

Article

The Future of Religious Education: The Role and Contributions of Youth Theology

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Abstract: Studies on youth theology, although a relatively new research field, offer various theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches concerning young people's theological thought structures. These studies not only illuminate the process of religious identity formation among youth but also provide an opportunity to reassess the pedagogical and practical dimensions of religious education. In particular, analyses of the intersections of youth theology with family, educational, and religious contexts offer practitioners of this field new perspectives and horizons not only at the theoretical but also at the practical level, contributing to a more inclusive and effective structuring of religious education. The main purpose of this study is to present the contributions of youth theology to the theoretical and practical dimensions of religious education in an analytical framework. In this context, the focus of this study is to examine how the perspectives offered by youth theology on the religious identity construction, spiritual development, and social roles of young individuals can shape the content, methods, and practices of religious education. In this regard, examining the relationship between the pedagogical dynamics of youth theology and religious education aims to provide a theoretical enrichment to the literature and innovative approaches to practical applications. This study was designed with the case study method, which is one of the qualitative research designs, and the document analysis technique was used as a data collection tool. The research data were analyzed using the descriptive evaluation method. This approach enabled the research to be handled in an in-depth and systematic manner and to present the relevant data in a meaningful way. This study, which deals with the phenomena of youth and theology in relation to each other, aims to examine the interactions between these phenomena in depth. In the concluding section, various educational models for religious education targeting young individuals are proposed, offering practical recommendations derived from a theoretical framework. These recommendations aim to highlight the potential contributions of youth theology to religious education, serving as a guiding resource for future research and applications.

Keywords: religious education; youth; theology; youth theology; contributions



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1. Introduction

The digital and cultural possibilities offered by the new world profoundly affect individuals' lifestyles, values, and conceptions of the world (Nerse 2023). Today, digital tools have become a fundamental component of individuals' lives, going beyond being merely tools that eliminate the time and space limitations on communication. This transformation significantly impacts cultural and social structures, leading to radical changes in individuals' lifestyles, habits, attitudes, and behaviors (R. Koç 2022). Social media and other digital platforms allow individuals to showcase their own lives and monitor the lives of others. These visibility-oriented platforms allow different understandings of life and lifestyles

to be shared without borders, thus accelerating cultural interaction between individuals and creating a global standard of living. Digital culture influences the cultures of societies (Gere 2019).

As the dynamics of digital culture radically change individuals' conceptions of life and perspectives, the world is gradually turning into a society wearing the same "uniform". As a reflection of this homogenization, values such as religion and morality are becoming increasingly personalized. Individuals can accept their actions as moral because they themselves perform them (Marar 2012). In addition, with the increasing prominence of a global understanding in today's world, it is observed that the life perspectives and lifestyles of believers and non-believers are becoming more and more similar. In particular, it is a remarkable change that believers shape their lives according to the secular norms and values of the modern world rather than religious references (Critchley 2013). Therefore, belief systems are becoming more dependent on individuals' personal experiences and preferences, while moral values are shaped by individual interpretations, detached from the social context. While this situation leads to a decline in the influence of traditional authorities and the prominence of individual freedoms, it also brings new questions about social solidarity and common moral grounds.

These changes and transformations in recent years have affected the conception of religion and the perspective on religion. Young people especially have different perspectives on religion and values. While traditionally the beliefs, values, and rules necessary for the order and continuity of social life were learned within the family (Canatan and Yildirim 2011), today, children who are introduced to digital platforms at an early age obtain information about values, morals, and religion from these platforms. In fact, influencers and digital content creators—regardless of their expertise—play a crucial role in shaping young people's religious perceptions and moral values, so much so that young people can act like the influencers they follow and prepare and share content like them. (Niedzviecki 2011). Today's youth have more opportunities for research and information than the youth of the traditional world, and they can easily study, access information, share, and exchange information, work from home, and work in groups (Drahošová and Balco 2017). However, some negative content on religious issues shared on digital platforms can also have negative effects, and young people can move away from religion. Therefore, there is a need to attract young people's interest in theology in order to reach them in terms of religion and spirituality and to support them in shaping their conception of religion (Zaid et al. 2022).

Today, in various parts of the world, especially in Europe, there is a growing interest in the theology of youth as a result of academic work in the field of child theology. The concept of child theology was first discussed in the academic literature in the last decade of the 20th century and the academic discourse in this field has attracted more and more attention. Friedrich Schweitzer, one of the leading figures in the field, sees children's theology as an extension of the "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) approach (Lipman 1988), which has attracted global attention and is considered an important paradigm shift in education. In this context, children's theology stands out as a discipline that takes seriously children's religious thought and metaphysical understanding by providing a pedagogical framework for their cognitive, moral, and spiritual development (Su 2023). According to Schweitzer's basic assumption, children's capacity to ask philosophical questions and exhibit a certain degree of philosophical thinking suggests that they can demonstrate a similar cognitive competence in the field of religion and theology. In this context, the ability of children to ask theological questions and develop theological thinking is one of the main arguments of child theology (Schweitzer 2014).

Over time, the basic principles and approaches developed in the context of children's theology have been extended beyond children to include adolescents and young people. This process of expansion has encouraged the construction of a theological understanding that is sensitive to the developmental and cognitive stages of individuals and paved the way for the emergence of youth theology. Youth theology has become increasingly important, especially in the field of religious education, interacting with various disciplines at both theoretical and practical levels. On the one hand, it contributes to the development of new approaches by religious communities in their spiritual guidance and education of young people, and, on the other hand, it contributes to a more in-depth consideration of issues such as the individual's faith development, religious identity construction, and the spiritual orientation of young people in the modern world in academic theological debates. In this context, youth theology emerges as a dynamic field that shapes individuals' religious thoughts in accordance with their age and cognitive capacities (Schweitzer 2014). Therefore, this field enables young people to ask questions about themselves and about life, to seek answers to their questions, and to become active.

Today, young people's understanding of faith transcends traditional and sectarian boundaries and is based on a more individual and subjective experience. Young people shape their world of faith in line with their personal experiences and develop a conception centered on individuality. This situation causes youth faith to have its own unique framework and to gain meaning independently from traditional patterns. Today, youth studies increasingly focus on how young people express their beliefs and the cognitive, emotional, and social dynamics of this process. In this context, studies in the field of religious education emphasize that young people should be treated not only as passive learners in traditional teaching processes, but also as subjective individuals who actively construct their own world of faith. The capacity of young people to interpret and make sense of their religious beliefs and accordingly develop individual theological frameworks suggests that they are not merely passive recipients of a mere transmission of knowledge, but also actors engaged in processes of theological reflection (Faix 2014). Therefore, recognizing that young people have an independent theological perspective and taking them seriously as subjects should be considered a central element of contemporary religious education. This approach requires that the belief systems that young people develop through individual and collective experience should be addressed without being limited by traditional dogmatic approaches and that their epistemological competencies should be taken into account in this process.

As a result, with the influence of social, cultural, and technological dynamics over time, young people's perception of religion and their perspectives on religion undergo a continuous process of change and transformation. Different models of religious education have been developed in order to make sense of this process and to guide young people to build their world of faith in a healthy way. However, it is thought that traditional educational approaches based on one-way knowledge transfer cannot fully respond to the processes of young people's understanding of religion. In this context, there are efforts to develop an understanding of theology in which young people are not only passive recipients of religious education, but also subjects who actively shape their religious thoughts. Youth theology has emerged to respond to this need and draws attention as a discipline that enables young people to construct their religious understandings in line with their own lives, experiences, and inquiries. Youth theology, which aims to understand young people's religious experiences, faith practices, and the place of religious values in their lives, aims to approach the needs, questions, and challenges of young people from a theological perspective. The main focus of this study is to analyze how the perspectives offered by youth theology on young people's religious identity construction, spiritual

development, and social roles can transform the content, methods, and practices of religious education. In this context, examining the interactions between the theoretical framework of youth theology and religious education practices in this study aims to make an important contribution to structuring education in accordance with the needs of young people.

2. Methodology

This study was designed with the case study method, which is one of the qualitative research designs. A case study is a qualitative research approach in which a particular event or situation is examined in depth and longitudinally and data are collected in a systematic way. The basic idea of a case study is to explain how a situation or several situations illustrate an issue. The most prominent feature of a good case study is the collection and analysis of qualitative data from many sources such as documents, books, and visual materials (Creswell 2017). A case study is the investigation of a current phenomenon or an event in its real-life context. It is the observation of the situation in real life, especially when the boundaries between an event and the context are not clear. A case study allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon or event in depth with “how” and “why” questions (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2018). Exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research questions are asked in a case study (Johnson and Christensen 2014). Document analysis technique was used as the data collection tool of this research and the data were analyzed by descriptive analysis method. The purpose of the descriptive analysis method is to create a general skeleton for data analysis based on the conceptual framework of the research, the questions determined based on the problem of the research, and the dimensions determined in the interview and/or observation, and to present the data as themes in accordance with this structure (Karataş 2015).

First, an extensive literature review was conducted on the topic of this study and the theoretical approaches and debates in this field were discussed in detail. In this process, a framework was built around the main arguments and assumptions of youth theology, and existing gaps and debates in the literature were highlighted. Since youth theology is largely based on the processes of religious development associated with adolescence, the data provided by studies in this field are also taken into consideration in this study. Since adolescence is considered a critical stage in which individuals shape their identity, values, and belief systems, the effects of this period on religious development are examined in detail. How adolescents develop their religious thoughts and beliefs, how they approach their theological questions, and what kind of searches they are in this process have been one of the focal points of the research. The main aim of this study is to develop a holistic understanding of the interaction between theology and individual development and its reflections on youth theology. This understanding emphasizes the importance of young people’s religious reflections, questions, and searches. Furthermore, the implications of this understanding for religious education practices are emphasized. Suggestions are presented in order to develop a more effective educational understanding and practical approaches to the religious development processes of young people. In this context, existing approaches in the field of religious education are questioned and new methods are proposed that can provide more sensitive and comprehensive answers to young people’s questions about theological thought. The research aims to provide important findings on how to develop more effective and comprehensive practices in the field of religious education by better understanding the factors that shape young people’s religious beliefs.

3. Religious Development in Adolescence

Academic studies on the theology of youth address the biological, physiological, cognitive, emotional, and religious development of young people from a multidimensional

perspective. These studies reveal that adolescence is not limited to physical growth and psychosocial changes, but is also a critical stage in which belief, identity, and value systems are formed. Defined as an intermediate period between childhood and adulthood (Kulaksızoğlu 2014), adolescence is a critical period in which individual identity is shaped and the basic steps of transition from childhood to adulthood are taken. This period, which covers the ages of 11–22 (Canales 2006; Coşkunsever 2022), is generally considered in the context of three main phases: Pre-adolescence (ages 9–12) is the first stage in which physical and cognitive changes begin, while the first stage of adolescence (ages 12–17 for girls and 13–17 for boys) is characterized by rapid physical growth, emotional intensity, and the search for identity. The last period of adolescence (ages 17–21, 22) is the stage in which the individual matures, gains independence, and prepares for adult roles. These stages provide an important framework for understanding the complexity of adolescence in terms of biological, psychological, and social development (Crone and Dahl 2012).

Adolescence is defined as a period in which young people exhibit many common developmental characteristics, despite individual differences. Among these characteristics, the search for identity, self-formation, socialization, the discovery of sexuality, the need for independence, religious doubts and conflicts, and the awakening of religious consciousness stand out. The development of abstract thinking during adolescence increases young people's interest in religion and spiritual matters, and in this context, it strengthens their tendency to conduct religious research and make inquiries on these issues. This process is considered a part of adolescents' efforts to find their own place in both individual and social contexts. Especially the spiritual inquiries that emerge in this period play a decisive role in shaping the individual's identity and value system (Gündüz 2020).

In the context of mental development, the period of early adolescence, during which the individual transitions from the stage of concrete thought to the stage of abstract thought, is a critical period in which cognitive abilities develop in a complex manner. In this period, with the increase in the capacity of young people to understand abstract concepts, and their interest in issues such as religion and existential issues, the meaning and purpose of life become more pronounced (Gündüz 2020). By the age of 12, young people show more interest in religion and comprehend religion in accordance with their own understanding. In fact, in this age period, young people are more interested in religion than ever before (Kılavuz 2006; Gündüz 2020). This age is referred to as "religious awakening" or "the age of religious development" in psychology (Gürses and İrk 2018; Hökelekli 2008). In addition, during adolescence, individuals develop a more personal understanding of God as a stage of "artificial traditional" belief (Fowler and Dell 2006).

Adolescence is a critical stage in which an individual's cognitive and emotional development accelerates, identity construction becomes evident, and the search for independence comes to the fore. During the cognitive development process, the adolescent gains the ability to evaluate events, concepts, and authority figures more analytically with the strengthening of abstract thinking skills. In this process, as the mental capacity of the individual expands, their tendency to see themselves at an equivalent level to adults increases. The adolescent develops a strong desire to become a more autonomous and independent individual by abandoning the relatively dependent structure of childhood. This cognitive transformation causes the adolescent to gain the courage to question the thoughts, value judgments, and authority of the adult figures around them (Özdemir and Çok 2011). This critical attitude towards authority not only reinforces the intellectual independence of the individual, but also transforms the relationships with parents and other authority figures. Adolescents tend to criticize the values and rules of their parents that they accepted without question in the past, to express their own thoughts more openly, and to evaluate the social norms around them from an independent perspective. As a natural consequence of this,

conflicts may occur from time to time in the relationship with parents (Aybak and İpek 2021). In this process, while questioning religious authority and belief systems, young people may sometimes tend to reject them or reshape their religious identity (Çayır 2014).

It is known that there are many factors in the formation of religious doubt and inner conflicts during adolescence. These factors include rebellious tendencies against authority with the development of a sense of independence; increased feelings of guilt with the awakening of sexual instincts and inner desires and consequent rebellion against religious and moral norms; questioning about the meaning of life and the inner confusion caused by these questionings; social and spiritual disharmony caused by inadequate religious education; scientific theories and facts of daily life appearing to contradict religious beliefs; reckless behavior of religious leaders negatively affecting religious life and interaction in society; and data pollution and misleading guidance in religious sciences increasing the tendency of individuals to doubt and deny. These factors pave the way for a complex process that causes adolescents to question their religious identities and belief structures (Özüdoğru Erdoğan 2014). Therefore, adolescence is a complex and dynamic process in which the individual experiences transformation in biological, psychological, and social terms, and includes the basic steps of transition from childhood to adulthood. During this period, adolescents also go through the processes of understanding, questioning, and internalizing religious and moral concepts. They need to be supported in forming their thoughts about religion during these developmental periods when they make many inquiries.

In conclusion, adolescence is a complex and dynamic process during which individuals undergo transformations in biological, psychological, and social dimensions, encompassing the fundamental stages of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Although individual differences exist, this period is characterized by common developmental features such as identity formation, the development of cognitive abilities, the pursuit of independence, changes in social relationships, emotional fluctuations, and the shaping of decisions regarding the future. During adolescence, individuals, through their cognitive and emotional transformations, strive to complete the construction of their identity, while simultaneously endeavoring to establish their own value system and determine their position within society. Moreover, this period involves processes of understanding, questioning, and internalizing religious and moral concepts. In particular, adolescence should be regarded as a phase in which individuals shape their worldview, critically examine their religious values, and define their spiritual orientations. Therefore, this stage does not merely represent a physical and psychological developmental process; it also signifies an important period during which young people have the opportunity to re-evaluate their religious beliefs, address existential questions to deepen their search for meaning, and attempt to balance societal norms with individual values.

4. Religious Development in the Digital Age

Youth theology is shaping up as an interdisciplinary endeavor to understand the youth of the modern age and offers an in-depth perspective on how young people construct their religious identities. In this context, it is necessary to consider young people not only as passive individuals who inherit their belief systems from their parents or religious authorities, but also as subjects who actively construct them in line with their own life experiences, cognitive development, and social interactions. This approach necessitates the development of new pedagogical models in the field of religious education, centering on educational methods that encourage young people's participation in the processes of questioning their beliefs, critical thinking, and meaning making. In the last quarter of the 20th century, following the scientific and technological developments that accelerated in the last quarter of the 20th century, computers and the internet, which were expressed as the

main force uniting different planets of the communication galaxy (Baldini 2000), penetrated deeply into the lives of individuals in a short time and caused radical transformations in daily life practices. Especially with the emergence of Web 2.0, it is observed that internet users have evolved from being merely passive consumers to taking an active role as content producers and evolving into a dynamic structure (Demirli and Kütük 2010).

Web 2.0 technology has encouraged digital collaboration and paved the way for the growth of social media and digital communities by providing a participatory structure that allows users to produce and contribute content. Thus, common spaces have been created on a global scale (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008). Social media, which has large platform networks within these common spaces, are virtual platforms where users create an open profile, create a network of people they want to communicate with, display and share content, and observe their relationships with other users' profiles (Boyd and Ellison 2008). Today, virtual platforms are used by a very wide audience. Research shows that the number of active social media users worldwide exceeds 5 billion, 94.3% of the 16–64 age group use social networks, and daily internet users spend 6 h 40 min online and 2 h 23 min on social media platforms (Wearesocial 2024, "Digital 2024"). Young people use Web 2.0 technologies for purposes such as communication, social communication, and problem solving (Radmard et al. 2020), communicating with people like themselves to eliminate the sense of insecurity experienced, especially during adolescence (Floros and Siomos 2013), following the agenda (Çömlekçi and Başol 2019), spending leisure time together and chatting (Yıldız and Demir 2016).

Research shows that young people spend long periods of time online. In one study, it was reported that middle and high school students spend about 5 or 6 h online, so children and young people spend a significant portion of their time in front of screens (Twenge 2018). Another study on the subject shows that today's children spend most of their free time in the digital environment for about 30 thousand hours until the age of 20. During this time, it was found that children spend about 20 thousand hours on the internet and the remaining 10 thousand hours on digital games. It is emphasized that this generation growing up in the digital age has an increased ability to perceive and interpret visual materials quickly and is particularly sensitive to graphic elements such as icons and pictures. In this context, it can be said that the visuals in digital games and the messages conveyed through these visuals have a significant impact on the cognitive processes of children and young people (Sayar and Benli 2020).

Digital platforms pave the way for the emergence of negative consequences such as distancing from religion, wasting time, and spending unproductive time in terms of youth theology. Young individuals' encounters with content that contradicts their lifestyle and beliefs negatively affect their identity and personality development, causing them to experience internal conflicts and dilemmas (Gürses and İrk 2018). A study on the subject revealed that the moral maturity scores of students who spend more than three hours a day on social media decreased and that the intensity of social media use has negative effects on moral maturity. High school youth are more affected by social media environments and these interactions lead to changes in their religious and moral habits and behaviors (Erol 2019).

A study conducted in the United States reveals remarkable results by examining the effects of digital platforms on social differences and cultural diversity. According to the findings of the study, with the spread of digitalization, the ways in which individuals interact with values specific to different cultural identities and social groups have changed significantly. In particular, social media, online communities, and global communication networks allow individuals to go beyond their own cultural boundaries and gain a broader perspective. In this context, digital platforms have been observed to increase interaction

between individuals, bringing certain cultural understandings closer and even eliminating some traditional differences (Twenge 2018). In other words, the boundaries of religious and moral thought are becoming common. Again, a longitudinal study shows that young people exposed to common content on social media do not care whether their discourse is moral or not (Twenge 2013). The constant stimuli on social networks and being exposed to all kinds of positive and negative content leads to the normalization of all kinds of content, weakening the sense of sociality on social media platforms and decreasing the commitment to religious and moral principles. This process eventually paves the way for the emergence of moral indifference (Hacikeleşoğlu 2021). Thus, in the perception of young people, moral indifference and the principles of religion become unimportant.

It reveals that individuals with altruistic tendencies may prefer unethical or harmful actions when exposed to negative environmental conditions. This emphasizes that individuals' moral decisions may vary depending on environmental factors and stressors, especially the impact of encountering negative images on an individual's moral attitudes (Neiman 2017). Therefore, young people who grow up spending long periods of time on today's digital platforms encounter a lot of positive and negative information about religion. In particular, negative religious content causes the formation of an inaccurate construction of religion in the imagination of young people. Alternative activities are needed for the elimination of this situation and for young people to gain a correct understanding of religion.

In today's digital world, the importance of youth theology studies has increased more than ever before, as young people growing up in a rapidly changing flow of information are able to construct their conceptions of faith in a conscious and healthy way. Youth theology emphasizes that individuals actively construct their belief systems not only through static teachings inherited from traditional authorities, but also through individual experiences, critical thinking processes, and social interactions (Schweitzer 2023). In this context, while shaping young people's understanding of religion, the opportunities and threats offered by the digital environment in which they live should be taken into consideration. In particular, the diversity of religious content that young people encounter through digital media poses both opportunities and risks in the process of making sense of their beliefs. At this point, youth theology encourages young people to develop a critical and conscious perspective by demonstrating that young people are not merely passive recipients in constructing their religious identities, but that they create their own individual world of faith through active processes of reflection and interpretation.

In conclusion, the scientific and technological advancements that took place in the last quarter of the 20th century have led to revolutionary transformations in the field of communication through computers and the internet. These developments have deeply permeated individuals' daily practices, becoming fundamental tools that interconnect various components of the communication galaxy. While this transformation positively contributes to young individuals' communication and cognitive processes, it also exposes them to content that may not align with religious and moral values. In particular, prolonged use of digital media during adolescence can have adverse effects on identity formation and the development of spiritual attitudes. This situation fosters internal conflicts, moral indifference, and the formation of distorted religious perceptions among young individuals, ultimately leading to the weakening of societal norms and spiritual values. Therefore, while assessing the opportunities provided by digital environments, it is essential to meticulously evaluate the accompanying risks. To ensure that young individuals adopt a sound understanding of religion and moral attitudes, it has become imperative to establish specialized study areas within the field of theology that specifically address the needs of youth.

5. Youth in Religious Texts

Youth theology is rooted in religious texts. Christian and Islamic texts provide information about young people. The treatment of young people in religious texts is different in Christianity and Islam. There is only one story in canonical sources about Jesus as a young person. It is a narrative in which the 12-year-old Jesus sits among the teachers in the Jerusalem Temple and interacts with them. According to this account, when his parents found Jesus in the Temple, they saw him listening to the teachers and asking them questions. This incident shows that the young Jesus stood out at an early age for his intellectual curiosity and religious wisdom (Luke 2:46, Kolektif 2018). This reveals that Jesus' method of learning was a deliberative process.

First, there is interaction in this process: Jesus learns by asking questions and listening carefully to what others say. Second, this interaction takes place with adults. Jesus is among the most competent teachers of the faith tradition and is taken seriously by his interlocutors during the discussions and benefits from their wisdom. Thirdly, these discussions take place in the public eye, that is, in an open public space. But this is not just any public space, but the Jerusalem Temple, which symbolizes the authority of the religious community. Fourth, the young Jesus is not merely lecturing or passively receiving lessons in this process. He is at the center of the action, in the public sphere, at the heart of authority, actively participating in theological debate through dialogue and deliberation. This suggests that Jesus' learning process takes shape in a communal and participatory context, rather than in an individual and isolated setting (Corrie 2020). The Christian Bible gives some insights into young people and their behavior. In the Bible, young people are often considered to be small and weak because they have not reached the maturity of adulthood (I Timothy 4:12; I Samuel 17:42, Kolektif 2018). This perspective emphasizes the vulnerability of youth in the process of physiological and psychological development. It is expressed in the request that God will not punish young people for their sins and rebellious behavior (Psalms 25:7, Kolektif 2018), and that although they are encouraged to act freely and joyfully during this period of their lives, they will be held accountable for their actions (Ecclesiastes 11:9–10, Kolektif 2018). They are also encouraged to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1–3, Kolektif 2018).

The parables of Cain and Abel, Joseph, Moses, Mary, and Moses occupy an important place in the Bible and the Qur'an, and both holy books deal with the human condition, moral values, and religious teachings through similar themes, events, and figures. These parables carry deep spiritual meanings for both Islamic and Christian beliefs, and both sacred texts deal with similar themes from different perspectives and narratives. In both scriptures, the parable of Cain and Abel reveals man's first crime and the negative consequences of human weaknesses such as jealousy and anger. The acceptance of Abel's sacrifice to God and Cain's jealousy and murder is a story that reflects the inner conflicts and moral responsibilities of human beings. The story of Joseph is a profound narrative that emphasizes surrender to God's providence, patience, and loyalty in both texts. Joseph being thrown into the well out of jealousy and his subsequent hardships in Egypt, and his eventual rise to a high position in Egypt, show that justice and God's providence are at work. The story of Moses appears in both the Qur'an and the Bible as a symbol of God's will to help people. His struggle against Pharaoh, the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, and God's guidance in this process reinforce the belief in God's justice and power in both texts. The parable of Mary, on the other hand, is a figure who deserves great respect and appreciation in both holy books. Mary's miraculous conception is mentioned in both the Qur'an and the Bible as an important event that demonstrates God's power and miracles.

The Qur'an also states that Prophet Abraham, at a young age, questioned what he should believe in and why, and realized the error of believing in non-eternal, created things. It is reported that he believed in the oneness of Allah and that one should submit only to Him. He rebelled against the cruel order of his time. He was not insensitive to the wrong beliefs and behaviors in society, and it is stated that he wanted to help his society find the truth through Socratic questioning in order to tell them the truth (Enbiya, 21/51–73, [Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2017](#)). In addition to describing role model youth in the Qur'an, the Qur'an also provides information on how to treat young people, how to address them, and what advice to give them (Lokman, 31/13–18, [Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2017](#)). The explicit mention of Lokman's advice to his son in the Qur'an underlines the importance given to the education and moral development of young people. These admonitions are of a nature to guide not only the individual morality and behavior of young people, but also their faith and social responsibilities. By addressing matters of faith and morality in his admonitions, Luqman emphasizes the fundamental principles of the Shari'ah, which encompasses both the individual's responsibilities towards God and his obligations in social relations. Topics such as not associating partners with Allah, treating parents well, the importance of worship, being patient, and avoiding arrogance aim to shape the individual's spiritual and moral development as well as their behavior in social life.

There is an important example in the Qur'an of young people as role models and valuing the opinions of young people, as well as drawing attention to communication with young people. The fact that Prophet David, who was a judge in his community, listened to his son Solomon's opinion on a matter on which he was consulted, evaluated his own judgment by comparing it with his son's judgment, and put it into practice because he found Solomon's judgment to be more correct, contains several important messages (Anbiya, 21/78–79, [Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2017](#)). First of all, this behavior shows that Prophet David respected his son's opinion and took his views seriously. At the same time, this attitude demonstrates that knowledge and wisdom can be evaluated regardless of age or position and that a correct idea should be adopted regardless of who it comes from. This approach of Prophet David is a good example of how a parent or a person in authority should set aside their personal ego and adhere to the principles of justice and righteousness. By not engaging in any jealousy or ego struggle against his son, he was fair in his decision, thereby demonstrating not only an example of personal virtue, but also an exemplary attitude as a leader and a father. This incident not only emphasizes the importance of humility and wisdom in leadership, but also clearly demonstrates that valuing the opinions of younger generations can contribute to individual and societal development.

In conclusion, religious texts constitute the basic dynamics of youth theology. Religious texts make it clear that young people's opinions are valued. Both Christianity and Islam encourage the participation of young people in religious learning processes and emphasize the importance of using a language of understanding and patience in responding to their questions and guiding them to the right path. The teachings of the prophets constitute the most important dynamics of this process. Religious texts provide guidance for young people to construct correct religious imagination and action. Islam and Christianity contribute to the character development of young people not only with their religious aspects but also with their moral and ethical dimensions. Both religions offer teachings that enable young people to develop models of correct behavior as they build their religious identity and fulfill their social responsibilities. This allows young people to embrace their religious life not only as a tradition but also as an in-depth understanding of life. Religious texts therefore provide the knowledge necessary for young people to develop their religious identity, strengthen their faith, and become virtuous individuals on a societal level. Both the Qur'an and the Bible provide examples for young people to

acquire the right conception of religion, leading them to consciously shape their religious thoughts, values, and actions.

6. Contribution of Youth Theology to Religious Education

6.1. Youth Theology

Every individual feels the need to question their existence, origins, surroundings, and ultimate purpose. This existential questioning forms the essence of ontological inquiry. As individuals get closer to their essence, they begin to perceive the truth more clearly. Much like glass, which becomes more transparent as it is refined, individuals gain clarity in understanding their existence when they engage in self-exploration. Glass, initially composed of sand and opaque materials, undergoes a purification process until it becomes a medium capable of transmitting light. Similarly, an individual, though lacking their own inherent light, gains meaning and radiance through spiritual enlightenment (Frager 2005).

A person who distances themselves from their roots and identity risks falling into spiritual alienation. However, those who resist this detachment and confront their existential estrangement gain the opportunity to reach a deeper understanding of their true nature (Camus 1998). Today's youth, referred to as "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), are growing up in a globalized world with unique networking opportunities. Although their perceptions of the world and religion change and their questions and problems are shaped according to the conditions of the day they live in, they ontologically need religious and spiritual development. Thus, a theological framework that effectively addresses the spiritual and religious needs of today's youth is essential.

Contemporary surveys suggest that, while religious affiliation among young people has declined compared to previous generations, their interest in theological discussions has increased (Markstrom 1999). Furthermore, young individuals tend to reinterpret traditional religious beliefs and dogmas in a more personal and unique manner (Faix 2014). With digital platforms now serving as the primary sources of religious information, a shared digital theological discourse has emerged (Temel et al. 2018). This transformation signals a shift toward a globalized, collective religious understanding that influences young people's spiritual and intellectual lives. The evolving paradigm of the younger generation signifies a fundamental shift in societal, cultural, and individual perspectives. This transformation necessitates surpassing traditional theological boundaries and adopting a more dynamic approach. Consequently, research on youth theology and church youth ministries has gained increasing importance in recent years (Roebben 2012; Smith 2020). Youth theology, therefore, is not merely a field that allows young people to express their theological thoughts but also provides a framework to explore their religious inquiries, struggles, and perspectives in a structured and meaningful way (Reiss 2015). It transforms young individuals from passive recipients into active participants in religious discourse.

Friedrich Schweitzer, in his 2005 research, examined whether young people could be considered theologians by building upon child theology studies. Concluding affirmatively, he initiated further studies on youth theology and its integration into religious education practices (Su 2023). Youth theology adopts a systematic approach that recognizes young individuals as theologians in their own right. It categorizes theological engagement into three forms: the theology of youth, theology with youth, and theology for youth. These categories explore young people's shared religious reflections, dialogue-based theological discussions, and age-specific theological developments, respectively (Schweitzer 2014). Theology serves as a discipline that enables young individuals to address questions and challenges relevant to their lives, encouraging critical and theological thinking. Consequently, the inclusion of youth perspectives in theological discourse strengthens their participation in religious thought and practice. When religious educators and theologians acknowledge young

people's perspectives, they foster a sense of validation and engagement that encourages deeper theological reflection (Schweitzer 2014).

Studies on youth theology present models of youth theological education. Models of youth theological education are based on four models: the biblical hermeneutic model, the servant-leadership model, the liberation model, and the Christian discipleship model (Canales 2006). The first model is based on reading and researching religious texts in order to understand and make sense of young people's own religious experiences (Canales 2006). The second model is based on listening and empathy, which calls for doing something for others and prioritizes altruism (Canales 2006). While the third model focuses on marginalized, poor, and marginalized individuals in society, it adopts the goal of liberating oppressed communities from political, economic, racial, and social discrimination as its primary concern. At the same time, it is based on a perspective that advocates for the emancipation of these communities and offers an approach to achieving social justice and equality (Canales 2006). The latter model aims to develop the spirituality of young people, awakening their spirituality in their lives through self-awareness and personal exploration. The main driving force of this approach is to treat people as a whole and support their spiritual development (Canales 2006).

When including youth theology within applied theology, certain basic principles need to be considered in order for the field to develop in an effective and meaningful way. Youth theology is a discipline that aims to help young people understand, experience and integrate their religious beliefs into their lives. However, for this process to be successful, an approach in line with the basic principles of applied theology must be adopted. These principles are evaluated under six headings: interdisciplinary dialogue, embracing different types of knowledge, creating meaningful practices, the importance of context, the importance of experience, and the importance of applied theology (Smith 2020). Firstly, interdisciplinary dialogue emphasizes that youth theology cannot be addressed only from a theological perspective, but must interact with different disciplines. Young people's religious identity development is influenced by many psychological, sociological, and cultural factors (Smith 2020). Secondly, embracing different types of knowledge implies that youth theology should not be limited to traditional religious knowledge. In addition to theological knowledge, scientific, experiential, and cultural knowledge should also be included. Considering the knowledge that emerges from young people's own life practices and experiences can make their religious understanding deeper and more meaningful. For example, in addition to learning the scriptures from an academic perspective, a young person can also consolidate their theological knowledge by practicing religious rituals or participating in social responsibility projects (Smith 2020).

Third, creating meaningful practices emphasizes the translation of theoretical knowledge into practice. It is not enough for young people to learn religious concepts in the abstract; they need to be shown how this knowledge can impact their everyday lives. Fourthly, the importance of context implies that youth theology should be considered in the context of the historical, cultural, and social circumstances in which it takes place. Youth theology cannot be developed without taking into account the dynamics of the age in which young people live, technological developments, globalization, and cultural diversity (Smith 2020). For example, in a world of increasing digitalization, theological studies for young people can be conducted through online platforms and social media. Likewise, the religious understandings of young people from different cultural backgrounds should be addressed in line with the context in which they live.

Fifth, the importance of experience shows that young people's religious and spiritual experiences play a decisive role in their theological thought processes. Theology is not only about abstract doctrines or academic debates; it is also shaped by the personal experiences

of individuals. Therefore, young people should be encouraged to engage in religious practices, share their spiritual experiences, and actively live their faith (Smith 2020). For example, experiences such as participation in worship services, spiritual retreats, or community solidarity activities can contribute to a deeper internalization of their faith. Finally, the importance of applied theology emphasizes the transformative impact of theoretical knowledge on the individual and society. Applied theology asks how religious knowledge can be reflected in the lives of individuals, rather than only in an academic framework. In the context of youth theology, this principle aims not only to equip young people with religious knowledge, but also to teach them how to make sense of it and integrate it into their lives (Smith 2020).

In conclusion, youth theology stands out as an important field for young people to consciously construct their religions, values, and life visions and to respond to the religious and spiritual needs they face during their youth. However, in order to manage this process effectively, it is necessary to adopt interdisciplinary approaches, blend different types of knowledge, develop meaningful and practical applications, take into account the requirements of the age and context, center individual religious experiences, and benefit from the opportunities offered by applied theology. In this way, youth theology will become a dynamic discipline that supports the spiritual development of the individual, strengthens the awareness of social responsibility and guides the construction of religious identity.

6.2. Religious Education

The concept of “religious education”, which consists of two important concepts, religion, and education, has two different meanings. First, it can be understood as the practice that usually takes place in different places, such as the family and school, for young individuals. In this sense, religious education stands out as a process that shapes individuals’ development of religious beliefs and values (Schweitzer 2023). Religious education is defined as the process of giving religious culture, gaining religious personality (Bilgin 1981), and bringing about behavioral changes in individuals through their own experiences (Aydm 2017). The second meaning of the concept of religious education is considered as an academic discipline, positioned within an academic framework, especially in the fields of theology or educational studies. In this context, religious education is the systematic study of religious knowledge and pedagogical methods (Schweitzer 2023). Just as education gives young people the responsibility to learn for themselves throughout their lives, religious education is a process that gives young people the responsibility to learn religiously. This happens when the religious educator has a willingness to engage with concepts, ideas, and questions with a certain depth and gives students the space to think for themselves about what is being taught (Watson and Thompson 2007).

Religious education should be shaped by the fact that, in most countries, different religions need to be taught, even though the national religion or denomination is usually at the forefront. It is an important part of religious education to not only impart religious knowledge to young people, but also to guide them to develop a love and devotion to God with their whole being. In this process, a spiritual awareness should be fostered through the use of thought-provoking habits and language that direct their attention to a higher reality. The universal values of religious education should encourage the teaching of different belief systems and the development of tolerance, respect, and understanding among young people through these teachings. A practical theology-based understanding of ministry can not only offer students the opportunity to deepen their own faith, but can also help them develop a broader understanding through exposure to different religious and cultural perspectives. This understanding should include respectful consideration and understanding not only of their own faith but also of other religions. Religious

education should be a platform that promotes social peace and cultural diversity while shedding light on each individual's spiritual journey (Smith 2020). Thus, when used as a filter in the process of religious education, it provides a coherent unity between different approaches and pedagogical methods, creating an effective educational environment that supports students' religious and spiritual development. In this way, young people have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation not only of their own beliefs but also of different belief systems around the world, contributing to their development as more conscious and tolerant individuals.

The six basic principles to be considered in the field of religious education allow individuals to gain a deeper understanding of both their personal development and their social relationships. The first principle, self-respect, emphasizes the need for the individual to accept his or her own identity and be open to change in a flexible way when necessary. This includes the capacity to develop personal critical thinking and self-awareness. The second principle, empathy for others, encourages individuals to develop an open-minded approach to understanding others' perspectives. Empathy aims to appreciate aspects of different views that are believed to be useful and insightful. The third principle, caring for the environment, refers to encouraging individuals to adopt a curious and tolerant attitude towards different cultural and religious traditions and to reflect on how these traditions relate to each other (Watson and Thompson 2007). The fourth principle, appreciation of beauty, envisages individuals appreciating the aesthetic dimension of life and its links to religious understandings. The fifth principle, concern for reality, emphasizes reflection on the nature and purpose of life, and the need for individuals to understand reality and discover how this meaning corresponds to reality. Finally, the principle of the search for wholeness calls for a holistic way of thinking about how all these values are interconnected and how they find expression, especially in God or a transcendental reality. These six principles enable religious education to be guided in a more meaningful and holistic way, not only in terms of religious values, but also in deepening individuals' relationships with humanity and nature (Watson and Thompson 2007).

As a result, youth theology is a field that examines in depth the impact of religious education, especially on young people, and the changes in religious behavior and the acquisition of religious values during this period. Religious education is a process through which individuals transform their relationship with religion through the experiences and interactions they encounter throughout their lives. This process is a journey in which the individual acquires religious values and beliefs both in the family and in educational institutions, but is most profoundly shaped by their own experiences. Religious education begins at home, where parents pass on religious knowledge to their children and help them develop a religious identity. However, this education is not limited to the transfer of knowledge; it is also a way for individuals to establish emotional bonds through religious values in the family environment. However, the most critical stages of religious education are experienced during the youth period. Youth is a critical turning point in terms of identity and personality development, and it is during this period that individuals begin to reshape their religious beliefs and values. Young people not only receive religious teachings but also try to integrate them into their life circumstances, social experiences, and individual thought processes. This is where youth theology comes in.

Youth theology provides important guidance for individuals in this period to construct their religious identity. It allows them to question, think critically, and make sense of their faith in their own unique way. In this period, religious education played an important role in helping young people gain a correct conception of religion. Religious education should provide young people with different perspectives and allow them to develop critical thinking skills in order to form their own inner religious understanding. Religion should

be a tool for young people to understand the world and society, develop moral values, and deepen their search for personal meaning. Religious education should help young people not only to learn religious knowledge, but also to apply it meaningfully in their lives. Youth theology is therefore an important discipline that examines the transformative effects of religious education on young people and helps them to build their religious identity on solid foundations. In this process, young people not only learn religious values, but also develop their own religious perspectives and acquire a more conscious and meaningful religious identity. This process not only deepens individual religious beliefs, but also contributes to the development of a generation that is more tolerant, understanding, and accepting of cultural diversity on a societal level.

6.3. Contributions of Youth Theology to Religious Education

The new generation has a much broader perspective on understanding and interpreting religion than previous generations. Factors such as globalization, digitalization, scientific advances, and individualization have significantly influenced young people's perspectives on religious issues. While the influence of traditional religious authorities and institutional structures is gradually diminishing, personal experiences, critical thinking, cultural interactions, and the search for alternative spirituality are becoming more decisive in the processes of shaping individuals' religious identities. In this framework, the ways in which young people understand, interpret, and practice their religious beliefs are differentiating, and questions about the impact of religion on individual and social life are becoming more common. Indeed, young individuals often critique the influence of religion on daily life, particularly its restrictive regulations, while relegating institutional religious structures to a secondary role (Oruç 2021).

In addition to seeing religion as an institutional structure, it is observed that young people find the language of religious texts heavy and difficult to understand. This situation reveals that there is a serious disconnect and communication gap between the language used in religious discourse and the world of meaning of today's youth. This disconnect can negatively affect young people's internalization of religious concepts and texts, leading to distance in their relationship with religion (Faix 2014). In other words, it is important to express religious texts in today's language.

The most fundamental and prioritized problem in all activities carried out for youth is the lack of language and communication. In particular, the language of religion has gone beyond the perception and understanding capacity of young people. This situation becomes even more evident with the differentiation of the interests, expectations, problems, and thought paradigms of the young generation depending on the dynamics of the age. Due to this differentiation, religious officials, who have difficulty adapting to the changing needs and communication styles of young people, have difficulty establishing effective relationships with young people. In this context, the language and communication methods of religion should be reconsidered by taking into account the mental structures and emotional needs of young people in the modern world, and young people should be addressed with a more inclusive and understandable approach (T. Koç 1998). Another issue that young people criticize about religion is the fear paradigm. The language of fear is not effective for today's questioning and liberal youth. The construction of young people's conception of religion based on fear often leads them away from religion. Studies show that spiritual education based on religious fears makes the beliefs of adolescents more solid for a certain period, whereas this kind of fear-based education affects the development of faith in young people based on emotional reactions, not on reason (M. Koç 2006).

In addition to factors such as the language of religion, institutional discourse, and fear, today's digital tools also affect the imagination and actions of youth. For young people

who are constantly exposed to content on the screen, the opportunity to exercise their will and develop different thinking skills is diminishing. It is thought that the greatest evil one can do to oneself is to give one's will overtly or covertly to the control of others instead of developing one's spiritual evolution (Peck 2019). Individuals who are constantly in contact with digital platforms can be affected positively or negatively by the messages given without realizing it and can condemn their thoughts to the control of others. In order to enable young people to take their faith seriously, which is an important factor in their spiritual formation, we need to restructure the way we communicate in a way that is appropriate to their unique contexts and experiences. In this context, the importance of religious education emerges. Religious education is provided within the family, school, and religious institutions. Today's youth, especially those raised in the digital age, want to be subjects in religion and refuse to be passive. In this context, youth theology is an approach that makes young people active in religion. There is a need to make room for a field of activity where the theological thoughts of young people are valued, their questions are answered, and they can become the subjects of the field (Reiss 2015).

Youth theology contributes to global peace by enabling young people to explore their own religious identity and to understand different belief systems. When religious leaders and educators encourage young people to find peaceful solutions, social cohesion and awareness of cultural diversity increase. As interreligious dialogue and critical thinking skills develop, young people's prejudices decrease and their tendency to radicalize weakens. Moreover, emphasizing the universal values of religious teachings builds trust and tolerance between different communities, laying the foundations for a sustainable understanding of peace. In this context, youth theology not only helps individuals shape their world of faith, but can also be considered a long-term strategy for achieving social peace and global stability (Schweitzer 2014).

Youth theology will be able to engage more young people when it is supported by policy makers. The development and expansion of youth theology need to be supported by activities and educational programs in different venues. In school and university settings, in addition to religion classes, programs such as school clubs, seminars, and workshops that encourage the active participation of students are activities that allow young people to interact directly with theological reflection. In churches, mosques, and community gatherings, youth groups, church events, and religious camps create common spaces for discussion and sharing, thus strengthening spiritual solidarity among young people. In community centers and social spaces, environments where young people can come together to exchange ideas, supported by social and cultural activities, can be created to connect theological issues to everyday life in a more concrete way. Such structured activities will support young people not only in acquiring religious knowledge, but also in deepening and questioning their faith and making sense of it in a social context.

In order to effectively implement youth theology, a variety of pedagogical methods should be adopted in educational processes. Dialogic and discussion-based approaches allow young people to question their own beliefs and explore different perspectives, while experiential and participatory learning methods can be used to put theoretical knowledge into practice. In addition, critical thinking and reflective practices allow young people to relate religious and theological concepts to their social, cultural, and individual experiences, contributing to their development of an informed faith. In today's digital age, digital and media integration can help young people engage more effectively with religious education through methods such as interactive presentations, online platforms, and digital storytelling. These approaches will enable youth theology to move beyond being merely a theoretical field of knowledge to a comprehensive learning process for young people to deeply understand and make sense of their faith.

In order to implement youth theology effectively, various strategies should be adopted. Promoting active participation aims to provide opportunities for young people to question and make sense of their own beliefs, rather than simply passively receiving religious information. In this process, young people's critical thinking skills are developed, enabling them to shape their beliefs more consciously. Connecting with real-life experiences involves relating theological issues to current social and cultural issues so that young people can better understand how their beliefs are reflected in their lives. Multidisciplinary approaches allow for a broader perspective on theological issues, drawing on fields such as psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and communication. Moreover, in shaping young people's theological reflection, one can draw on their everyday life experiences and cultural contexts. Young people's own stories and life practices can be an important resource in developing their theological understanding. Mentoring and role modeling also play an important role in helping young people construct their religious identity by providing them with support from people close to their age or experienced mentors. These strategies create a holistic educational process that enables youth theology to touch young people's lives in a more meaningful way and supports them in consciously developing their faith.

The fact that young people are growing up in a digital world makes it imperative to adapt religious education and theological discussions to these platforms. Digital environments are powerful tools that shape young people's approach to religious issues and enable them to interact with different perspectives. Digital platforms such as interactive content, online forums, video content, and social media offer spaces where young people can freely discuss religious issues, share ideas, and quickly acquire new knowledge. These platforms encourage the active participation of young people, ensuring that religious discussions go beyond mere passive listening. Digital media also make the educational process more dynamic, breaking the boundaries of traditional teaching methods and allowing young people to shape their own beliefs in a more authentic way. In addition, youth theological studies can include activities that involve the active participation of young people in how religious values can be related to social responsibility. They should be given the opportunity to reflect on how religious beliefs relate to important contemporary social issues, such as social justice, equality, and environmental awareness, and be shown how religious values can be applied not only on an individual level but also in a social context. This approach enables young people to put religious teachings into practice in a meaningful way, not only in their personal lives but also on a societal level. In particular, the aspects of religion that overlap with social responsibility and ethical values help young people increase their awareness of social participation and responsibility. In this way, religious values become not only an inner spiritual experience, but also an effective force for change in society.

Today's youths' understanding and interpretation of religion have evolved from traditional patterns to a more individualized, critical, and multifaceted perspective. In the modern world, young people question the impact of religion on their identities and life practices and strive to establish a dynamic interaction between traditional norms and contemporary values. Instead of seeing religious structures as absolute authorities, they turn to individual spiritual experiences and alternative forms of spirituality, which leads them to consider the concept of religious belonging in a more flexible and pluralistic framework. This transformation creates the necessity for religious institutions and theologians to develop new pedagogical and theological approaches. Flexible and inclusive theological approaches that can respond to the spiritual needs of young people and support their intellectual inquiry and identity construction should become a fundamental component of today's understanding of religious education. In this context, youth theology stands out as a field that should be supported academically and pedagogically, allowing young people to make their voices heard while constructing their religious thoughts and identities.

7. Conclusions

In recent years, issues related to the theological abilities and cognitive and spiritual development of children and youth have become increasingly important in religious education research. In this context, child theology, which began to develop towards the end of the 20th century, has taken shape as an important academic discipline that seeks to understand children's capacity for religious reflection, their relationship with faith, and their conception of God. In parallel with these developments, youth theology has also emerged as an increasingly important discipline in the field of religious education. However, despite the fact that children's theology has been the subject of wide-ranging discussions at the academic level, youth theology remains a relatively new field of study that has not yet been addressed in sufficient depth. Youth theology offers an alternative perspective to traditional approaches that treat theology as a specialty that is the sole preserve of academics. This new perspective aims to put young people's theological reflections, their world of faith, and their interpretation of religious issues more at the center and to enable them to take part in religious discourse as subjects.

Growing up in today's digital age, young people's understanding of religion differs markedly from traditional perspectives on religion and this difference constitutes an important feature of youth theology. Young people's approach to theological issues and religious questions is shaped in an environment where they need to discuss them in their own words. In this context, the role of religious educators is to provide opportunities for young people to express their thoughts on religious questions and beliefs in their own language and to encourage them to think freely. Research on young people's theological approaches provides important data on how they perceive religious themes, what questions they ask, and how they attribute meaning to these questions. These studies allow for the analysis of the forms of language young people use, the methods of interpretation they adopt, and their "theological needs".

One of the main aims of theology is to provide answers to the individual's existential questions and search for meaning. Young people evaluate the answers offered by different meaning-making systems, especially in the process of identity construction, and often turn to the solutions offered by religion when they cannot obtain satisfactory answers from these systems. However, young people's attitudes towards religious texts and traditional theological discourses are shaped by their cognitive development, their social environment, and the dynamics of the age they live in. At this point, the main claim of youth theology is that in order for religion to respond to young people's search for meaning, it must speak their language, find meaning in everyday life, and be directly related to their real problems. Whereas traditional religious discourses often use academic language, youth theology should support young people to make sense of religion in a way that is integrated with the world they live in. In this process, young people's theological abilities should not be treated merely as a passive learning process, but as an active process of participation and meaning making.

Youth theology brings with it an important paradigm shift in the context of religious education. Traditional models of religious education have often viewed young people as mere recipients of religious knowledge. Youth theology, however, argues that young people should not be treated as passive individuals who simply inherit their world of faith from their parents or religious authorities, but rather as subjects who make sense of religion in line with their own life experiences, cognitive development, and critical thinking processes. In other words, it offers an approach that addresses young people's religious beliefs and theological perspectives within their individual experiences, cognitive development, and social contexts. In this context, religious education for young people should be built on a participatory and interactive model based on mutual interaction, rather than a process that

proceeds only in a teacher–learner relationship. In the process of making sense of young people’s beliefs, their doubts, questionings, and the way they take religious texts in different contexts should be taken into account, and they should be given space to ask questions and develop their own interpretations. Youth theology is therefore a non-authoritarian approach that is open to different views and encourages young people to participate more actively in discussing religious issues. It allows young people to freely discuss religious issues and express themselves from different perspectives without being trapped in a dogmatic understanding.

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