

# Amos Yong's formative moments

by [Amos Yong](#)

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Six hours at a summer church camp altar in 1977 set the trajectory for my life. It was then, at the age of 12, that over the course of three nights I experienced what Pentecostals call the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Responding to the invitation at the end of the evening to receive more of God, my friends and I encountered God in such a palpable way that I think we caught a glimpse of what the Gospel writer said would happen when the Spirit is given and received: "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37). We prayed, cried, worshiped, spoke in unknown tongues and simply soaked in the presence of God. I have never been the same.

Later, when I was going through theological seminary and encountering all kinds of doctrines and ideas that challenged my Pentecostal worldview, I was tempted to leave the church that had nurtured me in the faith. But unlike previous generations of Pentecostals, I had mentors who suggested that it was possible to be something that was once considered an oxymoron—a Pentecostal scholar!—and that I could do so precisely by pursuing the vocation of the mind as an authentic expression of a Spirit-filled life.

This doesn't mean that I have since parroted what I learned growing up. But everything I have written and published has been part of a quest to understand at a deeper theological level this encounter with the Spirit of the living God, undeniably registered in my preteen years.

What does it mean that the Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ takes up residence in human hearts in life-transforming ways? This is the mystery at the heart of the gospel of God's redeeming

the world in Christ by the Spirit, and my own theological work has repeatedly returned to trying to understand this afresh.

When I

was invited to join the faculty at Regent University School of Divinity and to work especially with a new Ph.D. program in renewal studies, I discerned that this was simply the next step charted by the Spirit wherein I could continue to learn more about what had happened on those summer nights. And I might now be a source of encouragement for others with similar experiences who find themselves on a path of theological inquiry.

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