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Civil Religion and Christian Normativity: Heteronormative Mobilization in Korean Protestantism and a Process-Theological Response

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Abstract

This study critically examines the civil–religious influence of Korean conservative Protestantism, which mobilizes heteronormative strategies to oppose anti-discrimination and family rights legislation, through the lens of Christian normativity. These movements justify heteronormative values by appealing to the immutability of the “creation order” in Genesis. Yet such literalist interpretations disregard contemporary findings in evolutionary biology and animal behavior that document same-sex phenomena across species, thereby framing creation and evolution in rigid opposition. Imported from American fundamentalism, “creation science” has further fueled an anti-intellectual public sentiment that naturalizes heterosexuality as divine law. The absolutism of the creation order and special revelation exposes deep theological contradictions when confronted with the existence of diverse sexual and gender identities. In response, this study turns to process theology, which reimagines creation as open-ended, dynamic, and co-creative. Engaging Catherine Keller’s apophatic theology to reopen theological space for sexual minorities, it further develops Justin Sabia-Tanis’s interpretation of transgender transformation as a process of co-evolution, in dialogue with Donna Haraway’s notion of cyborg hybridity. Moreover, drawing on John B. Cobb Jr.’s “persuasive political theology,” it argues that participation in divine co-creation must be expanded into the socio-political sphere. Ultimately, this study seeks to resist anti-intellectualism and advocate for a transformative Christian civil religion in Korea—one oriented toward justice, inclusion, and continual co-creation.

Keywords: Korean Protestantism; civil religion; Christian normativity; heteronormative mobilization; creation science; process theology; persuasive political theology



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1. Introduction

Recently, Korean cultural content has drawn significant attention as it stands at the center of transnational cultural flows. According to the Oxford Research Encyclopedia’s explanation of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), it provides hybrid cultural content in the fields of media and popular culture, forming a dynamic intersection where globalization, localization, and glocalization converge (Ju 2018). However, unlike cultural hybridity as a marketable commodity, Korean culture as a lived reality still faces sharp conflicts between modernity and tradition.

In particular, disputes related to gender, sexual orientation, and family structure are increasing social costs. Since 2015 and continuing through to its most recent 2023 report,

the United Nations Human Rights Committee has consistently recommended that the South Korean government enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. (United Nations Human Rights Committee 2015, 2023). However, a legal human rights framework in line with international human rights standards has yet to be established. Of the 11 bills introduced in the National Assembly since 2007, not a single one has been enacted (K. J. Lee 2025, p. 371). Likewise, the Marriage Equality Act, the Civil Partnership Act, and the Support for Non-Marital Births Act—which were submitted to the National Assembly in 2023 to guarantee diverse citizens’ rights to form families and to realize reproductive justice¹—were ultimately discarded without deliberation.

These legislative failures can hardly be said to reflect the will of the majority. According to the 2022 Perception Survey on Equality conducted by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 67.2% of respondents supported the enactment of an anti-discrimination law (National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) 2022). Sexual minorities are more positively represented in popular culture, and alternative family structures are gaining acceptance.

One of the major reasons for the delay in legislation is the organized opposition of certain Protestant groups. Although Protestants comprise only 19.66% of the total population (Statistics Korea 2015)², some among them exert strong mobilizing power to pressure the National Assembly and the government into abandoning efforts to revise laws related to gender and family. This situation goes beyond mere issues of religious morality or doctrine. It is closely connected to the civil-religious history in which conservative Protestantism has sought to secure political dominance in the Republic of Korea, a nation constitutionally founded on the separation of church and state.³

This study begins from a critical awareness of the paradox that Protestantism—whose core ethic is to teach “love” and “reconciliation”—has in contemporary Korea become the most politically influential force advancing homophobia. Previous theological studies have primarily sought to explain the socio-cultural background of biblical prohibitions against same-sex relations or to expose the theological and spiritual irrationality of homophobia through queer-affirming interpretations of Scripture. In contrast, this study focuses on the situation in which the anti-LGBTQ political movements of Korean Protestantism operate as a civil-religious structure within society.

That said, the notion of “civil religion” presupposed in this paper diverges from Bellah’s (1967) definition. Bellah referred to the structure of religious symbols, values, and rituals that transcend specific denominations and provide solidarity for civil society and orientation for political ethics. However, in this study, the concept primarily designates political-religious practices by which a particular religious group extends its normativity into a state governance ideology and monopolizes sociopolitical power. This corresponds to the negative aspect of civil religion that Bellah himself had recognized as dangerous—namely, “an American-Legion type of ideology that fuses God, country, and flag” (Bellah 1967, p. 14).

During South Korea’s rapid economic development, Korean Protestantism provided theological discourses of “diligence” and “prosperity” that facilitated the entrenchment of Western capitalist systems. In doing so, it established itself as a civil religion aligned with the state-driven industrialism of the military dictatorships. In this process, the family, the church, and the nation—organized around heterosexual and patriarchal orders—have reigned as a trinitarian entity for “prosperity.” In particular, the routine religious practices repeatedly performed within the family and the church were inseparable from the parodying of typical heterosexual identities and gender roles, which ultimately undergirded the hetero-patriarchal nationalism of modern and contemporary Korean history. Such a

conservative civil–religious ideology may also be understood as a product of the fundamentalism and anti-intellectualism deeply rooted in the Korean church.⁴

This study understands these practices—drawing on Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity—as forms of *Christian gender performativity*. Furthermore, the term *Christian normativity* is used to denote the entire heteronormative and patriarchal value system reproduced through such Christian performativity.⁵ Although Butler’s theory of performativity (Butler 1990) will not be discussed in detail, her insight into the social constructedness of normativity and the mechanisms of its repetitive representation provides an essential conceptual framework for this study’s critical examination of *Christian normativity*.

Accordingly, the ultimate aim of this research is to deconstruct the “heterosexual normativity” that Korean conservative Protestantism has placed at the forefront of its political engagement while seizing hegemony within right-wing politics—an ideology that this paper analyzes as a product of biblical literalism and anti-scientific belief—and to do so from the perspective of process theology, which seeks integrative dialogue with contemporary sciences.

Specifically, first, this study critically investigates how the anti-homosexual political movement grounded in *Christian normativity* has gained power through its conjunction with the popularization of creation science. Second, it elucidates, through the processive and co-evolutionary understanding of creation in process theology, the theological legitimacy of existences and acts that have been excluded by heteronormative standards. Through this analysis, the study aims to offer a theological foundation for reimagining the social and political responsibilities that Protestantism, as a civil religion, must now newly assume within Korean society.

Before closing this introduction, a brief clarification on the standpoint of this study is necessary. Within Korean Protestant conservatism, there remain a few minority voices calling for a more tolerant attitude toward sexual minorities and discouraging hate-driven attacks against them. Such opinions have recently been voiced at the general assemblies of some denominations.⁶ Nevertheless, this study proceeds from the recognition that the ethics of tolerance alone cannot secure equal civil rights and legal protection for all individuals, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. In this regard, the political or doctrinal partiality inherent in this study should be understood not only as its limitation but also as the distinctive feature that defines its standpoint.

2. Defending Christian Normativity Through Antagonism Toward Science

2.1. Creation Order and Anti-Scientific Theology

To gain a deeper understanding of the political mobilization of Korean conservative Protestantism, it is first necessary to examine how conservative Protestants’ understanding of the natural order has become detached from the development of modern science and remains confined to a premodern framework.

The creeds and theologies of churches—despite church history proving the impossibility of complete agreement—have widely shared the language and confession of creation–fall–redemption. The issue lies in how this confession is interpreted. Today, defenders of Christian normativity have narrowed the interpretation of creation, fall, and redemption into a binary opposition: “heterosexuality” versus “homosexuality,” “morality” versus “immorality,” “health” versus “disease,” “normality” versus “abnormality,” and, ultimately, “good” versus “evil.”

The following excerpt from a column by Reverend Joseph Joo, the head of the Anti-Homosexuality Christian Citizens’ Solidarity—one of the most active anti-LGBTQ organizations formed in Korea in 2015—illustrates the typical discourse of these “defenders

of Christian normativity,” who interpret the Genesis creation narrative as revealing the absolute principle of heterosexual normativity:

Why did the omnipotent God, at the beginning of creation, distinguish living beings as male and female, forming Adam first and then Eve from his rib? If God had intended humanity for same-sex union, would He not have created another Adam from Adam’s rib, or endowed Adam with the capacity for reproduction himself? Scripture repeatedly declares God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply.” Had God desired humanity to exist as homosexual, He would surely have created them so from the start. Why, then, did He create Adam male and Eve female? To ignore these questions while selectively distorting Scripture is mere sophistry and arbitrary interpretation, no more than an attempt to mock the Bible. (Joo 2016)

This shows that these defenders rely entirely on a literalist interpretation of Genesis 1–2 to justify gender-binary sexual relations as “Christian normativity,” directly opposing the accumulated scholarly achievements of biblical criticism.

However, the issue addressed in this study is not biblical literalism itself but the antagonistic posture toward science that arises from it. In fact, this posture is clearly a very old and persistent problem in Christian history. Nicholas Spencer argues that theology’s antagonism toward science dates back to the Condemnation of 1277, which occurred after Islamic science and Aristotelian natural theology entered Western society (Spencer 2023, pp. 138–46).

Yet, in the twenty-first century, continuing to cling to this posture is clearly anachronistic. Even as theologians, it is difficult to deny that we live in a scientific age, and in this era, it is in fact the churches and theologies that have lost moral authority that find themselves constrained. Wolfhart Pannenberg candidly judged, “According to public opinion in our Western culture, this war was lost by Christian apologetics,” and he admitted that among these apologetics, there had also been instances of “bad apologetics” that fought strongly against the principles of chance and evolution in natural processes (Pannenberg 1981, p. 3).

Defenders of Christian normativity also adopt an antagonistic stance toward science through a literalist reading of Genesis—what might be called a “bad apologetic.” This stance imposes on science the outdated theological concept of creation order, which presupposes a hierarchical ontological and moral status between humans and animals, insisting that science must accept it as an absolute, unchanging law of nature. Science that deviates from this order—that is, science that explores the principles of chance and uncertainty—is rejected as “secularized” (Jung 2023, pp. 319–24).

However, if their claim were true, then those who violate the creation order would not be limited to humans. Since the original publication of Bruce Bagemihl’s *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* in 1999 (cited here as the 2023 Korean edition; Bagemihl 2023, p. 17) which cataloged over 300 species engaging in homosexual behaviors, research in behavioral ecology and evolutionary biology has expanded rapidly, observing same-sex sexual behavior across a wide range of animal species. Notably, the 2009 review by Bailey and Zuk, “Same-Sex Sexual Behavior and Evolution”, summarized the achievements across the biological sciences as follows:

The variety and ubiquity of same-sex sexual behavior in animals is impressive; many thousands of instances of same-sex courtship, pair bonding and copulation have been observed in a wide range of species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, mollusks and nematodes. (Bailey et al. 2009, p. 439)

More recent biological studies, largely led by phylogenetic approaches, explore the hypothesis that same-sex sexual behavior emerged simultaneously with opposite-sex behavior and constituted an ancestral condition of sexually reproducing animals (Gómez et al. 2023, p. 1). Theories estimating the causes of animal homosexual behavior have become more sophisticated, and the accumulation of objective observational data on animals' sexual behaviors to support these theories has also advanced significantly.

Nevertheless, defenders of Christian normativity obsessively focus their attacks on human homosexuals as “violators of creation order,” while deliberately avoiding reference to the extensive data on same-sex sexual behavior in non-human animals that contemporary biology has irreverently accumulated. More precisely, they go to great lengths to avoid mentioning animal homosexual behavior at all.

Why, then, do defenders of Christian normativity avoid mentioning the biological data on animal homosexuality? Why do they not equally denounce same-sex behavior in animals? This is because the worldview of “creation order,” which lies at the very core of their strategy to defend Christian normativity, is itself an anthropocentric worldview that places “human creation” at the pinnacle of all creation. As briefly noted earlier, this worldview—based on a literal interpretation of Genesis—strongly presupposes that only humans, as rational beings created in the image of God, possess not only freedom but also the unique capacity to corrupt that freedom through reason. From this perspective, human homosexuality is logically developed as an ethical degradation arising from the excess of sexual freedom and as an ontological debasement resulting from it.

Yet, in the same logic, the same-sex sexual behaviors of animals—understood in the pre-Darwinian sense as “animals” not including humans—are entirely inexplicable for defenders of Christian normativity. This is because, within the worldview of “creation order,” animals are beings without the “freedom” that enables them to violate the creation order—that is, inferior creatures not even granted the grace to sin.

From this background, it becomes understandable why defenders of Christian normativity, though they choose “science” as their strategic opponent, remain fixated on the nineteenth-century Darwinian theory of evolution rather than engaging with twenty-first-century behavioral ecology or evolutionary biology. Acknowledging the evidence of non-human animal homosexuality demonstrated by contemporary biology would mean relinquishing the human-centered creation order that has been the core basis for ontologically and ethically defining human homosexuality as abnormal. This would result in the theological and logical collapse of the very foundation of Christian normativity.

Contemporary biology, through the development of neo-Darwinism, has greatly expanded its scope by explaining evolution in terms of changes in populations and gene pools following the discovery of genes. The emergence of ethology, which directly observes animal ecology and studies the development of social behavior and morality within animal groups, has also brought about a major shift in the anthropocentric paradigm of biology.

By contrast, the classical Darwinian theory of evolution, which defenders of Christian normativity still regard as their primary target of attack, has largely been displaced from the center of contemporary life-science discourse; where it remains, its influence is extremely limited. In other words, their attacks are far behind the actual front lines of scientific debate. This attitude isolates them not only from twenty-first-century natural science but also from the broader contemporary intellectual world that has advanced through its integration with science. In particular, it makes any engagement with innovative currents of thought—represented by new materialism and posthumanism—virtually impossible.

Yet they appear untroubled by this isolation, convinced that all scientific research and interdisciplinary scholarship rejecting creationism constitute knowledge enslaved to “humanism” and “secularism”—that is, false knowledge hostile to God.

Contemporary scholarship, meanwhile, despite its occasional secular or atheistic orientation, has begun to confront the limits of anthropocentrism with intellectual humility. In response to the crises of humanity and the global ecosystem brought about by climate change, scholars are developing ethical frameworks that reexamine the hierarchy between humans and nonhuman animals, recognizing both as interdependent participants within a shared planetary system.

Nevertheless, defenders of Christian normativity maintain the hierarchical creation order centered on humans as the “lords of all creation.” To secure this position, they throw all their energy into finding ontological and/or moral fault in both non-human animals and LGBTQ+ people. This betrays Christianity’s sublime ethic of opening love to all other beings because of the Other that is God. In other words, it pushes Christianity into moral bankruptcy and exposes the most negative aspects of its functioning as a civil religion.

2.2. *The Rise in Creation Science and the Reappropriation of Scientific Authority*

Defenders of Christian normativity ground the justification for heteronormativity in the “immutability of creation order,” claiming that all life, including humanity, was determined to be heterosexual. At first glance, this immutability may appear to be defended on the basis of divine attributes—omnipotence and omniscience—established through medieval theology represented by Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas.

However, it is not difficult to notice that they do not explicitly draw their doctrine of God from medieval theology. This is because the objects of their opposition clearly include not only homosexuality, communism, and religious pluralism but also Roman Catholic theology. The Christian Council of Korea (CCK), one of the main federations of evangelical and fundamentalist churches in Korea, and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), with which some of them are affiliated, classify Catholicism as a “mission field” religion and strictly guard against any rapprochement with Catholic theology or the Catholic Church as religious pluralism (K. Song 2024; C. I. Jang 2024).

What is clear is that their theology proper is directly indebted to the concept of God introduced by American creation science, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, Korea’s anti-homosexual Protestant organizations have consistently received a stream of “scientific legitimacy” (which is, in reality, pseudo-science) for their anti-homosexual campaigns through collaboration with creation scientists.

How, then, do Korea’s anti-homosexual Protestant movements justify heteronormativity on the basis of the God-concept of creation science—that is, an absolute being who created the world according to the timeline, species, and sexual distinctions recorded in Genesis 1?

To answer this, it is necessary to understand the early missions of Korean Protestantism and its relationship with American churches. These missions began at the end of the nineteenth century, led primarily by North American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries. The vast majority of these missionaries upheld the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and regarded European higher criticism and liberal theology as heresy. Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming majority of early Korean Protestants inherited their positions. This situation differed from that of most evangelical churches in the United States and Britain, which, until the 1920s, had a certain degree of tolerance toward evangelical liberals (Hwang 2016, p. 2).

After World War I, the lingering effects of the American economic depression led to divisions within American evangelical Protestantism, as fundamentalists and modernists clashed. Ultimately, the dominant influence of fundamentalism took control of both church and politics. Fundamentalist churches, in turn, came to frame evolution as

atheism contrary to the Bible and sought to insert creationism into the public education curriculum, revealing their civil–religious ambition.

American public education, which had become a battleground between atheism and creationism, appeared to tilt in favor of creationism after its victory in the 1925 Scopes Trial. Yet before long, mainstream scientists—empowered by the scientific race with the Soviet Union—regained control over institutional bodies, and creationism was excluded from the mainstream of American science (Numbers 1987, p. 146; Kim 2009, pp. 356–57).

The “creation science” that this study focuses on was the new tactical weapon advanced by American fundamentalist churches in the 1970s in order to escape the crisis faced by creationism in the late 1920s and to re-enter public education. Creation science sought to move beyond the limitations of creationism, which had remained a doctrinal discourse, by adopting a scientific format that could stand against evolution. It originated in the young-earth creationism presented by Henry R. Morris, who, together with John C. Whitcomb, published *The Genesis Flood* in 1963. Morris claimed that this book scientifically proved the literal interpretation of Genesis. However, Eugenie C. Scott criticizes that, as the title of this book suggests, it not only asserts the separate creation of all species, including humans, but also claims the historicity of Noah’s Flood, thereby blocking its entry into the mainstream scientific community (Scott 1997, pp. 268, 276).

Morris and a small group of supporters organized the Creation Research Society (CRS) in 1963, published a quarterly journal, and emulated the collective scholarly activities of contemporary scientists (Numbers 1987, pp. 151–52). In the early 1970s, they established the Creation Science Research Center (CSRC) and the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), devoting all their energy to popularizing scientific creationism. According to Ronald L. Numbers, the efforts of creation scientists began to bear fruit in the 1980s, as the influence of creationism among evangelical Christians increased significantly compared to previous decades (Numbers 1987, pp. 156–57).

However, after the 1987 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Edwards v. Aguillard* ruled that creation science was not science, it disappeared completely from public education in the United States. This ruling is widely regarded as officially confirming the pseudo-scientific nature of creation science. Nevertheless, according to Numbers, creation science spread worldwide through translations of Morris’s books and became an “international phenomenon” in the 1980s (Numbers 1987, p. 157). Notably, Korea has “emerged as *the* creationist power house, propagating the message at home and abroad” (Numbers 2006, p. 418).

It is important to note that the Korean church did not focus on anti-evolution campaigns from the beginning. While it cannot be denied that Korean Protestantism was deeply influenced by American evangelical missions and fundamentalist faith, under Japanese colonial rule, it concentrated its efforts on supplying nationalism, and under the developmental dictatorship, it concentrated on supplying statism as a civil religion. In other words, it was not in a situation to be greatly influenced by the anti-evolution campaigns that had been the hottest issue in American Protestantism since the 1920s (H. W. Park 2021, pp. 2–3).

According to Hyung Wook Park, by the 1980s, some conservative pastors and a small number of scientists within the Korean Protestant church distanced themselves from the storm of the democratization movement and sought a “new mission” that aligned them with a freer capitalist system. That mission was realized through the importation of creation science (H. W. Park 2021, p. 13). These individuals copied the strategies of American creation scientists and founded the Korean Association for Creation Research (KACR) in 1981. Through savvy use of cultural education, broadcasting, and other business initiatives, they widely disseminated creation science throughout Korean society.

Unlike in the United States, where creation scientists could not enter the mainstream scientific establishment, these individuals—though not numerically a majority—leveraged the Protestant background that had monopolized elite power in academia, politics, and the economy since the founding of the Republic of Korea. This allowed them to promote creation science through national projects, national university research institutes, public broadcasting, and even amusement parks. Most Korean creation scientists were engineers who had studied in the United States, which allowed them access to key positions related to national science policy or university education that prioritized engineering for the sake of economic development (Kim 2009, pp. 366–70).

Like their American counterparts, they also attempted to introduce creation science into public education and sought to influence the production of biology textbooks in order to obstruct the teaching of evolution (S. B. Park 2012). Fortunately, these efforts did not succeed. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that, overall, serious education on evolution in Korean biology curricula (not only in elementary, middle, and high schools but also in universities and graduate schools) remains extremely limited (S. B. Park 2012).

This limited approach to evolution education is closely linked to an EBS (Educational Broadcasting System) survey from 2009, which found that approximately one-third of Korean respondents denied the theory of evolution and around 60% supported including both creation science and evolutionary theory in school education (S.-Y. Song 2018, p. 29).

This context makes it clear that, although creation science was a failed strategy of American fundamentalist churches, in the Korean church—which has a high degree of intellectual and political dependence on American conservative Protestantism—its influence cannot be easily dismissed. Korean conservative Protestantism has effectively used this anti-scientific strategy to strengthen heteronormativity while reproducing its political and economic power as a civil religion. As a result, external enemies have been “created”, namely, sexual minorities stigmatized as groups that violate the creation order. Today, not a few Korean churches regard the obstruction and suppression of these groups’ movements for legislative rights as a core mission of defending evangelism.

3. A Critical Analysis and Alternative from Process Theology

The anti-homosexual movement within Korean Protestantism justifies itself based on the concept of the “creation order,” which assumes heterosexual normativity as an immutable and completed order. In particular, the literalist interpretation of Genesis gained scientific credibility through creation science, providing the decisive momentum for the expansion of power within the church. However, the proponents of this ideology did not limit the defense of heterosexual normativity to the boundaries of the church or denomination.

They have actively opposed progressive legislation on gender equality and family diversity—measures required by the maturation of civic consciousness—through political activities aimed at maintaining the heteronormative and patriarchal legal structure of the modern state, thereby seizing the hegemony within right-wing politics. In the process, the constitutional principle guaranteeing the separation of church and state has been severely compromised, and Korean civil society, once a space of long-standing religious pluralism, has increasingly transformed into a site of ideological and cultural conflict. Naturally, anti-Christian sentiment within civil society has reached its peak.

However, the political slogan “Oppose Homosexuality,” produced based on the concept of the “creation order,” is subject to logical criticism for its fundamental claim that it cannot “oppose existence.” Yet, the greater issue lies in the fact that, from the perspective of traditional theology, it logically undermines the two attributes of the Creator—omnipotence and omniscience—which have been defended within Christian doctrine. This is because it implies that the Creator has made beings who fall short of His perfect

order or who are “incorrectly” created. To use Y. Fehige’s term, it encounters the difficult problem of “intrinsic disorder.” In other words, it falls into the contradiction of claiming that God creates homosexuals as such (God creates homosexuals as such), yet their sexual behavior is morally wrong (Fehige 2013, p. 44). For this reason, defenders of heterosexual normativity within Protestantism have chosen to avoid bringing the issue of homosexuality into the realm of theology or natural theology, instead focusing on attacking the morality of sexual minorities and strengthening political influence to impose legal intolerance.

Ironically, however, the traditional theology and natural theology based on the concept of a Creator who creates a perfect and unchanging order also become logically trapped when attempting to provide a theological counter-discourse to protect sexual minorities from moral and legal attacks. As long as the concepts of omnipotence and omniscience are upheld, they cannot escape the aporetic impasse of theodicy, asking, “Why did you create such beings?” and “Why did you allow such states to exist?” This study aims to find a way out of this old impasse by exploring the legitimacy and dignity of the existence and actions of sexual minorities from the perspective of process theology.

Fortunately, contemporary process theology offers an entirely new understanding of both the “Creator” and “creation,” which is essential for the theological interpretation of the existence and agency of sexual minorities. Unlike creation science, which rejects the achievements of modern scientific cosmology and evolutionary biology and seeks to prove the creation narratives scientifically from a literalist standpoint, process theology, through integrative engagement with contemporary science, explains the ecological and behavioral variations arising from environmental adaptation, as well as the processes of species differentiation—namely, “evolution”—as the ongoing and unceasing “open process of creation,” as follows.

Each stage of the evolutionary process represents an increase in the divinely given possibilities for value that are actualized. The present builds upon the past but advances beyond the past to the degree to which it responds to the divine impulses. This advance is experienced as intrinsically good, and it also provides the condition for an even rich enjoyment of existence in the future. (Cobb and Griffin 1976, p. 67)

The greatest appeal of process theology lies in its departure from the concept of a Creator who completed creation alone on the basis of omnipotence and omniscience. Instead, it explains God as one who brings creation into gradual realization not through coercive power but through persuasive power. The relational concept of “persuasive power” presupposes a process-theological providence that invites creatures—the objects of persuasion—into co-evolution. Accordingly, God is understood as one who patiently awaits the response of creatures to this divine invitation, revealing the holiness of humility. The process-theological understanding of creation proposed by Cobb and Griffin is further developed by Catherine Keller as follows:

Contrary then to any vision of a linear designer-universe, the creation is not portrayed in Genesis as God’s solo-performance. One can only read there a process of cosmic collaboration. Not a thing-like creation but a complex interactive process is called forth: we may call it the genesis collective. (...)

The creation called forth in genesis is a kosmos, in the Greek sense of a decorative order. But unlike classical, symmetrical aesthetic, this kosmos unfolds an art of flows, waves, disruptions, and surprise. A disciplined improvisation is called forth in creatures—at great risk. (Keller 2008a, p. 62)

Keller explains that creation is not God’s solitary act of “imposing order” but a cosmic process of cooperation in which the participation and freedom of creatures are open. This

open process entails the risk of change—yet such risk, in itself, is not evil but signifies the unexpected—and it is precisely at this point that new possibilities emerge. The process-theological Creator does not fear the risk of change but waits for it and anticipates it.

What is crucial in this study is that, through this overturning of perspective on creation, Keller establishes a foundational theological understanding that enables the affirmation of the existence and agency of sexual minorities—beings excluded from the concept of the “creation order” derived from a narrow literal interpretation of Genesis 1–2. Once Genesis 1–2 is no longer viewed as a story of “completed creation,” and when the long circle of continuing creation beyond the first Sabbath is discovered, she becomes ready to begin a new theological discourse capable of explaining the “unsaid” beings within that brief narrative—without treating them as ontologically inferior or morally corrupt.

In her 2008 article “The Apophasis of Gender: A Fourfold Unsayings of Feminist Theology”, Keller explores a feminist theological path built upon process theology while also discovering a methodological way of “speaking” about those beings who could not be spoken of within the long tradition of theology. What she rediscovers among the ancient theological relics is the “negative theology” of the early Renaissance theologian Nicholas of Cusa. According to her, “he is helping me currently to develop a theology of the fold, indeed to unfold the language of negativity and of the deconstructive infinite vis-a-vis cosmology and panentheism, matters which exceed the present assignment but pertain at a profound level to ecofeminist relationalism and the aporetics of pluralism” (Keller 2008b, p. 909).

It is important to note that neither Cusa nor Keller uses the meaning of negativity to signify the negation of “being” or nonexistence. Cusa’s negative theology acknowledges all the explanations, interpretations, and definitions of God provided by traditional affirmative theology, while simultaneously speaking of God’s unsaying—in the sense that God cannot be fully contained within the linguistic definitions of human reason. He writes, “And so, the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature” (Cusa 1981, p. 84).

Hence, Cusa’s negative theology does not lapse into agnosticism; rather, it signifies an epistemological humility before God that both expands human understanding and recognizes its limits. For this reason, his theology does not descend into despair or confusion but moves toward a posture of waiting for what has been unsaid—an openness to mystery.

Keller creatively connects Cusa’s mystical negativity with Derrida’s modern deconstruction, emphasizing that there can exist beings that cannot be explained by any literal record or discourse ever given to humanity. The diverse women unspeakable within the patriarchal tradition of theology, the many races unspoken within Western white theology, the queer individuals stigmatized as problematic within heteronormative theology, and, encompassing all of these, yet exceeding them—the multiplicity of beings that cannot be fully accounted for—are what she describes through the concept of a fourfold unsaying.

However, it must be noted that there are two opposing kinds of “unspeakability.” In the diverse discourses—everyday, academic, and political—produced by traditional affirmative theology within the church and the world, the gender, orientations, and sexual practices of those who do not belong to white, male, heterosexual identity have been treated as “a kind of unspeakability from beneath, the unspeakable of the shamed and the shameless, the abject” (Keller 2008b, p. 912). Naturally, any “speech about” or “speech by” such beings was entirely prohibited in the public sphere.

Keller, however, drawing on Cusa’s concept of “learned ignorance,” emphasizes that, just as God—the “mystery of being” who cannot be completely defined or known even through all the languages ever created or spoken by humankind—so too must we acknowl-

edge the existence of “mysterious beings” that have emerged within the evolutionary process of creation. She explains that these are nothing less than “the unspeakable excess of the divine” (Keller 2008b, p. 912).

She also adds this remark: “Mystery is not mystification—though it is often invoked to silence questions. The wall of impossibility is an invitation to enter, not a prohibition against critical thought” (Keller 2008b, p. 916). In other words, the mystery of the unsaying does not sink into silence and renounce further speech; rather, it continually reveals itself indirectly as critique of what has already been said. In this sense, following Trinh Minh-ha, she calls the negation of gender “critical non-knowingness” (Keller 2008b, p. 927).

Keller’s apophatic theology of mystery succeeds in creating within theology a place of respect for the existence of sexual minorities by criticizing the ignorance of affirmative theology that has produced knowledge erasing their being. However, from the standpoint of sexual minorities themselves, apophatic discourse—despite its resistance to mystification—ultimately leaves them in the realm of the non-verbal and thus fails to provide the linguistic tools necessary to enter the public arena of political struggle for the rights of everyday life.

Precisely because of this limitation, Keller herself, in her 2013 essay “And Truth—So Manifold!: Transfeminist Entanglement”, proposes a transfeminist version of feminist theology (Keller 2013, p. 78). In this essay, she argues that beings who remain unnamed due to the closure of revelation can be liberated through an excess of wisdom, and she attempts to present a theological model of “polydoxy,” or plural orthodoxy, according to three criteria—relation, mystery, and multiplicity (Keller 2013, p. 78). Yet, as she herself admits, as a white female ally theologian, she could elevate the “ontological and epistemological mysteriousness” of sexual minorities and open a space to listen to their voices, but she could not speak on their behalf.

This limitation reveals the inevitability of a theology of the subjects themselves. Justin Sabia-Tanis, who came out as a transgender person, presents the process of understanding his own “becoming” as a queer Christian as a co-evolution of risk, thereby suggesting a transition from mystical apophatic theology to innovative affirmative theology. In particular, unlike Judith Butler, who in *Gender Trouble* analyzed the structure of socialization into heteronormative gender norms through performative parody, Sabia-Tanis reflects on the sacred responsibility of “self-becoming” that breaks through the oppression of gender socialization on the basis of the process-theological concept of creation, and he describes the distinctive way of life of a transgender Christian as follows:

“We are called to be artisans of our own lives and bodies. We should take responsibility for our own continued creation, both the development of our inner selves and our outer bodies. As trans people, we should take seriously the task of creating for ourselves the lives to which we feel called and compelled. We are shape shifters, finding ways to move from one way of being to another; some of us do this over and over again while others change once. When we see this process as sacred, we can claim our places as artists cooperating with God in creating the developing, changing person that we are and that we are becoming.” (Sabia-Tanis 2003, p. 182)

Sabia-Tanis explains the process of transition to a transgender male not as remaining in the first form created by God, but as an artistic process in which transformation into a second form—and even further, repeated transformations thereafter—are realized in cooperation with God. Through such transformation, he argues, transgender persons bear responsibility not only for the re-formation of the body but also for the continual creation of the inner self. This mode of expression elevates intersex and transsexual persons—who, within the framework of traditional theology and natural theology, could only be understood as ontologically or morally deficient beings—to co-creators with God, and it demon-

strates the possibility for sexual minorities themselves to move forward as subjects who interpret and articulate their own existence.

In this respect, Sabia-Tanis does not remain in the position of refuge within mystery that Keller prepared for sexual minorities; rather, he presents a new theological direction as an active participant in co-evolution, creating his own place through that participation. In the Afterword of *Toward a Theology of Eros* (2006), Keller appropriates Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "flesh of the world," extending process theology's notion of divine eros into the dimension of an "ecological work of incarnation," and she emphasizes the multiplicity of embodied love (Keller 2006, pp. 370–71). Just as Keller left open the possibilities of ecological interconnection and plural relations through the concept of "incarnation," Sabia-Tanis reads that possibility as a concrete process of creation within the transgender body. From the perspective of sexual minorities, therefore, "self-becoming" can be rearticulated as becoming through the body—that is, as a theological narrative of incarnation.

However, the issue of "technology" employed in the process of transgender transformation, and further, in the reproductive processes of homosexuals, must also be theologically examined. Modern technology is not merely a tool of civilization; as Donna Haraway's concept of the "cyborg" suggests, it operates as a concrete medium of creation that acts directly upon the human body to prolong life and, furthermore, to transform and enhance capacities for gender transition and reproduction. In other words, the evolution of contemporary humanity is not a purely natural process but a creative act realized through artificial technology; in this sense, technology must be reinterpreted as an essential component within the process-theological doctrine of creation.

According to Haraway, "Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (Haraway 2016, p. 11). In this context, "cyborg identity" does not refer simply to robots that replace human labor. It is a subversive metaphor that deconstructs the anthropocentrism and hierarchical dualisms produced by patriarchal and capitalist human civilization. In this sense, sexual minorities who make use of technological assistance also emerge as beings who disrupt and dismantle the boundaries of heterosexual gender divisions and erotic norms—boundaries that have been constructed by dominant orders of exclusion and oppression.

Of course, Haraway's philosophy does not acknowledge the divine relationality or the teleological value orientation of cosmic evolution presupposed in process theology. For her, evolution is a transformative process that unfolds within a thoroughly new-materialist network, and is therefore explicitly posthuman rather than theological. In this regard, this study's theological reinterpretation of Sabia-Tanis's process of transgender bodily reformation through Haraway's notion of "cyborg hybridity" holds significance only as a theological attempt to reexamine its emancipatory effect within the eschatological purpose of divine liberation. In other words, the technological transformation and augmentation of sexual minorities, including transgender persons, disrupt and denounce the boundaries of exclusion and discrimination accumulated through the regressions of previous creative stages, and reinterpret this very "impure hybridity" as a co-agent of the new stage of creation—a "techno-theological creature." This term refers to embodied beings whose transformation through technology participates in the divine process of ongoing creation.

However, such an interpretation should not be misunderstood as an attempt to mythologize technology itself. As Butler critically analyzes in *Undoing Gender* (Butler 2004) through the case of infant intersex surgery, when technology intervenes coercively in another person's body, it easily produces tragic consequences. Therefore, from a process-theological perspective, technology employed in the process of co-evolution cannot in itself

be defined as “good”; it must be carefully governed under the ethical and legal responsibilities of individuals and communities—and, theologically, within the eschatological vision of the Creator.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the fact that access to technology is unequally distributed within structures in which capitalist market logic and militarized technological systems are intertwined. Today, gender transition surgeries, hormone treatments, and the entire spectrum of reproductive-assistance technologies are performed within a medical-industrial system that pursues intensified capital accumulation. Hence, the “continuing creation” of sexual minorities does not remain merely a process of spiritual and bodily co-evolution between God and the individual. This process must necessarily expand into a matter of economic and social justice, since disparities in technological accessibility are closely linked to socioeconomic inequality. Ultimately, any new theological discourse on gender must bear the political task of transforming unjust social structures in order to open a trajectory of more equitable co-evolution.

In other words, the concept of creation in process theology must inevitably extend to and be connected with the social and political dimensions. Monica A. Coleman, however, acknowledges that creative transformation cannot be fully realized within the immediacy of human society. As a result, human beings may experience a sense of powerlessness within the creative process. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the eternity of the creative process, asserting that creative transformation “guides us toward the improvement of the quality of life” and “includes a challenge to the existing order” (Coleman 2008, p. 93). This demonstrates that process theology, rather than simply denying the existing world order, retains a realistic awareness of the powerful influence it exerts upon our lives.

Coleman’s discussion resonates deeply with John B. Cobb Jr.’s “persuasive political theology” proposed in *Process Theology as Political Theology*. Cobb, while affirming the concept of justice in liberation theology that resists institutionalized social and national violence and oppression, nonetheless rejected the use of “revolutionary violence” as a means of victory. He emphasized that for Christianity to become a beneficial civil religion within society, it must practice “persuasion that introduces the possibility of creative synthesis of the new with the old, which is the mark of healthy development or growth” (Cobb 1982, p. 107) in democratic life.

From this perspective, the repeated failure of progressive legislation in the Korean National Assembly calls for creative Protestants, who reflect critically on the harm caused by Christianity’s heteronormative normality, to embody a more active power of persuasion. This persuasive power should not be limited to theology alone but should extend across scientific, legal, cultural, and political dimensions as a force directed toward comprehensive creative transformation.

Therefore, the continual creation, persuasive providence, and persuasive political theology of process thought can consistently contribute to overcoming the reality in which Christian normativity excludes sexual minorities and diverse others within a civil-religious structure, enabling Korean society to incarnate the creative love of Christ in its sociopolitical life.

4. Conclusions

The anti-homosexual movement within Korean Protestantism functions as an ideological manifestation of civil religion, having strengthened its political influence to elevate heterosexual normativity—understood as “Christian normativity”—to the status of a hegemonic moral value for the nation and humanity. Through its vehement opposition to anti-discrimination legislation and the three bills on family diversity, the Korean church has

exercised political influence far exceeding its demographic proportion, emerging as a core force obstructing the advancement of minority human rights.

This study critically reflects on this reality, focusing on the anti-intellectual religious structure deeply rooted in the Korean Protestant anti-homosexual movement. In particular, it examined how the popularization of creation science as a pseudo-scientific discourse since the 1980s provided the ideological soil for the twenty-first-century Protestant anti-LGBTQ movement.

To construct a theological counter-discourse against this anti-scientific intellectualism, this study explored key concepts of process theology. The notions of “ongoing creation” and “co-evolution” in process thought provide a crucial framework for the theological legitimization of the existence and agency of sexual minorities. Keller’s apophatic theology of mystery opened a theological space for the existence and action of sexual minorities that traditional theology could not account for; Tanas, within that space, concretized a theology of the subjects themselves by creating the language of *self-becoming* through bodily transformation. Building upon these, this study further recontextualized Haraway’s new-materialist cyborg concept within a process-theological framework, proposing a new theological interpretation of the hybridities generated by sexual minorities as sources of co-evolutionary creativity.

The intersection of these three perspectives reveals the relational creativeness among God, creatures, and technology, demonstrating that Christians are no longer called to be defenders of a completed order but co-creators participating in the ongoing process of creation. Accordingly, the process-theological alternative advances a theological transition toward “post-normativity,” encompassing issues of sexual minorities, technology, and social justice. This transition opens the path toward the ethical renewal of the faith in creation that contemporary Korean Protestantism must recover.

Consequently, the contribution of this study lies in tracing the anti-scientific structure embedded within the Korean Protestant anti-homosexual movement, thereby exposing the theological and logical poverty of its claim to “Christian normativity.” At the same time, by critiquing the limitations of its doctrine of God and its understanding of the creation order and by reinterpreting the existence of sexual minorities and the legitimacy of their political and legal struggles through the concepts of process theology, this research sought to offer a way for contemporary Christian communities to recover their contemporaneity and theological reflexivity.

Today, some Protestant denominations in Korea not only excommunicate sexual minorities but also discipline or expel their allies under church law. This reflects not only the structural premodernity of Korean Protestantism but also the practical limitations of Korean theology, which, despite its rapid importation of contemporary Western theological trends, remains silent in the face of violence toward minorities and others.

In this reality, the present study, through a new process-theological attempt to affirmatively interpret the entanglement of sexual minorities, theology, and technology, has suggested a foundational possibility for Korean Protestantism to renew its contemporary responsibility. This renewal must take place in solidarity with the international civil society and the ecumenical church.

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Notes

- ¹ The *Marriage Equality Act* is a bill that stipulates the establishment of marriage based on the registration of two individuals, regardless of gender. The *Civil Partnership Act* is a bill that allows two unmarried adults to register as civil partners in order to secure legal rights and social support. Finally, the *Support for Non-Marital Births Act* is a bill that would enable any woman who wishes to become pregnant, regardless of marital status, to receive support for assisted reproductive procedures (Shin 2023).
- ² Every ten years, Statistics Korea includes a survey on religious affiliation within the broader Population and Housing Census. The results of the 2025 survey have not yet been officially published.
- ³ Korea's Protestant heteronormative mobilization is closely linked to the regression of denominational politics. Major denominations such as the *Korean Methodist Church* (Korean Methodist Church (KMC) 2017), the *Presbyterian Church of Korea* (Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK TongHap) 2017), and the *General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in Korea* (General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in Korea (GAPCK) 2017) amended their denominational laws to include provisions disciplining LGBTQ individuals and their "allies" within the church. As a result, it became possible to expel members, revoke clergy credentials, and even bring accusations of heresy. As a result, a sweeping wave of anti-LGBT authoritarianism has emerged within churches—markedly different from the increasing public testimonies of Christian sexual minorities and the changes witnessed in evangelical churches in Europe (Aylen 2024, p. 1).
- ⁴ Korean society has an exceptionally low illiteracy rate and a globally noted intensity of educational competition. In this context, the anti-intellectualism of the Korean church cannot be reduced to a mere lack of intellect; rather, it can be understood as the product of the fundamentalism—centered on biblical inerrancy and doctrinal purity—transmitted by a large number of North American missionaries during the early mission period. Shin Hyung Seong defines the particular character of Korean fundamentalism as "conquest-oriented fundamentalism," noting that the anti-intellectualism of the Korean church has long functioned as a culture-war strategy of faith against modern secular humanism and theological liberalism (Seong 2022). Likewise, Hyung-Chull Jang, in his analysis of the anti-intellectual tendencies of Korean fundamentalism, argues that the modernization of the Korean church unfolded within a dual structure: on one hand, an affinity with the capitalist economic system; on the other, a rejection of the rationality of human reason presupposed by modern scholarship and science. Furthermore, he points out that, within this anti-intellectual context, the Korean church has built a strong front rejecting postmodernity itself. Consequently, the anti-communism of conservative churches after the Korean War extended beyond opposition to communism per se, expanding under the "red-complex" worldview to include liberalism, humanism, modern science, and even postmodernism (H.-C. Jang 2019). The problem is that this anti-intellectualism today operates as a driving force that spreads post-truth discourses of hatred throughout the church and society, targeting feminists, Muslims, Chinese nationals, undocumented migrants, sexual minorities, and human-rights activists for the disabled.
- ⁵ The term *Christian normativity* is drawn from J. M. Lee (2024), who applies Butler's theory of performativity to the context of Korean Protestantism and analyzes the depressive identities produced by religious parody acts.
- ⁶ As one of the largest and most influential denominations leading Korean Protestantism, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (TongHap)—which has traditionally represented a moderate position within the conservative spectrum—declared at its 104th General Assembly in 2019 that "homosexuality is a sin, but we have consistently maintained the stance that homosexuals should not be rejected or hated but embraced with love." Yet the statement continued: "We oppose the government's unilateral decision on policies concerning homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and we urge that concerns about the collapse of sexual ethics and traditional family values be sufficiently reflected" (Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK TongHap) 2019, p. 293). Thus, while the denomination outwardly advocates tolerance, it officially upholds a negative stance toward the legal institutionalization of sexual minority rights. Within such an atmosphere, certain theological studies have emerged that, while presupposing the rejection of homosexuality, call for a redemptive inclusion and pastoral care for homosexual persons (Choi 2022; Ok 2024; Kwon 2022).

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