

**A Response to Amos Yong's "*The Great/Higher Learning of and in the Spirit:***

**A West-(South)East Asian Conversation After Pentecost"**

Wonsuk Ma

Oral Roberts University, USA

22–26 July 2026

My response to Dr. Amos Yong's paper is again not a typical response to his presentation. Thus, my title is “Moving with Yong (and Kong) toward Singlish Pentecostal Theology, Formation, and Contribution.” And this is my delight to be back with the Global Pentecostal Voices. And this is my second engagement with Amos Yong, and I'm delighted for this privilege.

Amos Yong's recent co-authored book demonstrates his deep passion for the Spirit in higher/greater education.<sup>1</sup> And his plea for renewing Christian theology<sup>2</sup> also moves along his vision for new forms of theological education for the new era in the midst of the radical shifts in global Christianity

His presentation implies three critical components for a healthy, stable, yet agile contextual theology. The first one is a scriptural witness, followed by another ancient cultural and values. And the third is the contemporary context. Because of Yong's Singapore-specific exploration, pastor Kong Hee's “Antioch” chapter, presented in the first Global Pentecostal Summit, is a natural conversation partner. I hope that Yong's presentation and my response, along with other presentations, will continue to contribute to conservation so that Singapore can be an Antioch in today's world.

### **1. The Galileans at Pentecost & Early Church**

Scriptural witnesses to Yong's presentation are the Galileans at Pentecost and the early church. He clearly pointed out that the day of Pentecost was a vernacular phenomenon, led by Galileans. They were strangers to Jerusalem. And so were most of the people gathered in

---

<sup>1</sup> Amos Yong and Dale M. Coulter, *The Holy Spirit and Higher Education: Renewing the Christian University* (Baylor University Press, 2034).

<sup>2</sup> Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Baylor University Press, 2014)

Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, who experienced the outbreak of the Holy Spirit, also strangers to Jerusalem. They are mostly diaspora Jews. It is obvious, again, as Yong contends, that the whole Pentecost experience was a listener-privileged event. This aligns with everything God does, including the Incarnation of Jesus, who came to be with us, assuming our own existence. This was a listener-privileged work of the Holy Spirit.

Also, Yong points out the incredible diversity on the day in Jerusalem, in culture. Language, customs and even food. Even if they were all Jews, they were diaspora Jews, with a hyphenated cultural identity: if they were from, let's say, Alexandria, then they were Alexandrian Jews. Even their languages, although they might still have maintained Aramaic, had heavy accents and were often Greek-speaking or even local-language speakers. This was the scene of the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. And this is what we need to celebrate: the diversity of localness. And in the celebration of local, the authentic global mosaic is shaped.

From this first part, I took away several key points. First, I observed that Yong's focus here is on the key characteristics of the Pentecost experience and the early church. Second, the most authentic local makes the best contribution to the global. Third, Yong uses "Singlish" as a handle for glocal authenticity. He does not use Hakka, Mandarin, or Malay as the "glocal" handle, but Singaporean English—Singlish, today's lingua franca with a clear local identity. Therefore, any homogeneity project is likely an imperial program, never a kingdom initiative. Indeed, Kong takes Singapore's ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity not only as a given but as a gift for authentic Singlish Pentecostal theology-making.

## 2. The Great Learning (大學, *Daxue*) from the Middle Kingdom

The second ancient resource Yong presents is the Confucian classic *Daxue*. (I wouldn't pretend that I pronounced correctly.) In Korean, we read it *Daehak*, which indeed means “university.” I am sure the National University of Singapore has this word in the Chinese rendering. Yong surprises me with his rich knowledge of the Confucian academic tradition. *Daxue* represents higher or greater learning. As an Asian heritage, this classic teaches the holistic (大) nature of learning. Indeed, it encompasses the whole human existence and aspiration. The learning process starts with cultivating inner virtue, or guarding my body (修身), which expands to properly managing the household (齊家) and ruling the nation (治國). This learning process reaches the ultimate climax by achieving universal peace and harmony (平天下).

There is no doubt that this unique ancient gift has shaped values, traditions, and cultures. But just like any gift, it comes with critical challenges, calling for our discernment from our spiritual foundation. I also noticed that, unlike the first section, Yong here focuses on the contents of Confucian teaching. (We recall that in his presentation on Pentecost, it was the key characteristics of the event, players (people), and the setting, which shaped the modus operandi.

What does this ancient tradition imply for Pentecostal theology-making in Singapore? First of all, the ancient Confucian heritage prizes learning. And this is evident in this church and in the sustained efforts of the Global Pentecostal Voices. And this is an important gift to global Pentecostalism. Decades ago, when I began teaching in the Philippines, I argued that seemingly anti-intellectual Pentecostalism in the West would find rich and conducive soil in Asia, where learning is prized. Secondly, *Daxue* teaches the inside-out move of learning and its impact. It starts with inner cultivation, radiating to the family and the nation, until it ultimately achieves universal harmony. And this resonates with Pentecostal spirituality, starting with an inner change

and transformation that ripples out to family life, workplace habits, community life, national life, and the whole world. Thirdly, its emphasis on self-cultivation speaks to the Pentecostal desire for holiness.

However, there are at least two aspects of this ancient legacy that fall under the judgment of the scripture (in this case, the “Galilean” nature of Pentecost and the early church). The first is the elite nature of Confucian educational philosophy, reserved exclusively for the ruling class (君子), marginalizing or completely denying the Galileans. This makes an obvious contrast between the “fringe” players on the day of Pentecost and the ruling class in this Confucian intellectual heritage. Secondly, the goal of universal “harmony and peace” strives for homogeneity under the authority of the ruling class, directly challenging the celebration of diversity on Pentecost. Diversity, as we all know, is often not celebrated in oriental culture; no one wants to “stick out.” For this reason, Yong’s plea for Galilean or Pentecostal diversity is right on the mark. Kong has much to say about this.

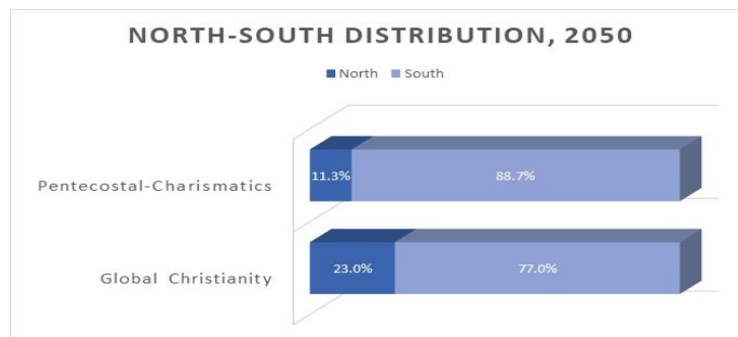
### **3. Contemporary “Glocal” Realities and Calling**

The third part of Yong’s presentation is contemporary global realities and the church’s calling to engage with them. He pointed out that this is the time for the global South to take ownership of the future of global Christianity

And Amos Yong challenges Singlish Pentecostal theology to empower the global south to actively lead the next-gen global Pentecostal theology. That is the vision of Antioch here in Asia. Now, I completely resonate with Amos here.

I created this chart some time ago. By 2050, global Christianity will find 77% in the global south and 23% in the global north. But for Pentecostal charismatic Christianity by 2050,

there will be 89% of the world's adherents in the global south and only 11% in the global north. Hollenweger is right that Pentecostal spirituality has an African root, or that of the global south.



And this challenges us to be intentionally and authentically local. According to Kong, Singlish Pentecostal theology must take Singapore's unique context into account. Religious plurality shapes the context and informs the church's missional engagement. Kong passionately urges to find ways to live harmoniously, positively contributing to the peace of society, while creatively and authentically witnessing to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Celebrating Singapore's ethnic diversity and intentionally developing Singlish Pentecostal theology will speak powerfully to the world, which is marred by ethnic conflicts. Kong is emphatic about the challenge of Pentecostal activism, urging us to shed exclusive and isolationist attitudes and correct the sectarian perception among fellow Christians. This calls for an active and Spirit-initiated ecumenism and healthy social engagement. I am sure there are many areas in which Pentecostal communities engage in a healthy, positive way within their contexts. And lastly, Kong advocates for glocal Pentecostal theology and education. The ongoing Pentecostal summits are courageous attempts to create and share authentically Pentecostal knowledge in the Singlish fashion.

#### **4. Yong and Kong for Singlish Pentecostal Theology and Mission**

Yong identifies two ancient traditions and the contemporary locus of Singapore as the sources for theologization, formation, and contribution. They are the gifts toward the “Antioch” vision. This contextual Pentecostal theology also shapes the church’s identity and its mission. It is clear that Singapore would never strive for a big number, for example, being included among the world’s top missionary-sending nations. But the unique intellectual gift, Singapore’s strategic location, Pentecostal spirituality, and committed theology-making promise to be a strong “Antioch” in Asia.

One area of the vision is becoming a regional theological hub, producing and sharing Pentecostal charismatic theological knowledge. The unique academic work in a church setting brings knowledge. An estimated 3.5 to 4.5 million workers are trapped in modern-day debt slavery across Pakistan's 20,000 brick kilns. And the City Harvest Church is on a liberation mission for enslaved families. A theological reflection can be developed anchored on Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (v. 1). Jesus defined his mission by quoting this passage in his Messianic Manifesto (Luke 4:18-22). I love how this Pentecostal work of mission redefines “liberation mission.”

Coming back to the desire to form an intellectual hub that your church and the Global Pentecostal Voices aspire to, I found an impressive model right here in Singapore. Yusuf Ishak Institute, established in 1968, holds the world's best resources on each Southeast Asian country. Its research and publishing output have earned global respect. It has published valuable research



monographs<sup>3</sup> and peer-reviewed journals. Its conferences and seminars are attracting the world's scholars, and its visiting fellowship is highly competitive. When I visited there, I found several publications relevant to Asian Pentecostalism. We also found that a senior researcher was your church member in the past. This center may serve as a model and inspiration for the church's ongoing development of scholarship infrastructure, such as the DYC Research Center for Glocal Pentecostalism. What is DYC? I just made up. However, this Center can be part of the "Antioch" vision, collecting national historical records of Pentecostal churches in Southeast Asia, attracting both Christian and secular scholars. The church already has a school of theology with impressive graduate cohorts, perhaps preparing for a top-level research degree program. This theological education system is a knowledge creation system. The Global Pentecostal summits are also bringing "global" scholarship into robust engagement with local contexts, providing another significant space for knowledge creation.

Can this center be the local Pentecostal academic sandbox which will eventually produce something like Pentecostal academic Apple? If Yong's last plea is to take up the new theological responsibility from the global South, then it's critical to reach out to the two other southern continents: Africa and Latin America. The Center can facilitate bringing their experiences, resources, and explorations into one place for sharing, comparison, and joint exploration. In this way, the Asian "Antioch" may bring theological resources from the global South into global spaces.

It is also commendable that the church and GPVs have explored ways to disseminate the produced knowledge. All three books out of the past three Summits are now open books, making their digital versions freely available. This intellectual generosity reflects the Pentecost spirit of

---

<sup>3</sup> One example is Terence Chong, ed., *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation* (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018).



“Galileans” serving “fringe” diasporas. I believe there is more room to explore to expand the scope of their dissemination. For example, my search for a chapter from *Voices Loud and Clear* in Google Scholar returned no results. These free gifts deserve more platforms for sharing. For example, there are several global theology library programs that provide free digital and printed resources; the books (perhaps in digital format) should be offered to them. And the digital presence is equally impressive: the YouTube recordings are freely available.

Still to come may be an academic journal. I just made up: *Global Pentecostal Voices: An International Journal*. I even put the inaugural date for Spring 2028. This new space also welcomes like-minded Pentecostals around the world to join productive conversations by sharing their studies. Is 2028 too long to wait? Then 2027 is even better.

There are encouraging signs that the CHC-GPVs works are becoming more visible in the global spaces. The recent issue of *Pentecostal Education* includes the response of a home-grown theologian, Daniel Lim, along with Craig Keener’s presentation. Two senior leaders of the School of Theology are attending the Global Forum of Theological Educators' international conference in Kenya (2026). Also, a study on the church’s “liberation mission” in Pakistan will be published in *Spirit-Empowered Transformation* (2028). However, there are other spaces where the School of Theology can actively participate and contribute. One is the Asia-Pacific Theological Association, the regional Pentecostal Theological Association. Another is the Asia Pentecostal Society, with which the School of Theology can engage with other Asian Pentecostal scholars. The School may host its annual meeting, during which the School’s rising scholars can also present their studies. I'm sure there is more to come.

As I wrap up, Amos Yong reminds me how the development of local Pentecostal theology fits into the “Antioch” vision for global role. Following Yong and Kong, I see only the

beginning of a long and fruitful road for the City Harvest Church, its School of Theology, and Global Pentecostal Voices towards becoming an intellectual hub for glocal Pentecostal studies.

Yes, it has only begun!

DRAFT