



Purity and Holiness in the Digital Age: A Biblical Interpretation of *Christus Vivit* (arts. 86–90)

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Abstract:

Digital culture has significantly transformed the lives of young people, creating both opportunities for communication and serious challenges to Christian identity, purity, and holiness. This study examined the biblical understanding of holiness through a theological interpretation of *Christus Vivit* (Arts. 86–90) in order to explore its relevance for young people living in the digital age. A qualitative theological library research approach was employed by analyzing selected biblical texts, *Christus Vivit*, and recent scholarly literature on digital culture, youth spirituality, and biblical theology. The findings demonstrated that biblical holiness originated from humanity's identity as the image of God, developed through God's covenant calling, and reached its fullest expression in Jesus' teaching on purity of heart. The study further revealed that *Christus Vivit* interpreted these biblical principles within the contemporary digital context by encouraging young people to engage technology with discernment, authentic relationships, and faithful discipleship rather than fear or withdrawal. This biblical interpretation contributed to the Church's mission by presenting digital culture as a context for Christian witness and spiritual formation. It also enriched Asian empirical theology by integrating biblical theology, ecclesial teaching, and the lived experiences of young Christians into a coherent theological framework for understanding holiness in contemporary digital society.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has transformed the way young people communicate, learn, build relationships, and understand themselves. Social media, smartphones, and online platforms have become part of everyday life, providing unprecedented opportunities for communication, education, creativity, and participation. However, digital culture has also introduced new moral and spiritual challenges. The constant search for online recognition, exposure to algorithm-driven content, viral trends, and the pressure to maintain an attractive digital identity increasingly influence how young people think, desire, and make decisions. As Campbell (2013) argues, digital media are not merely communication tools but environments in which religious beliefs and practices are continually reshaped. Likewise, Campbell and Evolvi (2020) observe that digital technologies increasingly influence religious identity, authority, and participation. Consequently, the question of purity and holiness has become increasingly relevant for Christian youth living in a digitally mediated society.

Recent studies have explored the impact of digital culture from various perspectives, including digital ethics, social media, youth ministry, and Christian education. Research has shown that excessive engagement with digital media may contribute to moral confusion,

superficial relationships, social isolation, and declining spiritual awareness (Langi, 2023; Nababan et al., 2024; Rahayu & Sumual, 2025). Other scholars have emphasized the importance of digital literacy and character formation in helping young people engage technology critically and responsibly (Pandie, 2022; Oliver et al., 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights into the opportunities and risks of digital culture, they primarily approach the issue from educational, pastoral, or ethical perspectives. Relatively little attention has been given to the biblical understanding of holiness as a theological framework for interpreting the challenges of digital life. Likewise, the relationship between biblical teaching and Pope Francis' reflection in *Christus Vivit* (arts. 86–90) has not been examined comprehensively. This gap provides the context for the present study.

The Bible consistently presents holiness as God's universal call rather than as an ideal reserved for a select group of believers. In the Old Testament, holiness originates in God's own character, "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Holiness therefore signifies covenant faithfulness expressed through justice, obedience, and love. In the New Testament, Jesus deepens this understanding by teaching that "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). Holiness is therefore not limited to external moral behavior but begins with the transformation of the human heart. As Wright (2006) notes, biblical holiness always involves participation in God's covenant life rather than merely observing religious rules. Similarly, France (2007) emphasizes that Jesus' teaching calls His disciples to an interior righteousness that shapes every aspect of life. This biblical perspective provides an essential theological foundation for evaluating the opportunities and challenges of contemporary digital culture.

Pope Francis develops this biblical vision in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. Addressing young people throughout the world, he acknowledges that digital media create new opportunities for communication, learning, and evangelization while simultaneously presenting dangers such as superficial relationships, manipulation, pornography, violence, and social isolation (*Christus Vivit*, arts. 86–90). Rather than rejecting technology, Pope Francis encourages young people to engage the digital world with discernment, responsibility, and missionary commitment. As he writes, "the digital environment is a characteristic of the contemporary world" (*Christus Vivit*, 86), and therefore it requires Christian wisdom rather than fear. In this sense, *Christus Vivit* functions as a contemporary ecclesial interpretation that applies biblical teaching on holiness to the realities of digital culture.

This study examined the crisis of purity and the call to holiness among young people in the digital age through a biblical interpretation of *Christus Vivit* (arts. 86–90). Using a qualitative theological library research approach, the study analyzed relevant biblical texts together with Pope Francis' teaching and recent scholarly literature on digital culture and youth spirituality. It argued that the challenges of digital culture should be understood not merely as technological or moral problems but as spiritual challenges that invite young Christians to rediscover the biblical meaning of holiness. By integrating biblical theology, ecclesial teaching,

and contemporary digital realities, this study sought to contribute to theological reflection on youth spirituality and to enrich the development of Asian empirical theology.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative theological library research approach to examine the biblical understanding of holiness in relation to Pope Francis' *Christus Vivit* (arts. 86–90) and the challenges faced by young people in the digital age. Library research was appropriate because it enabled a critical interpretation of biblical texts, ecclesial documents, and relevant theological scholarship to develop a coherent theological argument (Bevans, 2002; Zaluchu, 2020). The primary sources consisted of selected biblical passages on holiness and purity, especially Leviticus 19:2, Matthew 5:8, Matthew 28:19–20, and *Christus Vivit* (Arts. 86–90). Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books on digital culture, youth spirituality, biblical theology, and Christian formation published mainly between 2020 and 2025. Data were collected through systematic literature searching, purposive source selection, close textual reading, and thematic categorization. The data were then analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis combined with biblical-theological interpretation to identify the relationship between biblical holiness, digital culture, and youth discipleship (Osmer, 2008; Snyder, 2019).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Humanity Created in the Image of God: The Biblical Foundation of Purity

The analysis showed that the biblical understanding of purity began with the dignity of the human person as the image of God rather than with moral regulations concerning sexuality. The creation narrative in Genesis presented humanity as uniquely created "in the image of God" (*imago Dei*) (Gen. 1:26–27). This identity established the foundation of human dignity and defined the relationship between humanity, God, and creation. Unlike other creatures, human beings were entrusted with responsibility, relationality, and participation in God's creative work. As Wright (2004) argued, the doctrine of *imago Dei* was not merely an anthropological concept but a theological affirmation that human life reflected God's purpose and character. Consequently, purity in the biblical sense referred first to preserving this divine identity before it concerned specific moral behavior.

The second creation account (Gen. 2:18–25) further revealed that human dignity was expressed through authentic relationships. Man and woman were created for communion rather than isolation, and their relationship was characterized by trust, mutual respect, and openness before the entrance of sin. The statement that "they were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25) symbolized complete integrity before God and one another. According to Wenham (1987), this description represented the harmony that existed between humanity, creation, and the Creator before human disobedience disrupted that relationship. Therefore, biblical purity should be understood as the wholeness of human life rooted in communion with God rather than simply as external moral innocence.

This biblical perspective broadened the meaning of purity beyond sexuality alone. Throughout Scripture, impurity often described conditions that damaged covenant fellowship with God, including injustice, idolatry, false worship, and disobedience (Lev. 19:2; Isa. 1:16–17). Holiness therefore involved the restoration of the entire person to God's purposes. As Goldingay (2003) noted, holiness in the Old Testament expressed God's desire that His people should reflect His own character in every dimension of life. The biblical concern was not merely behavioral conformity but faithful covenant living.

This theological understanding provided an important framework for interpreting the challenges experienced by young people in contemporary digital culture. The findings indicated that many digital practices encouraged individuals to construct identity through popularity, virtual recognition, physical appearance, or social approval rather than through their identity as God's image bearers. Social media algorithms, online comparison, and the continuous pursuit of visibility often reduced human dignity to measurable digital performance. Such tendencies reflected what Pope Francis described as relationships that became increasingly superficial within the digital environment (*Christus Vivit*, 86). The problem, therefore, was not technology itself but the gradual displacement of human identity from God's creative purpose toward externally constructed digital identities.

From a biblical perspective, the crisis of purity in the digital age should therefore be understood as a crisis of identity before it becomes a crisis of morality. When young people no longer recognize themselves primarily as persons created in the image of God, they become more vulnerable to forms of digital manipulation, self-objectification, and distorted relationships. Consequently, the biblical doctrine of *imago Dei* offers the theological foundation for Christian formation by reminding young believers that their dignity does not depend upon online popularity, algorithmic visibility, or virtual acceptance, but upon God's creative love revealed from the very beginning of Scripture. This foundation prepares the discussion for the biblical understanding of holiness as God's continuing covenant call for His people.

Holiness as God's Covenant Calling

The findings indicated that holiness in the Bible was fundamentally understood as God's covenant calling rather than merely a collection of moral obligations. The biblical concept of holiness originated in God's own character. In Leviticus 19:2, God declared to Israel, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." This command did not simply require ritual purity or external obedience; it invited God's people to participate in His covenant life through faithful relationships, justice, compassion, and obedience. Holiness therefore expressed belonging to God before it described ethical conduct. As Wright (2006) observed, Israel's holiness was rooted in God's covenant initiative rather than in human achievement. The covenant established a distinctive identity that shaped every aspect of communal and personal life.

This covenant perspective continued throughout the prophetic tradition. The prophets repeatedly criticized Israel not because ritual practices had disappeared, but because worship had become separated from justice, mercy, and covenant faithfulness. Isaiah proclaimed that

authentic holiness required cleansing the heart through righteousness and concern for the vulnerable (Isa. 1:16–17), while Micah summarized covenant living as "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8). Consequently, holiness was never reduced to external religious observance but was consistently understood as a transformed life that reflected God's character in everyday relationships. Goldingay (2003) therefore argued that biblical holiness was fundamentally relational because it expressed faithful communion between God and His people.

The New Testament deepened this covenant understanding through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter reaffirmed the Old Testament command by reminding believers, "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15–16). Christian holiness was therefore not abolished but fulfilled in Christ, whose disciples were called to imitate God's character through lives marked by love, humility, forgiveness, and faithful witness. Holiness became the visible expression of a renewed relationship with God rather than compliance with external regulations alone. As Hays (1996) emphasized, New Testament ethics always flowed from the new identity believers received through Christ.

This biblical understanding provided an important perspective for interpreting *Christus Vivit*. Pope Francis presented holiness not as an unattainable ideal reserved for extraordinary Christians but as the ordinary vocation of every young believer. Although *Christus Vivit* addressed the unique challenges of the digital age, its theological foundation remained deeply biblical. The Pope encouraged young people to discover holiness through daily faithfulness, authentic relationships, service to others, and continual openness to God's grace rather than through fear or moral perfectionism (*Christus Vivit*, Arts. 86–90). In this sense, the document echoed the biblical conviction that holiness grows within a living relationship with God amid the realities of everyday life.

The findings therefore suggested that the crisis experienced by many young people in digital culture should not be understood simply as the decline of moral values but as a weakening of covenant identity. When digital culture encouraged self-promotion, consumerism, and continuous external validation, it often distracted young people from their primary identity as members of God's covenant community. A biblical theology of holiness invited them to recover this identity by recognizing that holiness was first God's gracious call before it became a human responsibility. Such an understanding prepared the way for Jesus' teaching on the purity of heart, where holiness was revealed as an inner transformation that shaped every thought, desire, and action.

Purity of Heart: Jesus' Teaching for Young Disciples

The analysis showed that Jesus redefined purity by shifting its emphasis from external observance to the transformation of the human heart. While Jewish tradition valued ritual purity as an important expression of covenant faithfulness, Jesus taught that true holiness began within the person. In the Beatitudes, He proclaimed, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). Purity of heart therefore referred not merely to moral innocence but to an undivided relationship with God. According to France (2007), the expression "pure in

heart" described those whose inner life was wholly directed toward God, allowing their thoughts, intentions, and actions to reflect His will. Holiness was thus understood as integrity before God rather than conformity to external religious expectations.

Jesus further developed this teaching by emphasizing that impurity originated from within the human heart. In Matthew 15:18–20, He declared that evil thoughts, false witness, greed, and other sinful actions proceeded from the heart rather than from external objects. This teaching challenged a merely legal understanding of holiness by placing moral responsibility within the inner life of the believer. Keener (2009) observed that Jesus consistently directed attention toward the transformation of human character because external behavior ultimately reflected the condition of the heart. Consequently, biblical purity involved the renewal of desire, intention, and conscience rather than simple adherence to religious regulations.

This biblical perspective offers an important framework for understanding the spiritual challenges of young people in digital culture. Many digital platforms continually shape attention, emotions, and desires through personalized algorithms, visual stimulation, and the pursuit of constant recognition. The findings indicated that the crisis experienced by many young people was not limited to inappropriate online behavior but also involved the gradual formation of the inner life. The continuous search for approval through social media, fear of missing out, and the pressure to construct ideal digital identities could slowly redirect the heart away from God toward external validation. In this sense, the digital environment became a context in which the struggle for purity of heart was experienced every day.

Pope Francis addressed this reality in *Christus Vivit* by recognizing both the opportunities and the dangers of digital culture. While digital media facilitated communication and learning, they also encouraged superficial relationships, manipulation, and isolation when used without discernment (*Christus Vivit*, 86–90). His reflection echoed Jesus' concern that authentic Christian life depended not only on outward behavior but also on the orientation of the heart. Young people were therefore called to cultivate interior freedom through prayer, discernment, and a living relationship with Christ rather than allowing digital culture to determine their identity and values.

The findings therefore suggested that purity of heart remained the central biblical response to the challenges of the digital age. Christian discipleship required more than avoiding immoral content or limiting online activity. It called young believers to develop hearts capable of discerning truth, choosing what was good, and remaining faithful to God's presence amid constant digital distractions. Such an understanding prepared the way for a broader theological reflection on how digital culture influenced holiness and Christian identity in contemporary society.

Digital Culture and the Crisis of Holiness

The findings indicated that digital culture has become one of the most influential environments shaping the moral and spiritual lives of young people. While digital technology has created new opportunities for communication, education, and evangelization, it has also introduced patterns of life that often challenge the biblical understanding of holiness. Rather

than remaining neutral, digital platforms continually shape attention, relationships, desires, and personal identity through algorithms, visual media, and constant online interaction. As Campbell and Evolvi (2020) observed, digital environments do not simply transmit information but increasingly influence how people experience community, authority, and religious life. Consequently, the challenge facing Christian youth is not merely technological but deeply spiritual.

The analysis showed that one of the most significant consequences of digital culture is the weakening of authentic human relationships. Social networking platforms enable young people to communicate across geographical boundaries, yet they often encourage relationships that remain superficial and transactional. Pope Francis recognized this danger by warning that digital communication can create the illusion of closeness while reducing opportunities for genuine human encounter (*Christus Vivit*, 86). This concern resonates with the biblical vision of humanity created for communion with God and with one another (Gen. 2:18–25). When relationships become centered on self-presentation, popularity, or virtual approval, they no longer reflect the mutual love and responsibility envisioned in Scripture.

The findings also revealed that digital culture influences the inner life through continuous exposure to algorithm-driven content. Personalized recommendations, viral trends, and the pressure to remain constantly connected shape not only behavior but also desire and moral judgment. The Apostle Paul therefore urged believers, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:2). Likewise, he encouraged Christians to focus on "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure" (Phil. 4:8). These biblical exhortations remain highly relevant in a digital environment where attention is often fragmented and moral discernment is weakened by the endless flow of information.

Another important finding concerned the biblical call to discernment. Scripture consistently encourages believers to evaluate every influence in the light of God's truth. Paul instructed the Thessalonian church to "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). This principle provides an essential response to contemporary digital culture, where misinformation, pornography, consumerism, and online validation frequently compete for the attention of young people. Rather than withdrawing from technology, Christian discipleship requires the wisdom to distinguish between what strengthens faith and what gradually distances believers from God. In this respect, Pope Francis' invitation to engage the digital world responsibly reflects the biblical tradition of spiritual discernment rather than technological rejection (*Christus Vivit*, 87–90).

The findings therefore suggested that the crisis experienced by young people in the digital age should be understood primarily as a crisis of spiritual formation rather than merely a crisis of technology. Digital culture continually shapes the heart, imagination, and patterns of daily life. For this reason, the biblical response is not simply stricter moral regulation but the cultivation of a life centered on Christ through prayer, Scripture, worship, Christian community, and spiritual discernment. Only through such practices can young believers engage

the digital world without allowing it to redefine their identity or weaken their calling to holiness.

Contribution to Asian Empirical Theology: A Biblical Vision of Holiness in Digital Culture

The findings demonstrated that the biblical interpretation of *Christus Vivit* (86–90) contributed to Asian empirical theology by providing a theological framework for interpreting the lived experiences of young people within contemporary digital culture. Rather than treating digital challenges merely as technological or ethical problems, this study interpreted them through the biblical themes of creation, covenant holiness, purity of heart, and Christian discipleship. This approach broadened empirical theological reflection by connecting biblical revelation with the concrete realities experienced by young Christians in their daily digital lives. As Bevans (2002) argued, theology becomes meaningful when the Word of God enters into dialogue with particular historical and cultural contexts.

The study further demonstrated that biblical theology offered an important interpretative lens for understanding the spiritual realities emerging in Asian societies. Rapid digitalization, expanding social media use, changing patterns of communication, and increasing cultural diversity have significantly influenced how young people construct identity, relationships, and religious commitment. Within these contexts, empirical theology should not merely describe observable religious behavior but also interpret those experiences in light of Scripture and the living tradition of the Church. Consequently, biblical theology and empirical observation should be understood as complementary rather than opposing approaches to theological reflection.

This biblical interpretation also contributed to the Church's pastoral mission. The findings suggested that the Church should move beyond viewing digital culture primarily as a source of moral danger. Instead, digital culture should be approached as a contemporary mission field in which young people are called to live out their baptismal vocation. Biblical holiness therefore became more than personal moral discipline; it became a way of witnessing to Christ through authentic relationships, truthful communication, responsible digital engagement, and faithful discipleship. Such an understanding reflects Pope Francis' vision that the digital environment is not only a challenge but also "a characteristic of the contemporary world" requiring creative evangelization (*Christus Vivit*, 86).

Finally, this study proposed that future Asian empirical theology should pay greater attention to the relationship between biblical formation and lived digital experience. Empirical studies employing interviews, digital ethnography, participant observation, or narrative inquiry may further explore how young Christians embody biblical holiness in everyday digital practices. By integrating biblical theology, ecclesial teaching, and empirical investigation, the Church will be better equipped to understand the realities of young people and to develop pastoral responses that remain faithful to Scripture while addressing the opportunities and challenges of contemporary digital culture.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the biblical understanding of holiness provides a comprehensive theological framework for interpreting the challenges faced by young people in contemporary digital culture. Beginning with humanity's creation in the image of God, Scripture presents holiness as God's covenant calling that is fulfilled in Christ through the transformation of the human heart. A biblical reading of *Christus Vivit* (arts. 86–90) showed that the crisis experienced by many young people is not merely a moral or technological problem but a spiritual challenge that affects identity, relationships, and discipleship. Consequently, biblical holiness should be understood as faithful participation in God's life rather than simply the observance of moral rules.

The study also demonstrated that *Christus Vivit* serves as a contemporary ecclesial interpretation of biblical teaching for the digital age. Rather than rejecting technological development, Pope Francis invited young people to engage digital culture with discernment, responsibility, and missionary commitment. This interpretation reaffirmed that Christian discipleship is expressed through authentic relationships, purity of heart, and faithful witness within everyday digital life. Accordingly, the Church is called not only to warn against the dangers of digital culture but also to accompany young people in developing biblical wisdom and spiritual maturity that enable them to live as disciples of Christ in contemporary society.

Finally, this study contributed to Asian empirical theology by integrating biblical theology, ecclesial teaching, and the lived experiences of young people into a coherent theological framework. It demonstrated that empirical realities within digital culture should be interpreted through Scripture while remaining attentive to the pastoral challenges of Asian societies. Future empirical studies may further investigate how biblical holiness is embodied in the everyday digital practices of young Christians across diverse Asian contexts. Such research will strengthen the dialogue between biblical theology and lived faith, enabling the Church to respond more faithfully and creatively to the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly digital world.

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