out: An African Perspective on Pentecostalism and Media in a Pandemic Era." In

- Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, edited by Heidi Campbell and J. Dyer. SCM Press, 2022.
- Asbury University. "The Outpouring at Asbury University." Asbury University, 2025. <https://www.asbury.edu/about/revival-history/outpouring/>.
- Basnet, A., and A. Shrestha. "Nepal's Digitalisation Journey: Experiences and Challenges in Digital Transformation and the Future Ahead." Asia Competitiveness Institute and Nepal Institute for Policy Research, 2023. <https://aciperspectives.com/2023/03/13/nepals-digitalisation-journey-experiences-and-challenges-in-digital-transformation-and-the-future-ahead/>.
- Benner, David G. *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*. Baker Books, 1998.
- Boyd, Danah. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press, 2014.
- Campbell, Heidi A. *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045625>.
- Campbell, Heidi A. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. Routledge, 2013.
- Campbell, Heidi A. *When Religion Meets New Media*. Routledge, 2010.
- Campbell, Heidi A., and R. Tsuria, eds. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2022.
- Campbell, Heidi A., and Ruth Tsuria. "Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion." In *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*. 2nd ed., edited by Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria. Routledge, 2022.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Chen, L., S. Zeng, and Z. Tian. "Resonance or Alienation: An Empirical Study on the Influencing Factors of Religious Belief Choices among China's Generation Z." MDPI, September 11, 2023. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/9/1161>.
- Choong, Wayne. "An Ecosystemic Approach to Digital Christianity: How Faith and Identity Formation Evolve among Youth in Singapore." *Religion and Social Communication* 23, no. 2 (2025): 317-45. <https://doi.org/10.62461/WC040325>.
- Clark, Randy. "The Next Generation and the Holy Spirit: Keynote Address." In *The New Generation & the Holy Spirit: Building a Spirit-Empowered Future*, edited by Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, Barry L. Saylor, and Rebekah Bled. ORU Press, 2025.
- Cornelio, Jayeel Serrano. *Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines: Young People Reinterpreting Religion*. Routledge, 2016.
- Cornelio, Jayeel Serrano. "Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia." In *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, edited by J. Wyn and H. Cahill. Springer, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-15-4_40.
- Cornelio, Jayeel Serrano, ed. *Rethinking Filipino Millennials: Alternative Perspectives on a Misunderstood Generation*. UST Publishing House, 2020.
- Crabb, Larry. *Soul Talk: The Language God Longs for Us to Speak*. Thomas Nelson, 2003.

- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dimitrov, Joseph. "A Spirit-Driven Ecclesiological Tenacity: Tested and Proven Response to Hostility and Afflictions." Paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmQwh7z5odw>.
- Dimock, Michael. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins." Pew Research Center. January 17, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Drury, Amanda Hontz. *Saying is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Estes, Douglas. *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World*. Zondervan, 2015.
- Félix-Jäger, Steven. "Inspiration and Discernment in Pentecostal Aesthetics." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 1 (2014): 85-104. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02301009>.
- Félix-Jäger, Steven. *Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics*. Vol. 16 of Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies. Brill, 2015.
- Félix-Jäger, Steven. *Spirit of the Arts: Towards a Pneumatological Aesthetics of Renewal*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon Books, 1977.
- France, Alan. *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*. Open University Press, 2007.
- Garrett, Duane A. *Hosea, Joel*. Vol. 19A of *The New American Commentary*, edited by E. R. Clendenen. Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, 1973.
- Gellner, D. N., S. L. Hausner, and C. Letizia, eds. *Religion, Secularism, and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Gibson, I. "Pentecostal Peacefulness: Virtue Ethics and the Reception of Theology in Nepal." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 4 (2017): 765-82.
- Gibson, I. *Suffering and Hope: Christianity and Ethics among the Newars of Bhaktapur*. Ekta Books, 2017.
- Giddens Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Guenther, Margaret. *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis. Hutchinson, 1980.

- Harris, Antipas L. "Global Christianity and Gen Z: A Bird's Eye Exploration of the Contemporary Situation of Faith in Search of Glimmers of Hope for the Future of Faith." In *Voices Loud & Clear*, edited by Kong Hee, Byron D. Klaus, and Doug Petersen. Regnum Publishers, 2024.
- Holmes, Sarah, and Ed Drew. "What is the Point of Ministry among Children, Youth and Families? Examination of Aims and Activities from Different Perspectives." *British Journal of Religious Education* (June 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2513546>.
- James, Allison, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout. *Theorizing Childhood*. Polity Press, 1998.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2006.
- Jun, Guichun. "Digital Pneumatology: Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit in the Metaverse." In *Voices Loud & Clear*, edited by Kong Hee, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen. Regnum Publishers, 2024.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. "Christian Church among Religions: Toward a Hospitable Encounter with the Other." In *Conviction in an Optional Society*, edited by Marina Ngursangzeli Behera and Jean-Daniel Plüss. Regnum, 2020.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. "Does the Spirit Blow Where it Wills?: Pentecostals and the Struggle of Discerning the Holy Spirit among Religions." Paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025.
- Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Vol. 1: Introduction and 1:1–2:47*. Baker Academic, 2012.
- Keener, Craig S. *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World*. Baker Academic, 2021.
- Kohrs Campbell, Karlyn. "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean." *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (2006): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1479142042000332134>.
- Lawoti, M. "Cleavages, Conflicts, and Sociocultural Groups." In *Towards a Democratic Nepal: Inclusive Political Institutions for a Multicultural Society*. SAGE Publications, 2005.
- Lövheim, Mia. "Mediatization and Religion." In *Mediatization of Communication*, edited by K. Lundby. De Gruyter Mouton, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272215.547>.
- Lukianoff, Greg, and Jonathan Haidt. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure*. Penguin UK, 2018.
- Ma, Wonsuk, Opoku Onyinah, Barry L. Saylor, and Rebekah Bled, eds. *The New Generation & the Holy Spirit: Building a Spirit-Empowered Future*. ORU Press, 2025.
- Macchia, Frank D. *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*. Zondervan Academic, 2006.
- Mannheim, Karl. "The Problem of Generations." Translated by K. W. Rawls. In *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by P. Kecskemeti. 1923. Reprint, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952.

- Martin, Stephanie A. *Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald Trump*. University of Alabama Press, 2021.
- McCann Worldgroup. "The Truth about Gen Z." 2021. https://www.creativebrief.com/user_files/26028/1685694599_TA%20Gen%20Z.pdf.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Nepal. "Youth Vision – 2025 and Ten-Year Strategic Plan." August 19, 2025. https://moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nitiheru/Youth%20Vision-2025_2.pdf.
- Mittelstadt, Martin W. "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation." *Spiritus* 9, no. 2 (2024): 293-315. <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1373>.
- Myers, Jeremy Paul. *Liberating Youth from Adolescence*. Fortress Press, 2018.
- Opoku Onyinah, Wonsuk Ma, and Barry L. Saylor. "Introduction." In *The New Generation & the Holy Spirit: Building a Spirit-Empowered Future*, edited by Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, Barry L. Saylor, and Rebekah Bled. ORU Press, 2025.
- Parker, Kim. "How Pew Research Center Will Report on Generations Moving Forward." Pew Research Center. May 22, 2023. <https://pewrsr.ch/3BLK6b>.
- Plüss, Jean-Daniel. "Lessons Learned during 30 Years of Ecumenical Dialogue: What Future Challenges Can Be Expected?" Paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm0b5vVopC4>.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1. University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Root, Andrew. *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation*. InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Seow, Dawn. "Kong Hee: 'Every Day Is an Adventure with Jesus.'" *City News*. November 8, 2014. <https://www.citynews.sg/2014/11/08/kong-hee-every-day-is-an-adventure-with-jesus/>.
- Seow, Dawn. "A God Who Answers Prayers: Testimonies from Prayer Meetings." *City News*. August 26, 2022. <https://www.citynews.sg/2022/08/26/a-god-who-answers-prayers-testimonies-from-prayer-meetings/>.
- Sonnenberg, P. M. (Ronelle). "Youth Ministry and the Empirical Turn." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, edited by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid. Wiley-Blackwell, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119756927.ch35>.
- Thapa, S. "Disparity in the Use of Mass Media among Youth Population in Nepal." *Nepal Public Policy Review* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.59552/nppr.v3i2.65>.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, 2011.
- United Nations Development Programme. "UNDP Nepal Youth Strategy 2018–2022." 2018. <https://un.org.np/resource/undp-nepal-youth-strategy-2018-2022>.
- Vondey, Wolfgang. *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*. Pentecostal Manifestos 3. Eerdmans, 2010.

- Vondey, Wolfgang. "The Church as Scandal of Salvation: Pentecost and the Continuity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Paper presented at the Euro-Asia Pentecostal Summit, City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 2025.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_S7MbViWCM.
- Vondey, Wolfgang. "Religion as Play: Pentecostalism as a Theological Type." *Religions* 9, no. 3 (2018): 1-16.
- Wang, Yang. "From Precarity to Stability: Job Preferences among Chinese Youth in Today's China." MA thesis, University of Chicago, 2024.
Knowledge@UChicago. <https://doi.org/10.6082/uchicago.13219>.
- Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. NavPress, 2002.
- Yong, Amos. "The Pneumatological Imagination." In *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey. Routledge, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507076-18>.
- Yong, Amos. "Sons and Daughters, Young and Old: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Family." *PentecoStudies* 10, no. 2 (2011): 147-73.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/ptcs.v10i2.147>.
- Yong, Amos. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Baker Academic, 2005.

Response to Joy Qualls’ and Wayne Choong’s “Youth as Pneumatological Agents: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Youth”

Kelvin Tan

Introduction

Thank you, Dr. Joy Qualls and Dr. Wayne Choong, for your passionate research on a Pentecostal theology of youth. Your chapter engages with the lived realities of young people, portraying them not as passive recipients awaiting their turn, but as active pneumatological agents in God’s *missio Dei*.

Three aspects of Qualls’ and Choong’s chapter are especially significant. First, they rightly critique the use of generational labels such as “Gen Z” or “Gen Alpha.” I would add that stereotypes often attached to these labels – such as “fragile”¹ or “strawberry generation”² – distort our perception and breed condescending attitudes. Youth are not a generation to be typecast or dismissed but to be loved and empowered.

Second, by situating youth within the cultural and digital contexts of today, Qualls and Choong challenge the church to reimagine how we can creatively engage the spaces where young people dwell. Just as Jesus stepped into Simon Peter’s boat (Luke 5:3)³ before calling him to follow, the church must boldly enter the “world” of our youth. Both Pentecost (Acts 2:17) and John’s eschatological vision (Rev 5:9) reveal God’s desire to reach every language and people group. Nowhere lies beyond the Spirit’s reach, and the digital sphere is no exception – for it is also a space where God’s presence permeates.

Finally, Qualls and Choong affirm that youth are not leaders of tomorrow but Spirit-empowered co-creators today. Pentecost is indeed our great equaliser,⁴

¹ Sean Lyons, “Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z Labels: Necessary or Nonsense?” *The Conversation*, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/baby-boomers-gen-x-millennials-and-gen-z-labels-necessary-or-nonsense-132161>.

² Han Ei Chew and Vincent Chua, “Singapore Youth: In Defence of ‘Strawberries’,” *Institute of Policy Studies*, accessed October 19, 2025, <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/publications/details/singapore-youth-in-defence-of-strawberries>.

³ Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

⁴ Martin W. Mittelstadt, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (2024): 299, <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1373>.

welcoming all to the table of communion where there are no second-class citizens. As Frank Macchia reminds us, Spirit baptism is not merely an endowment of power but an immersion in divine love.⁵ Youth engagement, therefore, cannot be merely for leadership renewal or replacing our ageing pew; it must flow from a place of compassion rather than utility. Love is the starting point and centre of how we relate to the next generation. Together, these insights should further our Pentecostal theology of youth in meaningful ways.

Yet, I wonder: does this chapter fully capture the depth and distinctiveness of Pentecostalism? Or does it lean more towards a sociological observation of what drives youth agency, rather than a theological account of how the Spirit forms them into Christlikeness? It is in response to these questions that I seek to explore further.

Towards a Fuller Pneumatological Vision

Qualls and Choong offer a rich sociological portrait of how Spirit-empowered youth navigate their contexts. While the Spirit is frequently mentioned, their discussion remains largely descriptive and risks understating God's transformative work. By contrast, a fuller Pentecostal vision sees the Spirit not only as actively present but also as the one who indwells and sanctifies believers,⁶ drawing them towards theosis – union with God,⁷ and thereby empowering them to live out that love.

For a more robust and formative theology of the Spirit, Steven Land's triadic framework of *orthodoxy* (right beliefs), *orthopathy* (right affections), and *orthopraxy* (right practices) offers a valuable model for understanding Pentecostal spirituality for young people.⁸ Believers experience harmony with God and with themselves only when they integrate all three areas, and this remains vital because zeal alone cannot sustain genuine encounters. The elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) illustrates this well: outwardly, he actively performed every duty and observed every right practice, but his distorted understanding of his father's love – and his place within that love – turned devotion into mere duty and affection into resentment.

The same pattern can be discerned in youth spirituality today, where zealous service in teenage years often fades into disillusionment and jadedness in adulthood. Without right beliefs and affections, even the most faithful service can lead to spiritual detachment. As Simon Chan cautions, "Pentecostal power and passion mean nothing if they do not issue from a life filled with the Spirit of holiness. There could be false affections and false Pentecostals!"⁹ In this

⁵ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Zondervan, 2006), 360.

⁶ Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Wipf and Stock, 2011), 70.

⁷ Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification* (Baker Academic, 2007), 205.

⁸ Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (CPT Press, 2010), 38.

⁹ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 70.

light, perhaps Qualls' and Choong's call for youth agency can be strengthened by integrating Land's framework, shaping youth through *orthodoxy*, *orthopathy*, and *orthopraxy*.

This approach is deeply biblical: Proverbs 22:6 underscores the importance of grounding our young in right beliefs, establishing a strong foundation from which they will not easily depart. Likewise, Paul exhorts Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed ... how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:14-15, ESV).

Orthodoxy matures passion and informs practice, enabling the Spirit's deep work to sanctify and transform youth into effective pneumatological agents in the world.

Example 1 – Flagging

Using Land's framework, I turn to the two case studies in the paper. In the first, flagging begins as a Spirit-prompted act – a youth led by the Spirit to wave a flag in worship – and gains communal and ecclesial acceptance. Yet, a deeper theological reading reveals more: the Spirit not only initiates the act but also forms the worshipper through it. Flagging, hence, is not merely a creative or symbolic gesture. It is an outward manifestation of inward experiential spirituality.¹⁰ It is Acts 2:17 in motion; it is prophecy without words.

What begins as *orthopathy* – a heart moved by divine love – flows into *orthopraxy*, a visible expression of that love. With each wave, the flag and the flagger become a living doxology: an embodied act of praise, through which the Spirit forms the worshipper, uniting belief, affection, and practice in harmony.

Without an understanding of this inner formation, flagging risks becoming performance rather than genuine participation; expression without the depth of communion, where the act is separated from the transforming work of the Spirit.

Example 2 – Digital Engagement

In the second example, Qualls and Choong affirm digital engagement as a space for authentic faith encounters and witness. Yet, like flagging, affirmation must be tempered with discernment, for the digital realm is never neutral; it can either form faith or fracture it.

Applying Land's framework, digital engagement reflects *orthopraxy*. However, without the integration of *orthopathy* and *orthodoxy*, it risks falling into performance. Even in the name of witness, the heart can subtly shift from glorifying God to seeking personal recognition. A Spirit-formed digital theology anchors youth in truth and love, fostering genuine communion rather than self-promotion or shallow connection.

Like Daniel in Babylon, discernment calls for creative yet courageous engagement: holding fast to biblical conviction while resisting every form of evil that is so pervasive in the digital space. Ultimately, the platform is secondary;

¹⁰ Wei Yang Ang, "Prophecy, Art and Inspiration: A Critical Evaluation of Prophetic Arts," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 27, no. 1 (2024): 73.

whether online or offline, wherever the Spirit is poured out, he always leads us to Christ.

A Call to Fathering in Love

To form Christlikeness in our youth, Qualls and Choong rightly advocate for a collaborative discipleship that midwives the Spirit's work in them. I propose that we deepen this model by moving beyond co-discernment towards fathering (or mothering)¹¹ the next generation. This is neither a return to a top-down hierarchical control nor a reduction of youth to powerless recipients. Rather, it is a call to relational discipleship.

This relational emphasis lies at the heart of Scripture. God's triune nature reminds us that the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost is never detached from familial relationships.¹² Acts 2:17, for example, did not occur in isolation: "your sons and daughters will prophesy" presupposes a relationship with fathers and mothers alongside them.

Therefore, a Pentecostal theology of youth must go beyond giving young people a seat at the table or affirming them as leaders of today; it roots their agency in identity, where spiritual parents create incubative spaces for transformation to godliness. Youth are therefore cherished as beloved sons and daughters in God's family. As missiologist Charles Kraft aptly notes, "life can only be communicated through life rubbing against life to produce life."¹³

What does this fathering look like? Paul offers a compelling model in 1

Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." Fathering transcends impartation of knowledge and skills ... it is an invitation to Christlike imitation.

It involves two dimensions: (1) What is *caught*: Youth observe our lived faith – how we pray, overcome temptation, navigate failure, and steward success. (2) What is *imparted*: We speak life, call forth their gifts, and walk with them through life's victories and setbacks.

This relationship is not one-directional. Malachi 4:6 presents an eschatological vision of reconciliation: "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (ESV).

The Spirit bridges both generations, calling the old to selfless love and the young to genuine honour. As we reject dismissive labels like "strawberry generation," youth must likewise resist viewing us as irrelevant "boomers." God's family is a circle of love marked by mutual honour and reciprocal affection.

Paul captures the heart of his spiritual fathering in his letter to the Corinthians, "Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers for in Christ Jesus I became your *father* through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15,

¹¹ I retain Paul's language of "fathering" as in 1 Corinthians 4:15, though this principle applies to spiritual mothering as well.

¹² Frank D. Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Wipf and Stock, 2023), 280.

¹³ Charles H. Kraft, *Issues in Contextualization*, Google eBook (William Carey Library, 2016), 18-19.

emphasis added).¹⁴ A teacher imparts knowledge; a mentor hones skills, but a father imparts life – often at great personal cost. Paul reinforces this selfless giving in Galatians: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). Perhaps one reason the Early Church flourished – even under persecution – was that the apostles saw themselves not merely as rabbis or teachers, but as loving fathers in the faith.

Spiritual fathering breaks the *orphan spirit* – a pervasive sense of disconnection from God, community, and self – that is so endemic in this generation. In this Spirit-initiated, transgenerational love, Land’s Pentecostal spirituality comes alive: youth are formed through right beliefs, right affections, and right living. Here, the Spirit is poured out afresh, reconciling generations and giving us a foretaste of the day when God will indeed be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).¹⁵

A Personal Note

On a personal note, my heart is full of gratitude as I bear witness to such fathering. In Chinese, there is a proverb that goes: 饮水思源, which can be loosely translated: when you drink of the water, remember its source. It was right here, in this church, that a twelve-year-old Kelvin Tan – a nobody – encountered love that broke the orphan spirit in him, love that healed him from brokenness to wholeness, and love that empowered and enlarged him beyond anything he could have become on his own. It was divine, transforming love that shaped me from a nobody to a beloved son. And just as I have received this love, I am compelled to pour it out – to father, to love, and to raise the next generation.

Conclusion

A Pentecostal theology of youth must not merely be about giving young people a seat at the table, affirming them as leaders of today, and allowing them to express their creativity in whatever they are passionate about. It must go beyond that.

A Pentecostal theology of youth should envision Spirit-baptised young people being formed into a community of divine love – where their identities, beliefs, affections, and actions are united by the Spirit who sanctifies, empowers, and sends them into the world.

Bibliography

- Ang, Wei Yang. “Prophecy, Art and Inspiration: A Critical Evaluation of Prophetic Arts.” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 27, no. 1 (2024): 67-86.
- Chan, Simon. *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*. Wipf and Stock, 2011.

¹⁴ In the New King James Version (NKJV), the term “instructors” was used instead of “guardians.” This distinction highlights the contrast between fathers and teachers.

¹⁵ Macchia, *Tongues of Fire*, 242.

- Chew, Han Ei, and Vincent Chua. "Singapore Youth: In Defence of 'Strawberries.'" Institute of Policy Studies. Accessed October 19, 2025. <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/publications/details/singapore-youth-in-defence-of-strawberries>.
- Christensen, Michael J., and Jeffery A. Wittung. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification*. Baker Academic, 2007.
- Kraft, Charles H. *Issues in Contextualization*. Google eBook. William Carey Library, 2016.
- Land, Steven Jack. *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. CPT Press, 2010.
- Lyons, Sean. "Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z Labels: Necessary or Nonsense?" *The Conversation*. 2020. <https://theconversation.com/baby-boomers-gen-x-millennials-and-gen-z-labels-necessary-or-nonsense-132161>.
- Macchia, Frank D. *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*. Zondervan, 2006.
- Macchia, Frank D. *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. Wipf and Stock, 2023.
- Mittelstadt, Martin W. "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation." *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (2024): 293-315. <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1373>.