

Re-envisioning Civil Religion in a Collaborative, Constructive Model

Lee, Song Chong^{*}

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I . Introduction

1. Preliminary Remarks

Our collective depression and fear having been intensified by a series of multifaceted

* 이성청, 서울대학교 종교학과 부교수

and multidimensional global crises, including “the largest synchronized fall in global GDP in modern history” and relentlessly increasing international security threats, are bringing back to life a dark, insecure and anxious feeling of *fin de siècle*.¹⁾ The *turn* or *end* of normality that our present world has to deal with this time is not a fear of losing something of the utmost importance for convenient life at the turn of an era but a cataclysmic change or a demise of even the system that we believe could sustain a minimum sense of order and hope in whatever crisis we face. Almost all indicators of human activities are pointing to a civilizational downfall. With the global GDP declined by 4.3%, the world has lost more than 493 million jobs. Climate change is causing economic loss to the world. It could, if not held back, cut 18% of GDP off the worldwide economy by 2050.²⁾ Violent crimes, including domestic violence, looting and murder, have drastically increased. More importantly, worldwide political instability is unprecedented. A recent survey of the Pew Research Center reports a sign of political crisis in many of the developed countries. Prominent think-tanks such as the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House and International IDEA have confirmed that democratic norms and civil liberties have deteriorated across the globe. A median of 56% out of 17 advanced countries surveyed in 2021 believe that “their political system needs major change or needs to be completely reformed.”³⁾ To make matters worse, the COVID-19 Pandemic having taken away 6 million lives and the Russian invasion

1) Faik ÖZTRAK, “2021-Report-The Global Economic Crisis: Implications and Prospects,” NATO Parliamentary Assembly, last modified October 21, 2021, <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2021-global-economic-crisis-implications-and-prospects-oztrak-report-018-escter-18-e#:~:text=But%20there%20are%20several%20potential,virus%20and%20renewed%20infection%20surges>.

2) Natalie Marchant, “This is how climate change could impact the global economy,” World Economic Forum, last modified June 28, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/impact-climate-change-global-gdp/#:~:text=The%20largest%20impact%20of%20climate,the%20Swiss%20Re%20Institute%20warns>.

3) Richard Wike and Janell Fetterolf, “Global Public Opinion in an Era of Democratic Anxiety,” Pew Research Center, last modified December 7, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/12/07/global-public-opinion-in-an-era-of-democratic-anxiety/>

having cost thousands of military and civilian lives, paralyzing global economy and disrupting the geopolitical stability, deepen our already pessimistic spirit.

The situation of Korea is no exception. OECD's recent snapshot of Korean economy and environment does not show a bullish outlook. Its GDP per capita is 20% lower than OECD best performers as the level of inequality is higher than most advanced economies. More than three quarters of the population are exposed to harmful levels of air pollution.⁴⁾ Decline of exports coupled with staggering operation of global value chains, due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and rapid population ageing and low productivity are projecting an uncertain future of Korean economy. As in the global situation, social discontent looming in various sectors of politics and the ensuing unrest expressed in multifarious forms are particularly imminent concerns that need to be addressed without delay. Most experts of Korean politics agree on the characterization of Korean democracy as “stagnant” or “degenerative.”⁵⁾ Democratic procedures occasionally malfunction due to partisan conflict. Korea ranked third and twenty-seventh in 2016 among OECD countries in key indicators of conflict and conflict management respectively. At the root of these challenges is the polarization or dichotomization perceiving the opponent as evil and inherently incompatible. According to Choi, it has reached “the polarization of emotion,” which comes after the polarizations of ideology and values.⁶⁾ The politics entangled by inter-generational, inter-ideological and inter-communal enmity has to face “a crisis of democracy” and “power politics.”⁷⁾ Since

4) OECD, “Korea Economic Snapshot, Economic Forecast Summary (December 2021),” accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.oecd.org/economy/korea-economic-snapshot/>

5) 임혜란(Haeran Lim), 「한국의 민주주의 위기와 경제개혁(Crisis of Democracy and Economic Reforms in, hereafter 한국의 민주주의)」, 『한국정치연구(Journal of Korean Politics)』 27, no. 1 (2018): 347-348.

6) 최장집(Jang Jip Choi), 「다시 한국 민주주의를 생각한다(Reconsidering the Korean Democracy: Crisis and Alternative)」, 『한국정치연구(Journal of Korean Politics)』 29 (2020): 1.

7) 이황직(Hwang-Jik Yi), 「민주주의 위기와 ‘힘의 정치’ 비판(Crisis of Democracy and the Critic of Power Politics)」, 『현상과 인식(Hyonsang-gwa-Insik)』 45, no. 3 (2021): 52.

Korea is relatively low at the crucial indicators of Democracy regarding particularly public engagement in the democratic process of dialogue and deliberation, its future is concerning.⁸⁾

2. Thesis

However, these signs of crisis are not completely negative. Just as *fin de siècle* connotes paradox, the paradox of the anxiety of dissonance and an anticipation of something hopeful, we can turn it into an opportunity and creativity. As we have long witnessed in history, politics cannot treat itself. It is because politics is a social phenomenon manifesting from the larger cultural environment formed by particular characteristics of human understanding of community and particular modes of expression to share a collective goal and exercise power to realize it. Among many of the forces to affect and help shape politics is the active role of religion, which should not be surprising, considering the fact that more than 80% of the world's population is religious.⁹⁾ Over the long history of politics, there has never been a time when religion does not play a significant role. It has been successful in its unique role particularly as the *nomos-builder* by providing various sources of power for society, including authority, legitimation and justification. The role of religion for politics has long been academically reflected upon, assessed, criticized and re-envisioned since scientific understanding of religion, a derivative of human sciences, emerged out of the enlightenment. The idea of civil religion is the most recent conceptual model to continue this conversation. However, this model

8) 임혜란, 「한국의민주주의」, 356. See EIU's annual assessment on Democracy for details. "Democracy Index 2021: less than half the world lives in a democracy," EIU, last modified February 10, 2022, <https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2021-less-than-half-the-world-lives-in-a-democracy/#:~:text=The%20annual%20index%2C%20which%20provides,dow n%20from%205.37%20in%202020>.

9) Harriet Sherwood, "Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular," *The Guardian*, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/27/religion-why-is-faith-growing-and-what-happens-next>.

focuses on the symbolic system and practical effects of the sacred feeling, religiosity, derived mainly from social memories, values and culture rather than the ordinary sense of religion.

In this paper, I ask what it means that religion positively influences politics, politics that I redefine in this paper as the *nomos-building-and-sustaining* activity, and how the positive role of religion can be understood in the discourse of civil religion. The reason why I use the concept of civil religion instead of a concept bearing a more traditional sense of religion such as Casanova's public religion is because it proposes an epistemologically neutral ground, which does not allow a situation where a specific religion is favored or disfavored and included or excluded.¹⁰⁾ To set the stage for the main thesis, I will first evaluate the established notions of politics and civil religion to find the background, and identify some flaws, of the conceptualizations, arguing that they have been constructed by the premise of power-dynamic. This would help typologically understand how Korean religions' engagement in politics has been discussed and understood. Based on the critical evaluation of these two themes, I will present a new model of civil religion, namely, interfaith civil religion, in which I formulate the notion of collaborative, constructive community, inspired by Berger's idea of "the great-nomos builder."¹¹⁾ I argue that this model would not put religion in a position where its inherent qualities are given up as shown in the classic models and where the significant contributions that religious communities are currently making are overlooked. And this concept of interfaith civil religion would be my response to Robert Bellah's diffident anticipation of a new level of civil religion coming out of a society larger than the state, which he expressed by saying "flickering flame of the United Nations." There is no absolute trans-national sovereignty at present. However, my discussion will demonstrate

10) José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

11) Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1967).

a possible groundwork to conceptualize a trans-national symbolic system, which Bellah imagined as “the civil religion of the world.”¹²⁾

II. Traditional Models of Political Engagement of Religion and Civil Religion

1. Problems in the Definition of Politics

Traditional, dominant discussions of the role of religion in politics have two major flaws. One is the very definition of politics upon which thematic selections in theoretical conversation and critical evaluations on political phenomena are mostly based. A particular understanding of politics not only makes the inquirer focus on specific issues but also dictates an interpretative framework to make certain axiological claims. Most classic discussions, including those of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau, show these drawbacks. The definition has been too narrow and unbalanced to properly understand the human phenomena that we might consider ‘political.’ Politics is a system of action in both the cognitive and institutional dimensions concerning the acquisition, distribution, and maintenance of power. Focusing on the distribution of value patterns in *Politics: Who gets What, When and How?*, Harold Lasswell characterizes the essence of politics as “the shaping and sharing of power.”¹³⁾ This early analysis of power dynamic unwittingly constructs an elitist view of political movement and history. The understanding of Robert Dahl, another American political scientist, confirms the power-oriented definition, defining

12) Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 18.

13) Harold D. Lasswell, H, *Politics: Who gets What, When and How?* (New York: World Publishing, 1936).

politics as any persistent pattern of human relationships dealing with “power, rule or authority.”¹⁴⁾ This definitional trend has also naturally created negative feeling about the purpose of politics. For instance, according to Elmer Schattschneider, “at the root of all politics is the universal language of conflict.”¹⁵⁾ Thus, it is not strange to encounter frequently a public perception viewing politics as “power-hungry, self-seeking, corrupt and violent.”¹⁶⁾

The other flaw is a derivative of the first. The narrow understanding of politics necessarily generates a limited sense of the agent. Just as the etymological root, *polis*, represents a particular typology of governance, which is the ancient city state, Athens, the dominant perception of politics involves types of government, their functional operations and other closely related issues; it is about the system of social organization and the machinery of governance. These special areas of focus, according to Hague and Haropp, unduly delimit where politics ought to occur and who ought to be the agent. Politics is practiced “in cabinet rooms, legislative chambers, government departments and the like; and it is engaged in by a limited and specific group of people, notably politicians, civil servants and lobbyists.”¹⁷⁾ This narrow view of politics also restrains our imagination of political development. Since politics is understood as an expression and outcome of power dynamic among various stakeholders constituting an institutional entity and seeking equilibrium, whether hierarchical or egalitarian, the ideas of development center around the measurable qualities mainly of the operation of the established system. For instance, the famous categories in which Pye believes political development should be measured

14) Cees Van Der Eijk, *"What Is Politics?" The Essence of Politics* (Amsterdam UP, 2018), 10.

15) Elmer Eric Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People. A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1960).

16) Trevor Munroe, *An Introduction to Politics: Lectures for First-year Students* (Barbados: Canoe Press, 2002), 31.

17) Rod Hague, John McCormick, and M. Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics-An Introduction* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

are comprehensive, ranging from the capacities of economic and juridical sectors to the level of mass mobilization and cooperation, but they are all indicators on institutional and systematic success.¹⁸⁾ None of the categories covers the development of the invisible but powerful aspect of politics that deals with the conflict of diverse symbolic systems such as religion, ideology and culture related to *nomos-building-and-maintenance*.

We need a new definition of politics, which can reflect a dimension in which more widely identified actors of politics are inspired and motivated of the crucial values of society: the dimension that ultimately pushes those values into a collective consciousness through their internal pressure and gives rise to a collaborative force to positively impact on fundamental tenets of civil society such as freedom, justice, better living, equality and rule of law. In this definition, political actors, including religious communities, do not fear of losing their essential values and functions in serving the new goal of politics, which is narrative-building rather than serving the power-dynamic. Among various theoretical frameworks for this new definition of politics, civil religion is most relevant because it brings the idea of religion to the center stage in discussing politics and because it gives due recognition of the dynamic, creative stories of politics, which the traditional understanding of politics has long overlooked.

The following discussion of the discourse of civil religion will support my point on the power-dynamic. The dominant discourse has been carried away by the modern imagination of an overarching secular religiosity, which unfortunately does not give any meaningful room for real religion: real religion that I mean here as the ordinary sense of religion. It is because the discourse is anchored in the presupposition of power-dynamic, in which the value of the player is evaluated only with its functional qualities of serving the established system. The general discussion of civil religion in Korean academia inspired heavily by Bellah's work is also aligned with this paradigm. There is no religion,

18) Lucian W. Pye, "The Concept of Political Development," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 358, no. 1 (1965): 1-13.

in the ordinary sense, in the conversation of civil religion. For religion to become civil or engage in politics in a constructive way, it is expected to jettison what is considered essential for what it is, such as particular understandings and expressions of the sacred through beliefs and rites. I argue that there still should be a theoretical place for real religion. The original, classical conversation of civil religion focusing on transcending the religious establishment, thereby formulating civil virtues, does not necessarily exclude historically proven positive contributions of religious communities, which I argue should be theoretically positioned in one way or another. In this paper, I present interfaith engagement to carve out space for real religion in the dominant conversation of civil religion.

2. Problems in Traditional Models of Civil Religion

The incomplete view and definition of politics discussed above causes several cognitive obstacles. Some problems are categorical/classificatory and others functional. The former deals with the question of who is in and who is out in politics. It involves issues associated with the classification of the agent, which people believe as a legitimate political actor. In the contemporary world based on liberal philosophy is religion not easy to find a proper place for politics. Any attempt to include religion in the discussion of politics is considered an apostasy to the modern intellect. The latter comes from the widely accepted negative assessment of the function of religion in politics. It is the notion that major historical points where religion made explicit involvement in politics have turned out to be destructive. There is a sense of suspicion and fear of whatever function religion plays. These cognitive obstacles have negatively influenced the discourse of civil religion. Rousseau, who is widely known to have made the first theoretical attempt on civil religion, and Machiavelli and Hobbes, whose discussions of the political meaning of religion are frequently juxtaposed with him and considered equally important, show similar problems.

In their views, the role and capability of religion in politics is understood in the viewpoint of power-dynamic and power-relation. It means that the meaning and value of religion in the traditional conversation was interpreted in terms of its relationship with the primary power player, which is the state.

For instance, according to Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, Book I, chapters 11-15, religion is merely an instrument to secure absoluteness, efficiency and stability of the system of power as he exemplifies it in the political craft of Ferdinand of Aragon, king of Spain. It is a useful civilizational source or tool to supplement or maximize the prince's political tricks and ploys against the subject, which would otherwise be out of control due to their own chaotic nature of self-interest: a tool that Luke characterizes arouses "extra-political sanctions for wholly political operations."¹⁹⁾ In this view, Christianity was useless because it malfunctioned in what Machiavelli thought of as essential for the purpose of religion. While devaluing honor, glory and liberty, Christianity celebrated slavishness and self-negation. Thus, he wanted to see religion fulfill its due role to meet the demand of "neopagan politics."²⁰⁾

Hobbes' discussion of civil religion in *De Cive* and *Leviathan* presents the similar line of thought with Machiavelli. Religion is meaningful and useful in politics only if it successfully serves to promote "the maximum discretion of the sovereign."²¹⁾ The constant alternation of the magistrate between Hebrew kings and priests on power struggle, which Hobbes identifies in *De Cive*, necessarily exposes people to political instability and crisis. Just as shown in the Old Testament, theocratic rule represented by the story of Moses is insecure and vulnerable. People constantly struggle over prophetic power. It is

19) Timothy Luke, "To Bamboozle with Goodness. The Political Advantages of Christianity in the Thought of Machiavelli," *Renaissance and Reformation* 8 (1984): 266-277, 268.

20) Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion, A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20.

21) Ronald Beiner, "Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau on Civil Religion (hereafter Rousseau on Civil Religion)," *The Review of Politics* 55, no. 4 (1993): 617-638, 624.

impossible to come up with a stable civil authority.²²⁾ Hobbes argues that not only is the monarchy the most effective system to contain this possibility of the anarchy of Hebrew theocracy but it is also the system to deal with the essence of religion, concerning the salvation of the subjects' souls. He suggests to re-Christianize Christianity, which is, according to Beiner, to judaicize Christianity. It means that Christianity limits itself to this-worldly claims and that the monarch plays the role of Christ until he comes at the Second Coming to establish the final Kingdom of God.²³⁾

In the last chapter of *Social Contract*, Book IV. Chapter 8, Rousseau presents a very realistic view of the relationship between religion and politics. His typology of various forms of religion is concise yet reflects the major concern that putative interlocutors of his time, such as Machiavelli and Hobbes, are assumed to share for theoretical positioning. It is the utility of religion for the stability and success of politics and the political regime. The whole classification and analysis of religion is conducted on the degree of its possible contribution to the power of the state. The conventional types of religion having manifested in history as pure, theistic regime, theocratic regime and hybrid regime are all evaluated by their engagement in power. In other words, whether religion can empower the existing political authority is the key question. The pure, theistic regime is sublime and law-abiding yet ingenuous, feeble and indifferent to practical matters on earth. And it is dangerous if exploited by a crafty tyrant such as Catiline and Cromwell. The theocratic regime, according to Rousseau, is good in that "it unites the divine cult with love of the laws."²⁴⁾ The sacred, and the profane, which is the state in this case, are paradigmatically interlocked and symbolically intercommunicated so that the dual functions and outcomes of an action can be naturally expected. However, its exclusive,

22) Beiner, "Rousseau on Civil Religion," 627.

23) Beiner, "Rousseau on Civil Religion," 629.

24) Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Chapter 8, 70, accessed January 10, 2022, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125486/5017_Rousseau_The_Social_Contract.pdf

totalistic nature always puts the state “in a natural state of war with all others.”²⁵⁾ All these classical theorists attempted to find an ideal model of interaction. However, their discussions ended up articulating primarily power and power-relation, which, of course, extended to larger issues, including civil peace, social unity and the foundation of commonwealth, republic and the state.

Modern discussion of civil religion does not deviate from this discursive track. Five major models particularly of American civil religion aptly classified by Richey and Jones have two common denominators: *stripping* of the original sense of religion and *artificial selection and juxtaposition* of evidence in consideration of power-dynamic or power-relation.²⁶⁾ With the denominator of *stripping*, civil religion is unfortunately an eccentric entity that either casts completely the traditional shell of religion or absolves politics only to become a conceptual Frankenstein. With the denominator of power-dynamic, civil religion is a conceptualization out of cherry picking, which ignores other historically significant aspects of the interaction between religion and politics. For instance, civil religion as folk religion, which Warner and Herberg conceptualize, exemplified by the Memorial Day celebrations of American cities and the deification of the American way of life, lacks a minimum sense of structure and coherence and of distinctiveness from other collective social phenomena, in making up an idea of religious community. The feelings and attitudes of religious nationalism, which is the second model, is problematic because the question of how the sociological collective effervescence is sublimated into a religious feeling involving the foundation of ultimate reality remains ambiguous. The model of democratic faith, which is exemplified by John Dewey’s common faith and other humanistic philosophies presents a value of religion but has no structure. The model of Protestant civic piety imagined by some American religious

25) Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Chapter 8, 70.

26) Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974).

historians such as Winthrop Hudson and Richard Niebuhr covers a relational dynamic, as shown in the classical debate, between the Protestant church and the state, saying that there is a “fusion of the American and Protestant historical entities.”²⁷⁾ However, the evidence of this model was consciously selected to fit in the imagery of the established system of the state, which I problematize here as power-relation. Finally, the model of transcendent universal religion of the nation, for which Robert Bellah’s civil religion represents, has similar problems with the others. “The institutionalized collection of sacred belief about the American nation,” which Bellah identifies in the light of transcendent reality, such as national documents and theistic belief, does present a parallel.²⁸⁾ However, as with other models, it is questionable to think of his civil religion as something closer to the sacred canopy, in Berger’s term, that is able to cosmize the nomos of society for the ultimate structure and greater legitimation. Like other models, the evidence of Bellah’s civil religion argument is based on his intentional, conscious attention to the established symbolic structure of religion.

III. Political Engagement of Korean Religion and Discourse of Civil Religion

The discourses of religion and politics and of civil religion in Korea do not diverge from the aforementioned traditional framework premising power-relation, the framework in which the player enters the relational dynamic to dominate, enhance and protect power or rebuild a power-base on their own. In this view of relation, the primary concern of engagement comes from a variety of practical benefits, including regime maintenance,

27) Gail Gehrig, “The American Civil Religion Debate: A Source for Theory of Construction (hereafter The American Civil Religion Debate),” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 1 (1981): 53.

28) Gehrig, “The American Civil Religion Debate,” 53.

security, and growth. Most conversations of civil religion in the Korean academia, inspired mainly by Robert Bellah, are all anchored in the Durkheimian obsession of collective consciousness and social solidarity, which are the root cause of religiosity and its *telos* respectively. They reflect the two main types, cultural and ideological types, which Cristi and Dawson identified in the discourse of civil religion.²⁹⁾ There is no real, ordinary sense of religion in this approach because the modern secular authority, which has already gained hegemony over power-struggle in the discourse, has deprived our intellectual inquiry of the need to consider the *sui generis* function of religion, which, for instance, gives the ultimate structure of reality. Put differently, in the dominant conversation is civil religion civil yet not religious. The following paragraphs will show how the underlying premise of power-dynamic shapes the conversation of Korean religions' engagement in politics, whose limited perspective, I argue, has ultimately made the discourse of civil religion in Korea follow the same trajectory of the dominant Western theory.

Due to the presumed power-relation running the total structure of society, religion is always evaluated as a subordinate, subsystem of politics, which is uncritically assumed. For instance, popular historical examples of the role of religion, some of which can qualify for the problematic understanding of civil religion, are categorized into four types of engagement: hegemonic, instrumental, separatist and messianic. The hegemonic engagement is the Korean religion's ambitious effort to dominate the power-dynamic and to establish the total system. The instrumental engagement is the strategic approach to politics, which aims to create a strong position in relation to politics and other competitive religions or to enhance its internal strength and solidarity. The separatist engagement is withdrawal from the political scene and public sphere particularly to survive in a hostile,

29) Marcela Cristi and Lorne L. Dawson, "Civil Religion in America and in Global Context," in *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. James A. Beckford and N. Jay Demerath III. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publication, 2007), 276-277.

existential crisis, while the messianic engagement is the direct intervention of religion in a political affair to save its larger society.

The research of Song and Kim on strategic relations between religion and politics offers a very good historical overview for my point.³⁰⁾ Confucianism as the state ideology of the Joseon Dynasty is the best example of the hegemonic engagement in Korean history. Not only did the principles of Confucianism give the cosmological structure and order to the consciousness and ethics of the people but it also provided “statecraft ideas” for effective governance and inspiration for significant symbolic acts such as naming key buildings, with Confucian philosophy, such as Gyeongbok Gung (景福宮) and Kwanghwa Mun (光化門).³¹⁾ Confucianism as religion was the established system running and supervising both the substructure and the superstructure of the society. The instrumental engagement can be found in the patron-client relationship between church and state, which was prominent during the developing stage of democracy, including the era of military dictatorship. For instance, religion, particularly the Protestant church, allied with political forces, during the First and Second Republic, for the shared stance of anti-communism and pro-Americanism. Behind the church’s support for the established regime was there an objective to stabilize and strengthen its position. Syngman Rhee, first president, gave various policy benefits to the church such as lowering exchange rate for missionary fund and helping its evangelization with financial support of building projects and implementation of military chaplaincy. Similarly, Park Chung-hee reached out to traditional religious communities with pro-Buddhist policies such as the establishment of the holiday of Buddha’s birthday and the inclusion of Buddhism in the military chaplaincy. In response, the Buddhist community showed a tendency to support the established system,

30) 송운석(Un-Suk Song), 김정태(Gyung Tae Kim), 「해방이후 한국 정치와 종교 간의 전략적 상호작용에 관한 연구(A Study of the Mutual Influence Strategy between Politics and Religion in Korea, hereafter 전략적 상호작용」, 『한국행정사학회지(Journal of Association for Korean Public Administration History)』 35 (2014): 337-361.

31) Haesung Lee, "Neo-Confucianism of Joseon Dynasty—its Theoretical Foundation and Main Issues," *Azijske študije* 4, no. 1 (2016): 173.

often proclaiming itself as patriotic Buddhism (호국불교). The National Prayer Breakfast can be another example of the instrumental engagement. Even though it does not have to be denied that the participant church leaders did have a genuinely spiritual motive, the fact that the church received a consistent favoritism on its various projects such as Billy Graham's largest Crusade in Seoul and the promotion of Hanshin Theological Seminary to university supports this instrumental interpretation.³²⁾ The Catholic Church's acquiescence to the May 16 coup and the ensuing establishments of military regime are arguably in the same vein.³³⁾ All of these strategic moves of Korean religions can be also considered, according to Kim, a corollary to their defensive move to contain the larger process of secularization, in which "the plausibility structure" of each religion is challenged by the heightened "religious plurality" and "free competition."³⁴⁾ Although historical examples of the separatist engagement are more complicated for generalization, two explanations are often attempted. Religion completely withdraws from the political scene either to keep and focus on the purity of its religious values, based on a theological rationale of church-state separation, or does it as a defensive, coping measure against the state, whose hostility is beyond its control in the current system. For instance, the conservative evangelical church's typical attitude of indifference toward politics and political affairs during the era of the military regimes shows the former. Inheriting from Western Protestant missionaries the Augustinian dichotomy of the functional separation of *civita dei* and *civitas terrena*, a large number of conservative Christians has not put political participation into their equation for spiritual journey. Their apolitical stance was part of their pietistic lifestyle.³⁵⁾ Likewise, Nacheol of Daejonggyo taught and

32) 송운석, 김정태, 「전략적 상호작용」, 349-350.

33) 강인철(In Cheol Kang), 「민주화 과정과 종교(Democratization Process and Religion)」, 『종교연구(The Journal of the Korean Association for the History of Religions)』 27 (2002): 36.

34) 김종서(Chonsuh Kim), 「국가의 종교지원 기준과 세계 종교기구의 설립(The Criteria of Governmental Support to Religion and the Establishment of United Institute of World Religions)」, 『종교와 문화(Religion and Culture)』 14 (2008): 125.

institutionally implemented the separation of church and state to cultivate, so called, “jinseong (진성, 眞誠),” at some point of the Japanese colonial era.³⁶⁾ In contrast, Son, Byong-hi’s effort of withdrawal from politics for Cheondogyo in 1905 and 1906 is perceived as indirectly forced. It was intended to defend religion for an existential threat. There are numerous historical examples of the messianic engagement particularly during the Japanese colonialism. This typology is not meant for general examples of active participation of religion but for a dramatic engagement of religion in political affairs, which could have risked its very existence. A few examples are as follows: Daejonggyo’s initiative on writing a declaration of independence and its coordinated independent movement such as armed struggle in Manchuria, Cheondogyo’s active support for the establishment of the Civil Government of Korea (대한민간정부, 大韓民間政府) and the Provisional Government of Republic of Korea, and Bocheongyo’s fundraising for independence movement.³⁷⁾

These examples of religious engagement in politics are factual and historically important for serious consideration in discussing the role of religion. However, they can be cognitively deceptive because they are definitely attention-grabbing but not exhaustive. While they are good materials to serve the typical paradigm of religion and politics based on the idea of power-dynamic, there are far more ways that religion engages in politics if the definition of politics is expanded, as discussed in the section II, to the dimension of *nomos-building-and-sustaining*, the dimension in which religion challenges, inspires and leads political community and institutions on the well-being and solidarity of society.

Shaped by this narrow understanding of religious engagement in politics, just as are

35) 송운석, 김정태, 「전략적 상호작용」, 161-179.

36) 김봉곤(Bong Gon Kim), 「근대 한국종교의 공공성과 대한민국임시정부 수립(A Study on Publicness of Korean Religion in Modern Period and the Establishment of the Provisional Government of Korea: Centered on Chondogyo, Daejonggyo, and Bocheongyo, hereafter 근대 한국종교)」, 『원불교사상과종교문화(Won-Buddhist Thought & Religious Culture)』 76 (2018): 91.

37) 김봉곤, 「근대 한국종교」, 107-112.

most other Western perspectives, the discourse of civil religion in Korean academia reflects the traditional view of religion and politics based on power-dynamic, which presupposes the idea that what determines the relation between religion and politics is the existential concern of the established system. While the discourse entertains various qualities of religion, it does not invite anything of real religion because there is a sense of suspicion that no matter how religion engages in politics, it will disrupt the established order or system, whether of the church or the state. Thus, the attention naturally leans to either the utility and function of religion to serve the dominant system or religiosity bereft of the essence. Oh and Lee's succinct overview of the discourse of civil religion in Korean society supports my point.³⁸⁾ For instance, Kang In-cheul's paradigm of Korean civil religion is identified as something about anti-communist and pro-American sentiments and liberalism. It is the cultural, functional mechanism that unites various social elements and forces, which can be chaotic and dangerous if remain unguided. The qualification of being civil here is the function itself to serve the state. Like in the models of Bellah and many other followers, Kang's model is nothing to do with real religion. It appropriates the religious frame dealing with the collective effervescence considered the sacred. Jo Haein's exploration of Korean civil religion through the concept of Gongmin Jongyeo brings attention to the symbolic system of liberal democracy, which she argues would buttress civil liberty. The Neo-Confucian principle of society utilized for her case is articulated to highlight its function to sustain social solidarity.³⁹⁾ Similarly, Cha Seonghwan's framework of familialism derived from the cultural system of Neo-Confucianism presents some vestiges of old religious values such as filial piety, but their functional qualifications in building a larger and firmer social solidarity is

38) 오세일(Se Il Oh), 이상지(Sang Ji Lee), 「시민 종교 담론, 한국사회에서 읽기(How to Read Discourses on Civil Religion in Korea, hereafter 시민종교 담론)」, 『사회이론(Korean Journal of Social Theory)』 no. 46 (2014).

39) 조혜인(Haein Jo), 『공민사회의 동과 서: 개념의 뿌리(Civil Society, east and west: the root of the concept)』 (과주: 나남, 2009), 170-173.

questionable due to the accusation of being a major cause of the collusion between politics and business and of regional discrimination and conflict.⁴⁰⁾ Lee Chansu's argument that Korean civil religion can be identified mainly in "the linguistic-grammatical" domain makes my points clearer. There may be secular symbols of the sacred, which involve the ethos of the Koreans. However, they are just symbols without the essence. Heaven, God, and other variety of expressions of religion used in everyday Korean language, with no religious intention and meaning, may be contributing to the formation of the collective consciousness in one way or another, but they lack such profundity as Bellah's case of American civil religion.⁴¹⁾ The most recent essay by Andrew E. Kim and Daniel Connolly shows a similar pattern. Their in-depth and comprehensive study of the historical cases of Korean civil religion is conducted, as they indicate in the introduction, by the viewpoint of power-dynamic. They conclude that the general character of civil religion in Korea has been "an elite-driven ideological construct" "to create the nation."⁴²⁾

IV. Collaborative, Constructive Model of Civil Religion

As presented above, both the discussion of Korean religion and politics and the discourse of civil religion in Korean academia reflect the paradigmatic problem that I identified in the classic and Western contemporary discourses of civil religion. The

40) 차성환(Seonghwan Cha), 『글로벌시대 한국의 시민종교(*Civil Religion in the Global World*)』 (서울: 삼영사, 2000), 221-223, quoted in 오세일(Se Il Oh), 이상지(Sang Ji Lee), 「시민 종교 담론, 한국사회에서 읽기(How to Read Discourses on Civil Religion in Korea, hereafter 시민종교 담론)」, 『사회이론(*Korean Journal of Social Theory*)』 no. 46 (2014): 400.

41) 이찬수(Chan Su Yi), 「개신교와 시민사회 간 소통 가능성과 방법론(On Possibility and Methodology of the Communication between the Protestant Church and Civil Society)」, 『종교자유정책연구원/우리신학연구소/제3시대그리스도교연구소 세미나』 (2010): 39-20, quoted in 오세일(Se Il Oh), 이상지(Sang Ji Lee), 「시민 종교 담론」, 402.

42) Andrew Eungi Kim and Daniel Connolly, "Building the Nation: The Success and Crisis of Korean Civil Religion," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 3.

measuring tool that helps narrate and evaluate the engagement of religion in politics in any shape or form is always the perspective of power-relation, which necessarily asks about its benefit or harm to the established system. In the conversation controlled by this presumption of power-relation can theorists of civil religion not help but exclude the ordinary sense of religion particularly to draw anything positive from religion because they would all agree that if religion is included in the conversation, as it is, it would certainly cause problems. This has been a persistent mindset of the theorists of religion and politics and particularly of civil religion. Of course, their suspicion of political engagement of religion and their *stripping* of the essence of religion for the discourse of civil religion make sense because the definition of politics, which is of power, is too narrow to embrace any possibility of religion playing as a larger political force without making the old mistake of trespassing an assigned domain.

However, if the definition of politics is redefined and expanded, as discussed in Section II, to cover other functions of social institutions, for instance, in sustaining the unity and solidarity of the community as a whole, this defensive reaction, which has already become the spirit of the default theoretical framework, can be reevaluated. The reason why the classical thinkers, particularly Rousseau, the pathfinder of civil religion, look at religion with suspicion is not because religion itself does not have the capacity to fulfill the expected duties to qualify for civil religion. Rousseau himself explicitly said, “A State has never been founded without religion serving as its base.” The paradox that he struggled with is rather the fact that the very nature of religion, shared by every person, which gives the transcendent order, becomes the source of conflict. The universal religious nature of people is necessarily degenerated into a divisive multi-religious environment. Thus, politics, which is the arena of the power-struggle of various institutional communities, makes religion a power-player-or-seeker. Unfortunately, the model of civil religion that Rousseau and many other contemporary thinkers commonly envision to deal with this problem is nothing close to something that can be called religion. It is rather a conceptual

zombie, for which the kinesiological elements of religion such as symbols and rituals based on collective memories and values might function, but parts of the core or essence such as sincere belief in divinity and the ability to handle big questions of life and cultivate a higher level of solidarity is missing.

I think that a possible solution can be drawn as we change our way of thinking. There are more ways in which religion engages in politics than power-dynamic particularly in the world of the 21st century with highly developed democratic values, which the classical thinkers could have not possibly put into equation. Differing from the common examples of both classical and modern theorists of civil religion, religious engagement in politics today is multidimensional and multifarious. Most importantly, the modern world has sophisticated infra and superstructure, in which religion is not necessarily shoved to the colosseum of power-dynamic in influencing society. It does not have to become a hegemon to communicate its central messages and improve its institutional stability and strength. Religions can cooperate and collaborate to deeply engage in all kinds of political matters while remaining in its socially legitimized and stabilized domain. Unlike the classic examples, this engagement does not demand the monopoly of wealth, power and status in relationship with others institutions, including the state.

For instance, through well-coordinated interfaith dialogue and collaboration can various religious communities generate creative force to affect, guide, inspire and lead society. What is important about this collaboration is the fact that the anticipated properties of civil religion do not come from one specific religion, which was Rousseau's main concern. Nor do they represent any particular tradition. It is rather a collaborative work of narrative-building, which Berger might call *great-nomos-building*. As participant religions, as sacred path on their own, communicate and work closely together for a shared goal and finally achieve it in historical reality, a collective memory is made. And the values formed out of that memory, which is initially understood in each one's sacred narrative, would be gradually elevated to a post-confessional stage. In other words, inter-faith

engagement hits the major marks or “the content” of Rousseau’s civil religion. Since the actual sentiment and values projected by inter-faith engagement are expressed and understood outside a particular scriptural and covenantal dimension, it is non-doctrinal. Its shared values and norms that would affect people’s way of life reflect some of the characteristics of Rousseau’s dogmas of civil religion. They would involve ultimate questions of life such as “Divinity” and “the life to come.”⁴³⁾ For instance, inter-faith engagement is a huge part of the effort to promote such values as democracy, economic justice, international peace and environmental protection and most importantly of social solidarity. For religious communities, these values not just moral imperatives, but they are symbolic extensions of their central tenets. Not only do they shape a particular life style but they also give a strong, profound sense of community, which is transcendent of the doctrinal community, related more to the civil community.

Inter-faith engagement having been expressed by interreligious dialogue, collaborations and initiatives is building a greater nomos, the nomos that is shaped out of a shared understanding, among various religious communities, of what it means to live in a civil society. Deep inter-faith engagement allows religious communities to realize more commonalities, than differences, that would gradually generate a non-institutional but morally and spiritually strong force to produce the type of solidarity and stability that our highly multicultural and multireligious society demands. It would gradually help lay the foundations of civil society, whose common denominator Choi identifies as “voluntary cooperation and network” encouraged by “individuals’ shared interest and faith.”⁴⁴⁾ Therefore, what constitute the civil religion that I am suggesting for the new context, the context that defies the premise of power-dynamic, due to the changed environment for church-state relations in the modern world, are in a higher dimension than those of

43) Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Chapter 8, 72.

44) 최신한(Shin-Hann Choi), 「후기세속사회의 종교 담론과 시민종교(Discourse of Religion in Post-Secular Society and Civil Religion)」, 『헤겔연구(Hegel-Studien)』 no. 33 (2013): 204.

the state and individual religions. It is a transcendent symbolic system that creates and sustains a set of shared memories, feelings, understanding and goals of various religions on the essences of a stable political community in the 21st century such as democracy, economic justice, human rights and environmental protection. I argue that although belief in and loyalty to these values can be formed in the dimension of the state and an individual religion, those grown out of interfaith engagement, once formed, should be, at least in principle, stronger and more effective in playing the function of civil religion. The following are some examples for, namely, inter-faith civil religion, from which a higher dimension of civil religion and a new set of “symbolic forms” can be imagined. This list does not represent a single political community. Nor is it going to serve as a coherent system that best reflects Rousseauian or Bellahian prototype. It is intended to enlarge our theoretical imagination to find a reasonable place for real religion in the discourse of civil religion. Rousseau would find these examples interesting because from their social-political and cultural engagement does a tyrant religion not emerge. Bellah would find it useful to continue his conversation of the trans-national civil religion.

First, interfaith civil religion generates transcendent, symbolic narratives, the narratives promoting and venerating such values as human rights, justice, tolerance and coexistence, whose foundation of legitimation is in a higher domain than the doctrinal basis of the individual religion. People enter interreligious dialogue and get involved in interfaith collaboration and cooperation with their confessional, doctrinal base, but they would generate together a new set of moral and spiritual values through a successful internalization or sense-making of different understanding and expressions of the sacred and the sacred duty. Since these values are the products of the collective effort, no individual religion can claim ownership. They remain non-confessional, non-doctrinal and non-sectarian in community, whether the state or global community. Politicians recognize the utility of this transcendent narrative of interfaith engagement and translate it into policy measures and larger political agendas. For instance, calling their city “the Capital of the

Interreligious Dialogue,” politicians of the city of Hamburg, Germany, including the mayor, utilize interfaith engagement not only as a branding tool of the city but also as a measure for the communal identity and solidarity. The coalition agreement, *Together we create modern Hamburg*, of the governing parties SPD (Social Democrats) and Grüne (Green Party) presents a clear objective to prevent social disintegration by implementing the narrative of interfaith engagement in the programmatic level, including promoting “Religious Education for All,” supporting religious minorities such as the Muslim and Alevi and the Jewish community.⁴⁵⁾ The narrative of interfaith engagement that South Africa’s first democratically elected Parliament took advantage of is another good example. Dr. Frene Ginwala, the newly elected speaker, closed the historic National Assembly, which was held on May 9, 1994, by praying together with a Muslim cleric, Shaykh Abdul Gamiet Gabier, making use of the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.⁴⁶⁾ And invitation of various religious leaders, to the inauguration program of President Nelson Mandela, such as the moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church, the archbishop of the Church of the Province, the chief rabbi, the president of the Muslim Judicial Council, and the chairperson of the Hindu Maha Sabha was very intentional. Lubbe calls this process “interfaith ethos,” the process that interfaith engagement fosters a greater sense of order, solidarity and healing in political community and that its language and symbolism intercommunicate with those of secular institutions.⁴⁷⁾

Second, just as the narrative of American civil religion was delivered by politically and historically divine figures such as John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln, so are the sacred messages of interfaith civil religion. It was the papal authority of Pope Paul VI that made the interreligious engagement and perspective of the Second Vatican Council

45) Ana Kors, Local “‘Formulas of peace’: Religious diversity and state-interfaith governance in Germany,” *Social Compass* 65, no. 3 (2018): 350.

46) Gerrie Lubbe, “Interfaith Resistance in South Africa (hereafter Interfaith Resistance),” *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 223.

47) Lubbe, “Interfaith Resistance,” 222.

an intellectually and spiritually symbolic milestone. It was the presidential authority of Barack Obama that made the interfaith recognition of his inaugural speech more historic and impactful particularly in including it in the civil discourse of peace.⁴⁸⁾ It was again the institutional authority and prestige of the sponsors, special guests and participants, as in 2008 Madrid Interfaith Dialogue Conference and the 9th International Conference of Interfaith Dialogue, that turned interfaith engagement into an opportunity to build a larger sense of civil community. In particular, the active historical engagement of the UN General Assembly and the Council of Europe in interfaith dialogue and collaboration by instituting high-level advisory meetings within the structures shows a phenomenon that powerful, authoritative political institutions prop up the sacredness of the civic virtues promoted by religious communities. And in the storytelling of enlarged human solidarity and justified civil disobedience through interfaith engagement is always the sacred authority of prophetic figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Thích Nhất Hạnh. Engaging in independence, civil rights and peace movements, these figures cultivated a consciousness, for both their countries and beyond, which transcends ideology, dogma, institutions and power but gives a strong sense of order and solidarity.

Third, although loose, disjointed and sporadic at the moment in time, a pattern of unifying values and ideas coming out of interfaith engagement is being shaped by a variety of venerated texts, at a slow but meaningful pace, which manifest in various forms such as public statements, declarations and encyclicals. The Second Vatican Council's milestone document, *Nostra Aetate*, officially sacralizing the language of religious tolerance, has impacted not only the Catholic community but also broader secular societies, and so has

48) The White House, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," last modified January 21, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/01/21/president-Barack-obamas-inaugural-address>. "We know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus-and nonbelievers...We cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role ushering in a new era of peace."

the European Council of Religious Leaders' Berlin Declaration of Interreligious Dialogue intended to alleviate "communal and interreligious tensions, reduce threats of weapons and promote human development and protection of earth."⁴⁹⁾ In particular, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration* prepared by the Parliament of the World's Religions promoting no-violence, justice and care for the earth became an intellectual landmark that turned our sense of moral responsibility and unity into the dimension of a larger civil community. Similarly, *A Common Word between Us and You* (ACW) written by global Muslim leaders and scholars, which was a collective response to Pope Benedict XVI's inappropriate quote of a Byzantine Emperor's criticism of Islam in 2006, was intended to encourage interfaith dialogue with Christians, but its impact went beyond the religious dimension, utilized as a text for a larger secular discourse of seeking tolerance and solidarity.⁵⁰⁾ ACW inspired many other joint declarations, publication projects, and the establishment of new college courses, programs, and conferences.⁵¹⁾ The Kano Covenant made by Christian and Muslim representatives to fight interreligious conflict and violence represented by Boko Haram insurgents in Kano, Nigeria, which is considered "one of the most endangered cities in sub-Saharan Africa, contains the type of language reflecting the non-confessional yet secular civil virtues. It talks about "freedom" and "right" guaranteed by "the constitution" and tries to make sure to "preserve" and "protect" the "lives" and "properties" of "all Nigerian people," regardless of their "religious affiliations."⁵²⁾ While the organizers of the covenant are religious communities, its function, sought-values, and objectives remain in the purview of civil religion.

49) European Council of Religious Leaders, "Interreligious Dialogue (Berlin Declaration)," last modified February 16, 2008, <https://ecrl.eu/interreligious-dialogue-berlin-declaration/>

50) "A Common Word," accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>

51) "A Common Word."

52) Daniel Olisa Iweze, "Boko Haram Insurgency, Interfaith Dialogue, and Peacebuilding in Kano: Examining the Kano Covenant," *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review* 2, no. 1 (2021): 42-43.

Lastly, interfaith engagement creates transcendent space, the space in which people can connect with people of different religious and ideological orientations. By visiting and learning about each other's sacred places full of symbols and stories do people develop empathy and deep understanding and build a higher sense of community, which I call the community of interfaith civil religion. It means that they would feel that lofty values such as dignity, peace, love, forgiveness and most importantly the sense of community are not the monopoly of their personal religion. Interfaith or cross-religious experiences cultivate a new set of values, beyond the separate, individual religious dimension, which can give a stronger sense of belonging, unity and community. For instance, Senbeto's research drawn from a qualitative data collection and analysis mechanism on the benefit of interfaith religious coexistence and harmony shows a possibility of space, which can build a larger sense of community transcending different religious orientations. Kulubi Gabriel, a prominent monastery in Eastern Ethiopia, is a pilgrim site attracting a large number of Christians, Muslims and non-believers especially during biannual celebrations held in July and December. It is one of Ethiopia's primary tourism destinations. This monastery named after Angel Gabriel is considered sacred due to the common stories of Abrahamic religions. However, what elevates sacredness into an even higher status is each participant's interfaith recognition of sacredness at the pilgrim site. Although celebrating the place in their own storytelling, Christian and Muslims get to create a space of mutual respect, which does not necessitate any confessional and doctrinal basis. It is a sense of community and solidarity occurring through actual encounter and emotional exchange of people. Even non-religious participants join this process by providing services to pilgrims during a religious celebration.⁵³⁾ Pilgrimage to Gishen Mariyam monastery, which is famous for the True Cross of Christ can be another good example. Although

53) Dagnachew Leta Senbeto, "One stone, two birds: harnessing interfaith tourism for peacebuilding and socio-economic development (hereafter One stone, two birds)," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 30, no. 3 (2022): 555.

from the Christian storytelling, this monastery get many non-Christians involved. According to Senbeto, most service providers, including the guard of tourists, are Muslims. Therefore, their solidarity is formed by a larger sense of participation, including visiting, providing services and involving in building and maintaining churches, mosques, and monasteries.⁵⁴⁾

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that the discussion of religion and politics and the discourse of civil religion are both based on the narrow definition of politics, which premises power-dynamic and power-relation. In this understanding, the player, whether church or state, is evaluated mainly for its function to serve the established system. Religion dominates, struggles, and retracts in the system. This understanding accordingly does not allow a positive imagination of civil religion particularly in sustaining a stable society. A typical approach by both classical and contemporary thinkers has been focused on *stripping* the soul of religion while utilizing only the flesh, which is the symbolic form, simply to identify or artificially conceptualize the unifying force of society. Rousseau brought up a new conversation topic regarding a church-state relation suitable for his imagination of civil religion. Bellah discovered a model suitable for Rousseau's imagination. None of these attempts, however, covers where real and ordinary religion can stand in the conversation. What caused the general tendency of the classical theorists to exclude religion from politics was the lack of evidence at the time that could make them think otherwise.

Contemporary society, which is highly multi-religious and multi-cultural, can defy this traditional way of thinking. Growing interfaith engagement worldwide can contribute to

54) Senbeto, "One stone, two birds," 555-556.

reshaping our conversation of civil religion. In the new political environment does religion not necessarily play a categorical role of the traditional power-dynamic. There are countless ways for religion to wield power and influence society, not joining the visible church and state power-struggle. More importantly, religious communities collaborate and cooperate rather than dominate in society, in constructing the *nomos* of society. No single religion can claim ownership over a newly emerging set of symbolic forms and values through interfaith engagement and experience. While the consideration of interfaith engagement keeps intact the essence of religion, which is the confessional and institutional base, it does project a possibility of the formation of transcendent values such as coexistence, tolerance, dignity, human rights, justice and environmental protection, which are able to embrace the more complex nature of the new society and to sustain its solidarity. Borrowing Berger's words, interfaith civil religion provides a *great nomos* for our society. A variety of interfaith experiences have been creating and fostering a new consciousness, which is spiritual, moral, and political. It has been translated into social norms, law, policies, and invisible cultural pressure or force in various political communities. The only problem is that the socio-political impact of interfaith engagement has not yet gripped the attention of many inquisitive minds, so it has not been identified, conceptualized and intellectually entertained enough.

Key Words: civil religion, interfaith dialogue, interfaith engagement, interreligious dialogue, religion and politics, religion and politics in Korea

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Abstract

Re-envisioning Civil Religion in a Collaborative, Constructive Model

Lee, Song Chong (Seoul National Univ.)

In this paper, I argue that the mainstream discussion of religion and politics and the dominant discourse of civil religion are both based on the narrow definition of politics, which premises power-dynamic and power-relation. However, growing worldwide interfaith engagement can contribute to reshaping our conversation particularly of civil religion. In the new political environment religion does not necessarily play the categorical role of the traditional power-dynamic. A variety of interfaith experiences have been creating and fostering a new consciousness, which is spiritual, moral, and political. It has been translated into social norms, law, policies, and invisible cultural pressure or force in various political communities. I argue that the new model, which I call *interfaith civil religion*, would not put religion in a position where its inherent qualities are given up as shown in the classic models and where the significant contributions that religious communities are currently making are overlooked. And this concept of interfaith civil religion would be my response to Robert Bellah's diffident anticipation of a new level of civil religion coming out of a society larger than the state, which he expressed by saying "flickering flame of the United Nations." There is no absolute trans-national sovereignty at present. However, my discussion will demonstrate a possible groundwork to conceptualize a trans-national symbolic system, which Bellah imagined as "the civil religion of the world."

Key Words: civil religion, interfaith dialogue, interfaith engagement, interreligious dialogue, religion and politics, religion and politics in Korea