

A Response to Joy Qualls & Wayne Choong's
“Liminal Prophets: Toward A Theology of Youth After Pentecost”

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Dr. Joy Qualls and Dr. Wayne Choong, for your insightful paper. While there is currently a wealth of research devoted to understanding youth and developing ministry practices, it remains, as you observed, “data-rich but theory-poor.” Your proposal, *A Theology of Youth after Pentecost* (TOYAP), reclaims youth as pneumatological agents in God’s Kingdom rather than future contributors awaiting adulthood. It reframes liminality as a gift rather than a developmental liability, establishing youth as “Liminal Prophets.”

This contribution is significant because it reminds the Church that the Holy Spirit has indeed been poured out on all flesh. Youth are therefore not merely the Church’s future but full participants in its present witness to Christ. Yet precisely because TOYAP gives sustained attention to youth, this response seeks to ensure that the Holy Spirit remains the theological ground of TOYAP’s vision.

This emphasis is not simply a theological counterweight. Rather, it keeps the Holy Spirit in view because although youth matter profoundly, their significance is not grounded in youthfulness or liminality itself. It is the Holy Spirit who graciously calls, empowers, and forms them for the Church’s witness.

Furthermore, because TOYAP describes youth as liminal prophets, it is important from the outset to clarify the term “prophets.” Paul distinguishes prophetic participation from the ministry of a prophet (1 Cor. 12:28–29; 14:1), asking rhetorically, “Are all prophets?” (12:29), to which the implied answer is no. Throughout my response, I therefore understand “liminal prophets” not to suggest that every young person is a prophet, but to recognise youth’s Spirit-enabled capacity to participate meaningfully in their prophetic witness of the Church. This

distinction allows youth to embrace their prophetic witness without confusing it with the ministry of a prophet.

Accordingly, this response seeks to extend TOYAP by asking a complementary teleological question: to what end does the Holy Spirit empower youth after Pentecost? I argue that the Spirit empowers liminal prophets so that they, together with all the saints, may participate in the Church's faithful witness to the risen Christ.

BUILDING FROM PENTECOST

To answer this question, we begin with Pentecost and Christ's mandate in Acts 1:8. Pentecost is both Christocentric and missional:¹ the Spirit is poured out so that Christ may be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. As Kong Hee observes, the Spirit who indwells believers is none other than the Spirit of Christ, drawing believers ever deeper into a Christ-centred life.²

This Christ-centred life finds expression in witness. Younghoon Lee affirms, “as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our inner self resembles Christ and our outer self becomes the preacher of Christ.”³ Peter exemplifies this as he follows Joel's prophecy to its climactic promise of salvation (Acts 2:21), centring his sermon on Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation (Acts 2:22-36). The result is immediate: three thousand people are “cut to the heart,” responding in repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-41).

Luke does not end with conversion but turns his attention to the kind of community Pentecost produces. Frank Macchia describes this as God “inhaling,” drawing His people into

¹ Stott argues that the Holy Spirit is a “missionary Spirit.” See John Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*, The Bible Speaks Today (InterVarsity Press, 1990), chap. 2.

² Kong Hee, “The Victory of Divine Love: A Pentecostal Commentary on Romans” (bible study seminar conducted at City Harvest Church, Singapore, May 11–15, 2026), 256.

³ Younghoon Lee, *Only By the Holy Spirit* (Institute for Church Growth, 2022), 286.

communion—first with God and then with one another—before “exhaling,” sending them out in mission.⁴ This rhythm of communion and mission deepens TOYAP by portraying that formation and empowerment are inseparable movements of the Spirit’s divine “breathing.”

Luke depicts this divine “inhale” in the life of the fledgling church: Filled with the Spirit, the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). Luke intentionally moves from endowment to proclamation, and from conversion to communion. The same Spirit who empowers believers for witness also shapes a Christ-centred community marked by worship, generosity, and love; a people whose shared life becomes a visible testimony to Christ.

Luke concludes by showing that the Lord continually “added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). This echoes Peter’s citation of Joel that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21), demonstrating that the promised “last days” announced at Pentecost (Acts 2:17) have begun. As Craig Keener notes, the goal of Pentecost is not merely Spirit-empowered mission but also the formation of a community whose shared life anticipates God’s coming kingdom.⁵

Acts 2, therefore, enriches TOYAP by revealing that youth do not participate in God’s prophetic mission in isolation, but within the communion of the Church, so that together with all the saints they may bear faithful witness to Christ, our Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

CONTINUING AFTER PENTECOST

⁴ Frank D. Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Cascade Books, 2023), 342.

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Introduction and 1:1-2:47 (Baker Academic, 2012), 1:2311.

If Acts reveals the people Pentecost creates, 1 Corinthians shows that such a people requires the Spirit's ongoing work of formation. Although the Corinthian church abounded in spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:7), it remained spiritually immature and worldly (1 Cor. 3:1-3). For TOYAP, this serves as an important reminder that Spirit-empowerment and the exercise of spiritual gifts do not automatically produce Christlikeness. As Donald Gee cautions, "no amount of Christian work, or even exercise of spiritual gifts, can ever be a substitute for walking with God."⁶

Paul's response to Corinth reflects this same concern. The Spirit who distributes gifts also forms His people to exercise those gifts in love for the building up of the whole body (1 Cor. 12:4; 14:5). Paul addresses this by placing love at the theological centre of his discussion on spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13). His rebuke concerning the Lord's Supper exposes a church fragmented by pride and division, revealing that the deeper issue was not a lack of gifts but a lack of love (1 Cor. 11:18, 21-22). As Gordon Fee observes, Paul's words reflect the "absolute supremacy and necessity of love" for every believer.⁷

This same emphasis is evident in his teaching on prophecy. Prophecy is to be eagerly desired (1 Cor. 14:1), but it should always be exercised under communal discernment (1 Cor. 15:29), for the edification of the whole church (1 Cor. 14:31). Prophetic participation is therefore never autonomous, but serves the Spirit's work of building up the body.

The Corinthian church reminds TOYAP that spiritual vitality alone does not equate with spiritual maturity. Furthermore, while youth bring the gift of liminality to the Church, often

⁶ Donald Gee, *The Fruit of the Spirit: A Practical Approach to the Fruit of the Spirit by a Renowned Charismatic Leader* (Gospel Publishing House, 1975), 13.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 744.

expressed through questioning and tinkering, this gift must remain rooted in love, lest it fragment rather than build up the body of Christ.

This is especially significant in our Asian Pentecostal contexts, where relationships are often shaped by hierarchy and respect for spiritual authority. While TOYAP rightly encourages churches to hear the prophetic voices of youth, Paul reminds us that such participation must be rooted in love, marked by humility, and communal discernment. Youth must question in love; older leaders must listen, discern, and guide with love. For without love, we are nothing.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF A LIMINAL PROPHET

Samuel provides a compelling biblical example of a young prophet whose liminal position resonates with Qualls and Choong's description of the "liminal prophet." God speaks through a young boy "at a time when the word of the LORD was rare" (1 Sam. 3:1). By choosing a child rather than the established priesthood as His prophetic mouthpiece, God demonstrates that the Spirit blows where He wills, raising whom He desires.

Samuel's story reveals that calling and formation belong together. Liminal prophets are not formed in isolation but within the people of God. Although Samuel hears the voice of God, he does not recognise it, repeatedly mistaking it for Eli's. God's call was undeniable, but Samuel lacked discernment (1 Sam. 3:7). Significantly, the same God who called Samuel also worked through Eli, who discerned the Lord's call and taught the young prophet how to respond (1 Sam. 3:9).

Samuel's narrative therefore provides a biblical vision of how liminal prophets are recognised, nurtured, and formed within the people of God. The question is no longer whether

God speaks through young people, but how the Church makes space for young prophetic voices, guiding them in discernment, so that they may faithfully respond to His call.

Such formation is also marked by mutual receptivity. Samuel humbly receives Eli's guidance, while Eli recognises God's call upon the child, makes room for him, and prepares Samuel for his prophetic ministry. The older priest guides the younger prophet into his calling, while the younger prophet becomes the bearer of God's word to the older. Without Eli, Samuel would not have recognised the Lord's voice; without Samuel, Eli would not have received the Lord's word.

Samuel's story therefore carries important pastoral implications for the Church today. In a world saturated with competing voices, discernment cannot be assumed but must be intentionally nurtured within the communion of God's people. Samuel and Eli model an intergenerational community in which each faithfully fulfils the role God has entrusted to them. Through this mutual giving and receiving, the whole body is built up.

A SINGAPORE EXAMPLE OF LIMINAL PROPHETS

TOYAP's vision of the liminal prophet is not merely a theological proposal but a lived reality in the history of Singapore Christianity. In 1972, Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) experienced an outpouring of the Spirit known as the "Clock Tower Revival". It emerged not from church programmes or adult leadership, but as spiritually hungry boys gathered beneath the school's clock tower to seek God in prayer.⁸ In their openness to the Holy Spirit, their liminality became the very space through which the Spirit moved.

⁸ Michael Poon and Malcolm Tan, eds., *The Clock Tower Story: The Beginnings of the Charismatic Renewals in Singapore*, 40th Anniversary Edition, CSCA Occasional Paper Series (Trinity Theological College, 2012), 20.

At a youth camp that year, Rev. Tan Khian Seng, Dr. Simon Chan, and Rev. Fred Seaward taught on the Holy Spirit.⁹ Many students left with a renewed hunger for God. As they sought God in prayer in their own homes, one of the students, Malcolm Tan, encountered the Holy Spirit and received the gift of speaking in tongues.¹⁰

What began in homes soon overflowed into the schools. As students gathered at the clock tower to pray, many more received the infilling of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. The revival spread beyond ACS into other schools such as Swiss Cottage, St. Andrew's, and Dunearn Technical School.¹¹ Far from being passive recipients, these youth became active participants in the Spirit's outpouring.

As the movement spread, so did controversy. Students speaking in tongues soon made national headlines. *The Straits Times* reported: "Students go into trance at prayer."¹² In response, the school prohibited any gathering without adult supervision. Days later, four mainline church leaders publicly dismissed the revival as cultic, likening the youth's behaviour to a pursuit of an emotional "high" that comes from consuming drugs.¹³ Rather than immediately discerning the Spirit's work, they rejected what the Spirit was doing among the youth.

One student, sixteen-year-old Norman Wong, initially kept his distance, describing those praying at the clock tower as the "screaming lot." Curious yet cautious, he sought the counsel of his Methodist leader, who admitted that he had never spoken in tongues but humbly replied: "I

⁹ Poon and Tan, *The Clock Tower Story*, 75.

¹⁰ Georgie Lee and Gaven Lee, *Unfolding His Story: The Story of the Charismatic Movement in Singapore* (Genesis Books, 2015), 11.

¹¹ Lee and Lee, *Unfolding His Story*, 18.

¹² Masie Kwee, "Students Go into Trance at Prayer: Some End Religious Sessions in Hysterics," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), November 7, 1972.

¹³ Masie Kwee, "Church Leader's Warning: An 'Unhealthy' Cult Spreading Among Young," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), November 11, 1972.

do not see any reason why God should not do this again.”¹⁴ Soon, Norman himself received the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Perplexed by his encounter, Norman approached Anglican priest James Wong and asked, “What do you think of the Holy Spirit?” Wong replied, “Look, I don’t know too much ... but I will find out.”¹⁵ As he sought the Lord, Wong, too, experienced the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Even Bishop Chiu Ban It, who had publicly warned against the movement only weeks earlier, also encountered the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Convinced through careful discernment that this was God’s work, both Wong and Chiu publicly affirmed the revival, giving ecclesial recognition to what the Holy Spirit had already begun among the youth.¹⁷

What was once dismissed as cultic and hysterical youthful fanaticism is now recognised as the beginning of the Charismatic Renewal in Singapore. Wong later pastored Kong Hee, who now pastors City Harvest Church. The ripple effects of the revival that started at ACS through these liminal prophets, reshaped the spiritual landscape of Singapore—a reminder that the Holy Spirit often begins His greatest works through those the Church least expects.

CONCLUSION

The Clock Tower Revival offers a contemporary illustration of liminal prophets within a community, echoing the story of Samuel and Eli. Youth created space for the unexpected movement of the Spirit, while spiritually receptive elders eventually helped discern and give ecclesial recognition to what God was doing. Neither youth nor elders stood alone; through humble discernment, the wider Church was built up. As Qualls concluded in her final reflection

¹⁴ Poon and Tan, *The Clock Tower Story*, 42. The Methodist Leader was Professor Khoo Oon Teik.

¹⁵ Poon and Tan, *The Clock Tower Story*, 51.

¹⁶ Poon and Tan, *The Clock Tower Story*, 73.

¹⁷ Poon and Tan, *The Clock Tower Story*, 52.

last year, “For one group of people to rise, another group of people does not have to sit down ... we must come together ... and let the Spirit move amongst us together.”¹⁸

If the Church is an orchestra, then the Holy Spirit is its divine conductor, gathering many voices into one symphonic harmony. Youth are neither soloists performing apart from the Church, nor passive spectators watching from the sidelines. They are fellow musicians within the Spirit’s symphony, joining all the saints in proclaiming one gospel, bearing one witness, and singing the song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

¹⁸ Joy Qualls, “APS2025: Final Reflections & Perspectives,” Asia Pentecostal Summit, 2025, posted July 1, 2026, accessed July 19, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohy3HhOPmYk&t=3915s>.

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