

## Article

# Religious Governance as Collaboration for the Resolution of Disgust: The Case of Protestantism in South Korea

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**Abstract:** The pandemic enhanced disgust for the socially disadvantaged. In South Korea, hatred of the Chinese, the Shincheonji Church, sexual minorities, and migrant workers intensified during the pandemic. In this social atmosphere of fear and anxiety, Korean Protestantism turned into a representative group that promotes and spreads disgust. In particular, homophobia can be said to be led by the conservative Protestants in Korea. A secularization strategy proposed by David Martin has significant implications in resolving this disgust demonstrated by Korean Protestants. Martin asserts that Christianity should respond appropriately to the demands for the enhancement of the public good with the resources of religion that he calls secularization. This paper argues that religion-government governance can be a process and system that makes possible secularization in which religion realizes the virtues of reconciliation and hospitality beyond conflict and disgust. Among various types of governance, collaborative governance is the most appropriate for religion-government governance to resolve disgust for the socially disadvantaged. Here, collaboration means the process of pursuing the realization of the public good by creating new values beyond the actors' interests. A case for this can be found in the collaboration between some Protestants and LGBTQIA+ rights activists and the government to support anonymous COVID-19 tests on homosexuals during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** collaborative governance; disgust; Korean Protestantism; homosexuality; secularization; David Martin; pandemic; public good



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## 1. Introduction

According to Miller (1998), the word disgust indicates a complex sentiment that can be marked by expressions declaring things or actions to be “repulsive, revolting, or giving rise to reactions described as revulsion and abhorrence as well as disgust”. It is an aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect, or pollute by proximity, contact, or ingestion (p. 2). The human response to the possibility of infection or contamination by coming close to or in contact with dirty and dangerous things appears as avoidance in terms of behavior and disgust in terms of emotion (H. Park 2020, p. 74). What is important here is that the possibility of infection or contamination, not infection or contamination itself, evokes disgust. Disgust is triggered by the suspicion that something or someone may be a pollutant. Therefore, disgust can always occur where there is doubt and fear of not knowing.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced disgust. People were advised by various media to recognize that the risk of infection was not imaginative or symbolical because the possibility of infection was omnipresent and real in a pandemic situation (Joe 2020, p. 26). In addition, when it comes to infectious diseases, there is a tendency to identify the disease with the patient, so it spreads distorted information or excessive fear that can be more dangerous than the infectious disease itself. Treichler (1999) calls this phenomenon “an epidemic of meanings (Jung 2021, pp. 176–77)”.

In this context, the pandemic enhanced disgust for the socially disadvantaged. People who were subject to social hatred even before the pandemic became targets of increased disgust as the cause of infection during the pandemic situation. With the designation

of Wuhan, China, as the first place where the coronavirus was detected and identified, Abhorrence and racism against Asian people, including the Chinese, exploded around the world (Joe 2020, p. 27). South Korea was no exception. Since the first identified infection in Korea was a Chinese citizen, the degree of disgust toward the Chinese was even more serious and the next object of disgust led to migrant workers working in Korea (Y. Jang 2021, pp. 146–47, 150).

During the pandemic, the targets of intensified collective disgust in Korea were homosexuals (J. Lee 2020; Moon 2020; S.-Y. Kang and Lee 2021; J. Park et al. 2021). In the spring of 2020, a collective infection occurred in an Itaewon club.<sup>1</sup> When the club became known as a gay club, all LGBTQIA+ people were stigmatized as a source of COVID-19 pollution. On social media, hate expressions for sexual minorities exploded. Regardless of COVID-19, reportage-style articles appeared that stimulated disgust and fear for gay men's "perverted" sexual practices. In this way, the bodies of LGBTQIA+ people are depicted as problematic bodies that easily spread viruses and penetrate and break normal life boundaries (Han 2021, pp. 50, 52). In this social atmosphere of disgust, conservative Protestants became a representative group that promoted and spreads homophobia in Korea.

This paper argues that religion-government governance can be a process and system for resolving such disgust by Korean Protestants. The disgust produced and promoted by religion cannot be resolved by the efforts of religion and government alone. A different approach than ever before is needed for the public good in the post-pandemic era. Religion can suppress hate discourse and practice that harms coexistence and peace through collaboration with the government, and the government can provide religion with the opportunity to realize religious virtues in the public sphere by encouraging religion to participate in the process of promoting the public good in modern society. In this way, religion and government can abandon their desire to control each other and move on in the pursuit of the public good.

The main discussion will proceed in the following order: Section 2 examines the historical background and current status of homophobia in Korean Protestantism. I discuss the historical context of South Korea in which Protestantism has raised homophobia as an important social agenda since the 2000s and show the aggressive opposition of Protestants to the enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act. Section 3 explores David Martin's secularization thesis. Martin's notion of secularization can help solve the problem of disgust by Korean Protestants in that it normatively suggests what values should be realized where religion and secular meet. Section 4 explains the types of governance and collaborative governance. Here, I argue that collaborative governance is necessary to implement Martin's secularization strategy. Section 5 represents a case study on religion-government collaborative governance during the pandemic in South Korea. Section 6 identifies the limitations of religious governance in the current situation and shows a glimpse of possible solutions to overcome them.

## 2. Korean Protestant-Led Disgust: Homophobia

Korean religion has deeply intervened in politics, class, gender, generation polarization and extremization, and functioned directly or indirectly as "invisible hands" in the reproduction of conflict and disgust (Jun 2007; I. C. Kang 2020). The far-right Protestants supported political conservative forces through material and religious symbolic resources, resulting in political division and mutual hatred (M. Kim 2018; J. Kim 2019). Economically, the gap between the rich and the poor was justified by the prosperity theology (Smith 1998; H. C. Jang 2021). Religion contributes to gender conflict in hierarchical and discriminatory practices by still following patriarchal gender concepts and promotes intergenerational hatred by supporting only collective rituals and a traditional belief systems centered on the older generation (Gross 1996; CISJD 2022; Nye 2003).

During the pandemic, Protestants would lead the disgust for the socially disadvantaged groups, which was strongly expressed in Korea. When the collective infection occurred in the Shincheonji Church, many Protestants expressed antipathy, criticism, and

disgust toward it. Founded in 1984, the Shincheonji Church is a messianic cult originating from South Korean Protestantism (Woo 2019). Disgust for the Shincheonji Church was an amplification of the antipathy against the so-called “heresy” or “cult religion” from the standpoint of orthodox Protestants (Y. Jang 2021, p. 147). Even before COVID-19, the Shincheonji Church, as an anti-social, rigid, apocalyptic Protestant variant, gained a negative reputation in society due to human rights abuses, violence, collusion with politics, and the exploitation of believers (M. Park et al. 2020, p. 21). However, after the mass infection, social criticism of the Shincheonji Church gradually shifted its focus to the Shincheonji Church itself beyond its direct relation to the disease (J. Lee 2020, p. 126). In this way, Korean Protestants strengthened their disgust for the Shincheonji Church by marginalizing and demonizing it.

In particular, anti-homosexuality can be said to be led by conservative Protestants in Korea. The homophobia of Korean Protestants is related to the conservatism of some Protestants in Korea. The conservative characteristics of some Korean Protestants date back to right after the liberation from Japanese colonial rule. Protestants in the northwestern region, consisting of the Hwanghae and Pyeongan Provinces in North Korea, suffered severe religious oppression after the Communist regime came to power in North Korea and moved to South Korea to avoid it, forming the mainstream South Korean Protestants (Jeong-ran Yoon 2015). Korean Protestantism was combined with anti-communism from the beginning and accepted the conservative pro-American and anti-North Korean ideology as characteristic of the Protestant faith (I. C. Kang 2007). During Syngman Rhee’s regime, Protestantism functioned as a kind of state religion and enjoyed more privileges than other religions, and in turn, became the most active supporter of the government’s pro-America and anti-North Korea policy (Chang 2006; Bae 2016; Kyungro Yoon 2016; J. G. Lee 2018). During the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, the collusion between Protestantism and the government was further strengthened. Conservative Protestants defended the legitimacy of the undemocratic regime by blessing the dictators Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan at the National Breakfast Prayer, and criticized a movement for democratization and protecting the human rights of a small number of progressive Protestants, accusing them of violating the separation of religion and state (H. S. Kim 1992; M. B. Kim 2008; I. C. Kang 2014; J. G. Lee 2018).

In the political and historical context of Korea, some Korean Protestants had strong religious and political conservative characteristics. They believe in the scriptural inerrancy of the Bible and argue that redemption is possible only within their type of Protestantism. Politically, they advocated past dictatorships under the banner of anti-communism, anti-North Korea, and pro-America, undermining the democratization and human rights movement. Regarding homosexuality, according to a survey conducted by the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development in late 2019, 58 per cent of the Protestant respondents said homosexuality was a crime, which was twice as high as 25 per cent of the non-Protestant respondents who answered ‘yes’ to the same question (CISJD 2019).

The homophobia of Korean conservative Protestants is most evident in their aggressive opposition to the enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act. In the 2000s, the identity of sexual minorities as a discriminated group was formed due to their sexual orientation and the public debate about the injustice of discrimination began in Korea, which urged the National Human Rights Commission of Korea to propose a comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act (S. Lee 2011, p. 198). A general and comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act specifies causes and categories of social persecution and minoritarian discrimination based on gender, disability, medical history, age, country of origin, ethnicity, language, appearance, marital status, family form, religion, ideology or political opinion, criminal history, sexual orientation, education, social status, and so on (S. Lee 2011, pp. 207–8; Heo 2021; H. J. Lee 2022). In Korea, the Anti-Discrimination Act failed to be enacted seven times since it was first proposed by the National Assembly in 2007. The proposers surrendered to opposition pressure and voluntarily withdrew the bill or it was automatically scrapped at the end of the National Assembly session.

The continued failure of the enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act was due to strong resistance from some opponents, mainly conservative Protestants who criticized the Anti-Discrimination Act for including the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation. They urged members of the National Assembly to reject the bill itself or remove some articles, especially on anti-discrimination in the sphere of sexual orientation. They put the brakes on the protection of the human rights of the sexual minorities through various political activities, including visits to relevant departments, submission of opinions, faxing dissenting opinions, press conferences, texting and calling lawmakers, and picketing (S. Lee 2011, p. 208).

Conservative Protestants look to the Bible for evidence against homosexuality. The passages they usually cite include Genesis 19:4–8<sup>2</sup>; Leviticus 20:13<sup>3</sup>; Romans 1:26–27<sup>4</sup>; and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10<sup>5</sup>. However, the homophobic hatred projected by the Protestants needs to be understood in a social and historical context rather than considered fixed or immutable. The selection and interpretation of certain verses in the Bible and their message must be done in modern society depending on the social and historical context.

Anti-homosexuality has not always been an important issue for Korean conservative Protestants. The homosexuality issue has emerged as an important agenda among conservative Protestants in Korea since the 2000s. It was the Protestants' response to an awareness of the crisis that had emerged in the 2000s and the Protestants framed the hatred and exclusion of homosexuals, refugees, and Muslims as a so-called "culture war" and raised it as a key agenda within Protestantism (Suh 2021).

First, the internal crisis in Protestantism was a remarkable decline in the Korean Protestant population since 2000. From the late 1980s, the growth of Protestant churches slowed, and from the mid-1990s onwards the Protestant population decline has been more pronounced. According to 2006 Statistics Korea, the number of Protestants, which had risen sharply from 6.48 million in 1985 to 8.76 million in 1995, had decreased by 144,000 to 8.616 million by 2005. Between 1995 and 2005, then, Protestantism was the only major religion to have declined, while other religions such as Buddhism and Catholicism had grown (So 2006; Cho 2014; M. Kim 2018, 2021). The church's loss of social trust was also considered a crisis for Protestants. In addition, the sexual and financial scandals of the megachurches, the rise of so-called heresies, such as the Shincheonji Church and the World Mission Society Church of God, and zealous overseas missionaries damaged social trust in Protestantism. The Bundang Saemmul Presbyterian Church incident in 2007 further intensified anti-Protestant activities and sentiments in Korea (M. Kim 2013; Cho 2014).<sup>6</sup>

Second, regarding the external crisis of Protestantism, there has been a perception that Korean Protestantism would be threatened by the emergence of the so-called progressive regime from Kim Dae Jung to Roh Moo-hyun. For conservative Protestants, the left-leaning civil society, secularization, pluralism, relativism, feminism, queer theory, and anti-discrimination law were considered anti-Protestant trends. Homosexual culture and gender policy were thought to secularize the church and society, which might cause a crisis in the church (H. J. Kim 2017, pp. 77–78).

Recognizing the above situation as a crisis, conservative Protestants took action to realize and expand Protestant values in their daily living, and the most representative agenda among them was anti-homosexuality. In this historical and social context, conservative Protestants were organized around the movement to resist the enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act and actively led the anti-homosexual movement, which contributed to strengthening disgust for sexual minorities during the pandemic. When the mass infection occurred in the Itaewon club, it was a Protestant newspaper that first announced that the club was a gay club, and it was the Protestants who first had an abhorrent reaction to it. Since the Itaewon club's collective infection, criticism of homosexuals on social media mainly focused on negative comments referring to "Sodom and Gomorrah". Sodom and Gomorrah are biblical cities destroyed by the wrath of God for the people's corrupt lives and are often cited especially to oppose homosexuality (J. Lee 2020, p. 132).

### 3. David Martin's Secularization Thesis

To resolve such disgust by Korean Protestants, participation of religion in civil society aimed at realizing the public good through the secularization strategy proposed by David Martin can be suggested. Martin argues that religion can contribute to achieving public good to make civil society healthy without creating hatred and conflict in society. Additionally, it is possible through the secularization process in which the essential virtues of Christianity are translated into secular language and realized in civil society.

It was Jürgen Habermas who emphasized the translation of religious language into secular language. He argued that for religious beliefs to play a role in a rational world, they must enter the public domain after going through a process of transformation (Habermas 2001, 2008; Habermas and Ratzinger 2006; Jongseok Yoon 2009, p. 129).

Martin admits that religious beliefs should be translated into the secular language to exert influence in civil society but emphasizes that it is necessary to preserve the essential virtues of religion in the process of translation and project them onto society. Martin thinks that religious speech is an irreducible mode and a manner of speaking which is *sui generis*, so it can still be alive with great influence in modern society (Martin 2005, p. 171). He, for example, explains “faith, hope and love” as “primary virtues” of the logic of Christianity, and “patience, prudence, wisdom, humility, sincerity, judgment, mercy, and care for the brethren” as its “supporting ancillary virtues” (Martin 2005, p. 173). Such Christian virtues are transferred to secularized languages without disappearing in the translation process due to the potential of the irreducible and *sui generis* religious languages.

In this context, the secularization proposed by Martin is a secularization that succeeds the intrinsic character of the original Christian language and responds appropriately to the demands of the enhancement of the public good with the resources of Christianity. Its details are as follows:

It may, as Liberation Theology and Minjung Theology have done, appeal to the shared humanity of our common genesis, the reversal of the condition of the poor and the release of the prisoners in the alternative kingdom, to the exodus from slavery in Egypt and the ending of exile in Babylon, and to the prophetic condemnation of laying field to field and oppressing the widow and the fatherless. It can point to the sharing and caring community of the Eucharist and the priesthood and kingship of all believers. It can set out a dramatic scenario of good embattled against evil where all is not lost even when ‘good is on the scaffold’ and evil on the throne. In times of crisis, it may ask for fundamental choices, not grey compromises, and it can look forward to a peaceable kingdom where each and all live under their own vine and their own fig tree. (Martin 2005, p. 193)

Martin presents the specifics of secularization for the public good, such as changing the condition of the poor, liberating the sinners, being good against evil, and making fundamental choices, not compromises. In other words, it is required to project belief, hope, love, patience, wisdom, sincerity, justice, and mercy that he suggested as the original and intact virtues of Christianity into the real world in accordance with local and contemporary circumstances.

On the other hand, Martin asserts that when religion loses the pristine Gospel by being suborned by the world, it causes conflict, violence, discrimination, and disgust in society rather than the pacific and fraternal ideal and, consequently, justifies privilege and domination. He describes this failure of secularization as “the power of the Cross converted into the violence of the crusade” (Martin 2005, p. 186). He explains this as follows:

You can cry ‘peace, peace,’ where there is no peace, and you can divide the world into good and evil, with your own nation wholly on the side of good in opposition to the evil empire. You can appropriate the elect status of God’s Israel of God’s Messiah as historical privilege and domination rather than as historical responsibility and redemption. ‘God with us’ may mean the presence of the



Prince of Peace, but it can just as easily turn into the idea that ‘The Lord is a man of war’. (Martin 2005, p. 193)

Martin’s secularization thesis goes beyond the question of whether or not religion can participate in civil society, or whether or not religion should participate in civil society, and suggests the values and virtues that religion should pursue in society to resolve disgust and achieve public good. It does not matter how much influence religion exerts, how much power and control it secures, and how many people’s consents it gets when it enters the public sphere. What matters is whether religion’s social remarks and actions promote the realization of public good by resolving disgust for specific groups, caring for the socially disadvantaged, and supporting and expanding equality, coexistence, peace, and hospitality. While Habermas’ translation provides a methodology for religion’s participation in civil society, Martin’s secularization thesis presents its purpose and direction. In Korea, where many sexual minorities are stigmatized as sinners due to Protestant-led homophobia, Martin’s secularization strategy is helpful and useful in resolving disgust in that it urges Protestants to discover and practice religious values and virtues for the public good.

However, despite the insight Martin’s thesis provides, it does not explain how religion can succeed in that kind of secularization. This paper argues that religion-government governance can be a process and system that makes possible secularization in which religion realizes the virtues of reconciliation and hospitality beyond conflict and disgust.

#### 4. A Model for Religion-Government Governance

##### 4.1. Three Types of Governance

By the end of the twentieth century, the term governance emerged as a new way to solve public problems that replaced the government and bureaucracy. To address the deepening of monopoly capitalism and the widening gap between the rich and the poor after World War II, big governments emerged which means government-led public services, an increase in public spending on welfare programs, and increased political regulations on the market. Gradually, however, the government was referred to as the source and cause of these problems, not as a solution to social problems, and neoliberal ideas and policies that aimed for minimum government emerged (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020). However, as revealed in East Asia in the late 1990s, reckless financial opening and liberalization without proper regulations led to the bubble economy and financial crises. The lesson that the dichotomy of big government and small government could no longer solve social problems urged the emergence of a new government model which would enable cooperation and coordination with the private sector. This was the background of the emergence of governance in the late 1990s (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020; E. Kim 2014, pp. 3–5; M. H. Lee 2022, p. 80). As it is used in different contexts in various fields of study, no clear academic consensus has been reached on the definition of governance. However, to describe the common elements of the various definitions, it can be defined as a new way of government operation in which various actors, such as governments, companies, and NGOs, establish networks based on common interests to solve social problems (Oh 2006, p. 51).

Three governance arrangements have existed historically and at present: hierarchies, markets, and networks (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 1). First, governance as hierarchies is a model with vertically integrated state structures. It seeks for the state to take the initiative in managing the market and civil society (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 19). This type of governance strictly upholds the distinction between the public and the private. The state was distinctly separate from the rest of society because it is conceived of as the epitome of the collective interest and governs society by law and other forms of regulation. Governance as hierarchies focuses on improving governance practice rather than the size of the government, by introducing entrepreneurship into the government or by applying efficient management techniques developed in the private sector to the government. This includes New Public Management which limits the role of the government to setting goals and steering society rather than doing everything directly, and Good Governance defined as the proper use of state power by effective, honest, transparent, and responsible governments

(S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 19; M. Lee 2017, p. 76). Many of the current researchers exclude this model from the governance model. They contend that hierarchies were an appropriate institutional order in the days of highly standardized public services. With profound changes in this order, governance as hierarchies falls. The emphasis now is instead on smaller scales, flexibility, diversification, and informal exchange rather than formal control, and a strict division between the public and the private (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 5). In modern society, hierarchical governance causes government failures such as the government's inefficiency, low productivity, and corruption (M. Lee 2017, p. 67).

Second, governance as markets means market-oriented governance based on competition and customer-first principles. In the production of public services, it does not rely on public decisions and enforcement, but on the principle of a market-driven by prices (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 43). The market is believed to be the most efficient and just allocative mechanism available since it does not allow politics to allocate resources where they are not employed most efficiently. In its idealized form, neither elected officials nor managers make any detailed decisions. As a practice of governance as markets, contracting-out is mainly attempted to allow private companies to competitively supply administrative services. The idea is that a market mechanism in which the state is minimized and the private sector competes with each other can provide higher-quality public services (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, pp. 44–46). This governance as markets model offers various mechanisms whereby economic actors can cooperate to resolve common problems without distorting the basic mechanisms of the market (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, pp. 9–10). However, there is a problem that this kind of governance is likely to lead to a reduction and decline in the public domain by handing over public activities and related powers to economic actors whose publicity is not guaranteed (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 47).

Third, governance as networks is one of the most familiar forms of contemporary governance (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 11). This kind of governance solves the social problem through policy networks formed on the basis of trust, mutual understanding, reciprocity, informality, cooperation, mutual adjustment, shared ethical or moral commitment, a sense of common purpose, and trustworthy communication without relying on hierarchical control. It consists of informal relationships between equal actors (M. Lee 2017, pp. 147–48). Governance as networks is a coordination by a political authority that does not rely on legal coercion. Unlike governance as markets, there is coercion by political authority, but it is not legal coercion by formal authority, but social and normative coercion by voluntary cooperation unlike hierarchies (M. Lee 2017, pp. 138–39). Specifically, this is practiced as activating the participation of individuals and various civil society organizations, such as local NGOs, private organizations, local governments, multinational corporations, and branches of international organizations, which have been excluded from the government's policy-making process (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 40–41). This type of governance can fail when conditions such as trust between members are not realistically met, and when public policy becomes shaped more by the interests of self-referential actors in the network than by the larger collective interest (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 12; M. Lee 2017, p. 162).

As discussed above, governance can theoretically be explained in various types and dimensions. Currently in Korea, it tends to mainly refer to the participation of NGOs or civic groups in the policy-making process. Researchers who support governance argue that civic engagement is democratic and therefore desirable. In Korea, there have been efforts to involve the representatives of civic groups such as consumer organizations or environmental organizations at consultation meetings. Recently, such experiments included citizen engagement in participatory budgeting or the policy deliberation processes. There are also signs of an increasing reliance on consultants and think tanks, and websites where anyone can present their views on public policy (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 13). However, it is not easy to assess the effectiveness of governance in such a way that citizens participate in public policy decisions. This is because, even if the participation of citizens is large in quantity, there is little way to qualitatively weigh how much the citizens' opinions are reflected and what results they lead to. For this reason, criticism has been raised

that the current governance of civic participation is only about establishing a structure for participation.

All three types of governance above are structural. It is necessary to establish a structure in which citizens engage in government policymaking and enforcement, but the structure of participation does not guarantee the success of governance. Governance as a structure focuses on who can participate in governance and how, while governance as a process focuses more on the objectives and outcomes of governance. The question of what objectives governance should work towards makes it possible for actors to cooperate toward the public good beyond their interests.

Governance as hierarchies does not help solve the social problems of widespread conflict and disgust. Religious social welfare governance clearly shows the limitations of hierarchical governance. Social welfare is the most representative field in which religion participates in policy decisions and works in cooperation with the central or local governments. Religious social welfare relies absolutely on state subsidies (Chun 2011) and this means an unequal hierarchy between the government and religious organizations, making the religious institutions subordinate to the government. In this situation, private actors, including religion, are likely to consider completing the project as a more important task to secure subsidies rather than realizing the public good.

Governance as markets aims for the ideal that social coordination is made through the voluntary exchange of individuals without political authority or public debate, which is likely to foster conflict and disgust. This is because people participate in the market as customers who benefit from the policy rather than as sovereign citizens and therefore tend to value self-interest above all else.

Governance as networks relies on the pressure brought not by a formal authority but by voluntary cooperation to solve social problems, it is optimistic and unrealistic that voluntary cooperation takes place based on interdependence and the common good among actors (M. Lee 2017, p. 177). Additionally, because networks can be held together by personal interests rather than public interests, it is difficult for the results of such cooperation to guarantee the pursuit of the public good. There is a high possibility that certain interest groups, centered on companies that are advantageous in various information, resources, and organizations, have strong voices and exert more influence than other NGOs (S.-J. Kim et al. 2002, p. 41). In addition, since network governance is mainly practiced by non-profit organizations in civil society (M. Lee 2017, p. 139), it is ineffective in solving problems that require political coercion and authority, such as disgust related to the coronavirus. It might be an error to leave the resolution of disgust by religion to the autonomy of religion.

#### *4.2. Collaborative Governance as a Model for Religious Governance*

To solve the increasingly serious issue of disgust in Korean society today, it is necessary not only to focus solely on the search for structural governance, but also to shift the attention to governance as a process. Thinking about governance from a process perspective is important because governance is not so much about structures but more about interactions among structures (Pierre and Peters [2000] 2020, p. 12). When we understand governance as a process, we can find the dynamics in which two organizations, religion and government, collaborate to resolve the hatred promoted by Korean Protestants.

This paper argues that among diverse forms of governance as a process, collaborative governance is the model appropriate for religion-government governance to resolve disgust. M. Lee (2010) explains that the concept of collaborative governance refers to a term for solving social problems through collaboration between various organizations in the public sectors including the government and private sectors (p. 27). There are various explanations of collaborative governance provided by some scholars, but common and general elements can be extracted to examine the characteristics of collaborative governance.

First, collaborative governance is defined as collaboration between organizations, not between individuals (M. Lee 2010, p. 28). This is not always the case, but it mainly refers to



the collaboration between government agencies and private-sector partners. In this model, government agencies tend to lead the interactions, which does not mean official control of the compulsory exercise of government agencies. Therefore, second, collaborative governance is an officially organized collective action. It has an interaction with a structured arrangement at a level beyond everyday cooperation (M. Lee 2010, pp. 28–29). Shergold (2008) indicates that genuine collaboration in governance involves the network of institutional structures (p. 20). Third, it is nevertheless based on a non-hierarchical authority structure (Agranoff 2007; M. Lee 2010, p. 28). Even if the government is at one end of governance, all the actors collaborate with equal and autonomous status. Thus, direct and active participation beyond simple opinion presentation or counseling is required in the collaboration process (M. Lee 2010, p. 29). Fourth, all the actors are also responsible as they share decision-making authority. The responsibility for the results of collaboration is also collectively equal (M. Lee 2010, p. 28). Fifth, collaborative governance is an interaction that takes place to solve public problems regardless of the actors (M. Lee 2010, p. 30). Shergold (2008) discerns a move from command, through coordination and cooperation to collaboration: command is the process of centralized control with clear lines of hierarchical authority, coordination is the process of collective decision-making imposed on participating institutions, cooperation is the process of sharing ideas and resources for mutual benefit, and collaboration is the process of shared creation brokered between autonomous institutions (p. 20). Among the four processes, only collaboration pursues the realization of the public good by creating new values beyond the actors' interests. Summarizing the above characteristics, M. Lee (2010) redefines collaborative governance as a way to solve social problems, creating new public values beyond existing organizational boundaries and policies by utilizing structured interactions between autonomous actors and organizations led by public institutions (p. 30).

Collaborative governance can be an appropriate model for the collaboration of religious groups and governments to resolve the issue of disgust for social minorities. Above all, collaborative governance is governance for the public interest beyond the boundaries and private interests of the actors. There is no need to spend too much time and energy on reaching an agreement and discussing the process because the actors have a clear purpose. With a clear purpose set, it would be more efficient to have practical effects, that is, the resolution of disgust.

A collaboration between the public and private sectors helps explore various ways to utilize the rich information and resources of the two organizations. In particular, it enables rapid response to social problems. When dealing with urgent issues such as quarantine during the pandemic, collaborative governance can quickly respond to problems by mobilizing existing private and government organizations or resources without taking time to create new organizations and mobilize resources. Additionally, through collaborative governance, it is possible to approach social minorities subject to collective hatred. People directly involved in social issues are often hostile to the government of the public sector, and collaborating with members of private organizations who have friendly relations with social minorities makes it possible to overcome this reluctance and effectively utilize government-led political coercion and authority to resolve disgust (M. Lee 2017, pp. 200–1).

In addition, collaborative governance provides religious groups with the opportunity to participate in civil society as an equal agency for the public good beyond their exclusive religious doctrines. Religious groups can be equal actors in collaboration with the government to realize the common value of reconciliation and hospitality beyond disgust, not just relying on government subsidies or presenting opinions on government policy decisions without knowing whether they are accepted. This overcomes the limitations of the social role of religions, most of which were mediators in the conflict within civil society or between civil society and the government.

The disgust produced and promoted by religion cannot be resolved by the efforts of religion alone, or by leaving it to the government. The solution might only be reached if various groups in society, including the government, collaborate. In particular, the participation of Protestantism, the disgust-promoting representative, in government-led governance

with political authority and institutional coercion can have important implications for resolving conflict and disgust in our society.

### 5. Case Study: Religion-Government Collaborative Governance in South Korea

Infection is related to health administration and the government, so collaboration with administrative authorities and the government is essential to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The case in which religious groups and other Korean LGBTQIA+ rights groups worked with the government to prevent the spread of the coronavirus is a successful case of collaborative governance.

In early May 2020, the number of infected people began to increase in Itaewon, Seoul. The local government disclosed the place visited by the infected person and a Protestant newspaper, which usually instigated sexual minority hatred via its reports, informed people that the infection came from the gay club. Right after, regardless of the COVID-19 infection, disgust and prejudice against homosexual minorities surged as sensational reports on homosexuals' sexual practices and culture continued ([Headquarters 2020](#)). Homophobia, which existed before the pandemic, was amplified by the Itaewon club's collective infection.

In response, Korea's first LGBTQIA+ rights movement organization, Chingusai, meaning "friends" in Korean, founded in 1994, immediately issued a statement with the criticism that the reports highlighting gay clubs promoted prejudice and disgust against LGBTQIA+ and hindered not only LGBTQIA+ rights but also public health because getting tested for COVID-19 proved that the person had visited gay clubs and disclosed their sexual orientation. In Korea, people who visited places where collective infections occurred in the early days of the pandemic had to have a coronavirus test to prevent the spread of the virus and the routes of the infected people were traced and announced. In the case of collective infection at the Itaewon club, there was a risk of forced outings in which sexual identity was revealed if the route path of visiting the gay club was disclosed.<sup>7</sup> Along with the fear of outings, LGBTQIA+ hesitated to take medical measures such as tests and treatment due to the discrimination and conflict that may occur between coworkers, family members, and neighbors, and fear of bullying and unemployment ([Jung 2021](#), p. 174).

Soon, LGBTQIA+ rights groups formed the COVID-19 LGBTQIA+ Emergency Countermeasures Headquarters (hereafter Headquarters) to respond swiftly to the problem ([Jung 2021](#), p. 195). Right after its formation, the Headquarters held a meeting with the Seoul quarantine authorities. Disgust and stigma only hide those who need a checkup but do not help prevent diseases. To prevent gay club visitors, including sexual minorities, from not testing for privacy and sexual identity safeguarding, the Headquarters introduced an anonymous test in collaboration with the Seoul quarantine authorities, allowing people to get tested without revealing their identity and telling which club they visited in Itaewon ([Headquarters 2020](#)).

Above all, it was necessary to inform LGBTQIA+ people that they should voluntarily have tests to protect themselves and society. Online advertisements to encourage voluntary testing were distributed through social media of organizations affiliated with the Headquarters, and counseling, activity briefing, anonymous test guidance, statements and commentaries, and foreign language translation were provided through the website and hotline ([Jung 2021](#), p. 198). In mid-May, with the support of the Seoul metropolitan government, a safe COVID-19 test campaign for sexual minority human rights without discrimination was implemented. Test-encouraging advertisements by the Seoul metropolitan government and the Headquarters were also posted on SNS, web pages, and mobile applications. In particular, through collaboration with the quarantine authorities, the Headquarters publicized anonymous tests, walk-through tests, and drive-through tests in Seoul to induce rapid tests. A poster "COVID-19 tests without discrimination and stigma" was made and distributed, where the contact information of 25 screening clinics in Seoul was provided so that LGBTQIA+ people could be safely tested ([Jung 2021](#), pp. 199–201). Anonymous tests were immediately expanded across the country beyond Seoul through collaboration between the Headquarters and a Central Disaster Relief Headquarters which

is responsible for national quarantine ([Headquarters 2020](#)). All this was possible because the collaboration between the Headquarters and the government actively mobilized the existing sexual minorities network of LGBTQIA+ rights movement organizations.

The Itaewon incident was a representative example of how fatal the stigmatization of a group or identity is to public health in the event of an infectious disease. Sexual minorities who visited the club hesitated to be tested for fear that their homosexual identity would be disclosed, which was a crisis that would make their voluntary tests impossible. However, the central government introduced anonymous tests thanks to the quick and appropriate request of the LGBTQIA+ human rights organizations, and the need for voluntary tests for each other's safety spread in the LGBTQIA+ community, allowing the situation to be resolved without any major problems.

The religious group listed in the Headquarters was just one, the Social Labor Committee of the Jogye Order, the representative order of traditional Korean Buddhism. However, Protestant activists from LGBTQIA+ rights Protestant groups such as Rainbow Jesus, Christian Network for a World of Equality without Discrimination and Hatred, and A Queer Question for Korean Churches utilized the church networks to recommend anonymous tests to the LGBTQIA+ community and organized volunteer groups to work at the screening clinics because more workers were needed for anonymous tests. They also protected Queer Christians and accompanied them to be tested safely because Queer Christians were minorities, even among LGBTQIA+ people, and voluntarily monitored the inspectors right next to them to ensure safe tests for minorities.

The governance case in which LGBTQIA+ rights organizations including some Protestants collaborated with the government has insightful implications in several ways. First, it was the civil human rights groups that proposed collaborative governance first. In many cases of governance, the government first asks for cooperation. However, when the hatred of homosexuals was becoming serious enough to hinder quarantine measures during the pandemic, civil organizations first asked the government for cooperation to solve the problem. Second, it was almost the first public-private collaborative governance to protect gay human rights. Although the human rights groups first proposed it, the government and quarantine authorities actively collaborated to enable effective and systematic activities within a short period. Through collaboration, the government recognized that disgust and prejudice had a negative effect on the quarantine and the members of the Headquarters were able to work with the government to shield LGBTQIA+ from strong disgust and to protect their human rights. Third, the result of the collaboration was successful. The Itaewon collective infection no longer spread, and through this experience, the LGBTQIA+ groups became more intimate and tightly connected ([Han 2021](#)). Homophobia is still prevalent in our society and many Protestants still oppose the enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act and express disgust for sexual minorities. Additionally, those Protestants who helped with the anonymous testing of homosexuals were from the minority of progressive Protestant churches. However, attempts at creating various structures and processes for collaborative governance between religious groups and governments will increase the possibility that the collaboration between public institutions and private organizations toward achieving public good can make Korean civil society healthy and promote the consciousness of human rights.

## 6. Conclusions

What terrorized people during the rapid spread of COVID-19 around the world was the fact that the virus could equally infect anyone regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, class, and social status. There seemed to be no place or way to completely block the infection. These fears led to persistent attacks on the socially disadvantaged and attempts to control risks in a way that detested and excluded them. Viruses do not discriminate against people, but people tried to avoid the potential of viral infection by discriminating against others and hating them. In this trend, Korean Protestants were a

significant group of people who produced and spread disgust for social minorities. In particular, disgust for LGBTQIA+ people was and is very strong among Protestants.

Martin asserts that religion's projection of the message of hatred, discrimination, prejudice, and conflict into society undermines religious values. It is the social responsibility of religion in modern society to contribute to the improvement of the public good with religion's primary virtues such as peace, fraternity, reconciliation, and hospitality. Religion-government governance can be a possible way to bring about the secularization that makes the essential virtues of religion successful. In particular, collaborative governance can be an appropriate model for religion-government governance to resolve disgust against sexual minorities in that it allows religion to be an autonomous and independent actor to realize the public good. A case of this can be found in the collaboration between LGBTQIA+ rights activists including some Protestants and the government to support anonymous COVID-19 tests on homosexual people when a collective infection occurred in a gay club in the early days of the pandemic.

Existing studies on religious governance were mainly produced in a Western context. The West has recently accepted large-scale Muslim migrants and refugees and, as a result, governance of religious diversity emerged as an important topic. For westerners, who had a relatively homogeneous religious identity and cultural background, the modern situation of religious diversity is considered a dangerous liaison of religion and nation where while the nation provides for solidity and safety, religion ascertains cultural and political superiority (Modood and Sealy 2019, p. 5; Bader 2009).

However, the situation in Korea is different. Korea has been multi-religious for a long time and religions have coexisted relatively peacefully. The traditional thoughts and behavioral patterns of Confucianism and Shamanism influence most Koreans. Buddhism has been around for over a thousand years, blossoming into a beautiful culture. South Korea is one of the Asian countries in which Protestantism and Catholicism have taken deep root and flourished (A. E. Kim 2006). Moreover, Korean religions such as Won Buddhism, Cheondogyo, Jeungsangyo, the Donghak movement and new religious movements have also played an important role in society, constantly providing people with new worldviews (Yoo and Lee 2020). In this context, religious governance in Korea should be conceived to recognize and solve Korean issues that arise at the point where religions and society meet. For this purpose, this paper has analyzed the social emotion of disgust in the context of Korean society and religion and presented religious governance as a strategy to solve it.

Religious governance mentioned in this paper systematizes a structure and process for religion's participation in society, but there is a limitation in that the actor of governance are likely to be restricted to established and institutional religions. In Korea, there are not only established religions such as Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism, but also various Korean religions and new religions (Shin 2021) which have a great influence on Koreans mentally, symbolically, and physically. Therefore, it is required to build a more open and flexible religious governance model for minority religions to participate in.

Due to the current trend of globalization, a lot more religions around the world have coexisted and interacted more closely in Korea. With more refugees, migrant workers, and immigrants, Islam is now a notable religion in Korea. Recently, there have been conflicts in the local community over the construction of mosques and the creation of sacred sites for religions is causing mutual inconvenience. In this context, religious governance should also improve the prospects for multilateral governance between religions and governments. It is the time to devise governance to resolve conflicts between religions and create cooperation as the Korea's religious landscape becomes more pluralized.

Here, I will introduce Jeollabuk-do's case which presents one possibility of inter-religious governance. The World Religious Peace Committee (hereafter WRPC), located in Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do, shows a model case of building cooperation among four major religions, including Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Won Buddhism. WRPC provides people with opportunities to learn and experience each other's religions through movies, food, and performance festivals. Additionally, it has tried to expand mutual under-

standing by holding the World Religions Forum led by professional researchers of religious studies. All these events are sponsored by local governments and central government agencies. By holding religious festivals and forums every year in Jeollabuk-do, collaborative governance between religions and governments contributes to peace and harmony among religions and at the same time has a positive effect on the richness of local culture.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Itaewon is an administrative district belonging to Yongsan-gu, Seoul, and famous for foreigners, foreign goods, and foreign culture, including the U.S. military in Korea. It is a place where shopping malls, restaurants, tourist hotels, and entertainment facilities such as clubs, bars, and pubs are concentrated. Since the club related to the COVID-19 collective infection was called Itaewon club rather than a specific name in South Korea and specifying the club name is feared to be a homosexual stigma, this paper refers to it as Itaewon club.
- <sup>2</sup> Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, “No, my friends. Do not do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. However, do not do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof (hereafter NIV).”
- <sup>3</sup> If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
- <sup>4</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.
- <sup>5</sup> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
- <sup>6</sup> In 2007, twenty-three members of the Bundang Saemmul Presbyterian Church visited Afghanistan for short-term missions. They were abducted by the Taliban and two of them were killed. This incident led to bitter criticism and attacks on Protestantism in Korean society, with many accusing them of not respecting other countries’ cultures and religions and creating a diplomatic crisis (J. Kim 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> Outing, a tactic used in the 1980s in the American gay movement, originally meant exposing the sexual identity of politicians or celebrities who supported anti-homosexual laws and policies while hiding homosexuality. However, in Korea, it refers to threats and violence that forcefully expose homosexual identity against one’s will (Seo 2005, pp. 66–87).

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