

# Militarism and Korean Protestant Churches

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## Abstract

*With the idea that it is important to distinguish between institutional mechanisms and informal practices of Protestant militarism, in this article, I examine the relationship between Korean Protestant churches and militarism in two dimensions. Firstly, I focus on institutionalized channels and mechanisms that contribute to militarism's direct infiltration of the church. This includes military chaplaincy, the Christian doctrine of war and peace, and doctrinal anticommunism. Active support for sending Korean troops to assist in a war of aggression and strong opposition to conscientious objector status can be said to be the result of these three factors working together. Secondly, I focus on informal practices that allow and encourage militarism to rule the daily lives and consciousnesses of Protestant believers. These include the spiritual warfare frame, foreign and North Korea missions, and domestic evangelism and church-building.*

**Keywords:** militarism, military chaplaincy, war doctrine, anticommunism, spiritual warfare frame, foreign mission, Korean Protestantism

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In 2001, the weekly magazine *Hankyoreh21* brought the issue of conscientious objection—hardly known to Korean society at that time—into the public sphere for the first time. Without exception, Korean conscientious objectors belonged to two Protestant denominations pursuing pacifism—Jehovah’s Witness and Seventh-day Adventist. South Korean society was greatly shocked to learn from this article that nearly 10,000 conscientious objectors had been imprisoned over the past half-century.

However, response to the proposal to give conscientious objectors an opportunity for alternative services was very diverse. The reaction of religious leaders was generally negative. With the exception of a very few progressive figures and groups, the response of Protestant churches was strong opposition to both conscientious objection and alternative services. Despite the official doctrine that conscientious objectors should be provided with alternative service opportunities, Korean Catholic leaders responded negatively to conscientious objectors, emphasizing the “security situation” in Korea. The response of Buddhist leaders in Korea was close to silence.

In the years since 2001, fierce controversy surrounding the issue has developed in Korea. In this, Protestant leaders have always been the strongest opponents. However, in the course of the debate, public opinion in favor of the introduction of alternative service for conscientious objectors has increased slightly. Some Protestant believers belonging to Protestant mainstream denominations and a few Buddhists and Catholics have also declared conscientious objection. The international community, including the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, also pressured the Korean government to introduce alternative service. Finally, in 2007, the Roh Moo-hyun government decided to introduce an alternative service system in 2009. Catholic and Buddhist leaders quietly accepted this decision, but Protestant leaders, who are overwhelmingly conservative, strongly opposed it. Lee Myung-bak, who was elected president in late 2007, accepted the demands of Protestant leaders and canceled the plan to introduce alternative service. As an elder of a mega-church in the Gangnam district of Seoul, Lee was elected to the presidency relatively easily thanks to the full support of the Protestant churches. On June 28, 2018, when the Constitutional Court issued a historic ruling requiring the introduction of

the alternative service system, conservative Protestant leaders again opposed it.

In 2003, two years after the *Hankyoreh*21 article, South Korean society was again thrown into considerable conflict over the issue of sending South Korean troops to the Iraq war. There had been minor opposition to the dispatch of South Korean troops to the 1991 Gulf War, but this time a massive social movement erupted against such a dispatch. This was the first organized antiwar movement in South Korean history. The Catholic Church of Korea officially declared its position against sending troops, and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), which represented progressive minorities in Korean Protestantism, also expressed its opposition. However, conservative Protestant churches, the absolute majority of Korean Protestantism, actively supported the deployment of South Korean troops.

These two examples illustrate how Korean Protestantism is captivated by a militaristic way of thinking. Why is Korean Protestantism so supportive of war and hostile to pacifism? The answer to this question has important implications not only for Korean churches but also for Korean society more broadly. The impact of militarism on Korean Christianity, and how Korean churches have contributed to such militarism, is a rarely studied subject. Previous studies have only described how major religions in Korea have responded to past wars.

Militarism here refers to ideas, attitudes, and modes of behavior that prioritize strengthening the military and preparing for war, praise the military and military forces, and support a militarized re-organization of society as a whole. More specifically, I use the following five elements or phenomena as indicators of “religious militarism”: (1) a friendly and positive attitude towards war and the military; (2) an emphasis on the importance of national security based on a strong military defense; (3) military-like thinking and organization; (4) possessing a worldview that a serious struggle between good and evil is underway, or is imminent, and the church should play an important role in that conflict; and (5) an exclusivist and triumphalist attitude toward religious others.

This paper will focus on Korean Protestantism. Although conservative

Protestantism is the most important object to study, it is also clear that the extent of militaristic influence goes beyond conservative Protestantism. In research on Protestant militarism, it is important to distinguish between institutional and informal mechanisms. With this in mind, I will analyze the relationship between Protestantism and militarism in two dimensions. Firstly, I will deal with more institutionalized channels and mechanisms that contribute to militarism's direct infiltration of the church. This includes military chaplaincy, the Christian doctrine of war and peace, and doctrinal anticommunism. Secondly, although not institutionalized by official norms or doctrines, there are mechanisms that allow and encourage militarism to rule the daily lives and consciousnesses of believers. These include a spiritual warfare frame, foreign (including North Korea) missions, and domestic evangelism and church-building.

### **Military Chaplaincy**

Korea is one of the earliest non-Western states to adopt military chaplaincy. This institution was introduced into the South Korean military forces in early 1951, during the Korean War. The Korean military chaplaincy has been operated in favor of Christianity, excluding other religions. It was only in 1968 that Buddhism, which was Korea's largest religion in 1951, became eligible to participate in the military chaplaincy. In the absence of all other religions, Protestant and Catholic churches gained vast new believers in the army. The Protestant and Catholic churches were also very successful in acquiring new believers at the South Korean Military Academy. This provided important institutional benefits to Protestantism and Catholicism in the military regimes that governed South Korea for 30 years from the early 1960s.

The military chaplaincy was the most important institutionalized channel through which militarism could penetrate the churches. Military chaplains as morale builders of the army, not as moral advocates or peace educators, produced and spread a military version of Christianity. Military chaplains have also served as military advocates within the church. As

Klausner (1987, 269) points out, military chaplains with long-term military experience tend to “represent the army in the church.” In the same vein, one function of military chaplains is likely to spread the “military version of religion” within the civilian church. In the context of the United States, Harvey Cox (1969) criticized military chaplaincy for promoting “military religion.” In this context, critics of military chaplaincy have presented two major tasks of reform: (1) forming a *demilitarized* chaplaincy by removing militarism from the daily activities of chaplains; and (2) forming an *autonomous* chaplaincy that is relatively free from military control (Lutz 1973, 258).

We need to keep in mind that there are various types of military chaplaincy. According to my typology, depending on the degree of integration into the military organization, we can distinguish between the full integration type, partial integration type, and autonomous type. And depending on the relationship between the church and the military, we can distinguish between the conformist approach, balancing approach, and critical tension approach. Korean military chaplaincy is a good example of the full integration type and the conformist approach. The full integration type is characterized by active and positive identification with the military. In this type, military control over chaplains is very strong, while denominational control over chaplains is relatively weak. In the conformist approach, the military is regarded as a place to pursue and realize the institutional interests of the church, and the military chaplaincy is considered the most effective means for this. At the same time, most wars the state carries out are justified as just or holy war. In the conformist approach, military chaplains tend to become military spokesmen. In short, Korean military chaplaincy is a typical example of *militarized chaplaincy* and belongs to a type which is highly susceptible to strong control and influence by the military (Kang 2017, 158–175).

A comparative analysis with the US military chaplaincy enables a better understanding of its Korean counterpart. The Korean military chaplaincy was modeled after the US military chaplaincy and was launched with the cooperation of American military chaplains (S. G. Kim 1984). In Korean military chaplaincy, the phenomenon of *compressed growth by imitation*

became prominent in the 1950s and 1960s. The United States ended its long journey to “military chaplaincy as a bureaucratized profession” shortly after World War I. It was 1920 when the independent office of Chief of Chaplains was born, which enjoyed a certain bureaucratic autonomy within the US Army (Budd 2002). Those institutional changes that took place in the United States over nearly four centuries—from the colonial period to the beginning of the twentieth century—were largely accomplished in Korea within ten years from the establishment of the military chaplaincy in 1951. As a result, by the end of the 1950s, Korea’s military chaplaincy had become very similar to its American counterpart (Kang 2017, 116–122, 147–157).

If the interaction between the Korean and the US military chaplaincy promoted homogenization in the 1950s and 1960s, it has promoted heterogenization since the 1970s. The military chaplaincy of the United States faced a grave crisis as popular opposition to the Vietnam War intensified. The Vietnam War was regarded by many as an unjust war and there was a growing public opinion that the military chaplaincy that cooperated in this war should be abolished. Faced with this challenge, the leadership of the US military chaplaincy attempted a reform that might be summarized as a transition from morale builder to moral advocator (Loveland 2004). The leaders of the US military chaplaincy broke away from the long tradition of linking military chaplaincy directly with combat power. They gradually reduced the military chaplain’s traditional role as a morale promoter, while broadening its role in moral guidance. At the same time, the focus of its role as morale builder changed to improving the quality of life within the military community. Today, US military chaplains are active as advocates of the human rights of soldiers.

However, today, as before, the Korean military chaplains pursue a positive combination of faith and combat strength. This orientation is concentrated in the notion of *sinang jeollyeokhwa* (making faith a combat power), which became the official motto of Korean military chaplaincy in 1976. The military chaplains have argued that chaplain activities should contribute to spiritual fighting capacity (*jeongsin jeollyeok*). This tendency is more pronounced among senior officers who have long served as military chaplains. This tendency was not limited to Protestantism. Tikhonov (2015)

observes that Korean Buddhist chaplains emphasized the importance of strengthening the spiritual force of the soldier through developing their religious fighting capacity (*sinang jeollyeok*), while embracing the state-protecting Buddhism (*hoguk bulgyo*) tradition. Whatever religion they belong to, the military chaplains of Korea were willing to accept as their mission the strengthening of spiritual fighting capacity through faith.

Additional factors make the military chaplaincy a channel for militarism's penetration of civilian religious organizations. This is related to the so-called "myth of the golden fishing ground." Korean religious leaders and military chaplains regard the military chaplaincy as a chance to acquire new believers. Indeed, military chaplains have had tremendous success in terms of evangelism. They have been leading the Protestant Church's quantitative growth over the last decades in South Korea. In particular, all religions participating in the military chaplaincy acquire most male newcomers in their 20s from the military. The result is the myth of the military as a golden fishing ground for the recruitment of new believers. This myth is shared by top leaders of each religion as well as military chaplains. Leaders of each religion are dedicated supporters and patrons of military chaplains. On behalf of their religions, the military chaplains fiercely compete with their counterparts in other religions. As the myth of the golden fishing ground has grown more powerful, the army has become the evangelical battlefield of military chaplains. In the war of evangelism, church leaders and military chaplains maintain an organic partnership. This close cooperation makes it easy for military values and practices to flow into the church. In terms of cooperation between military chaplains and religious leaders, Protestantism far surpasses Catholicism and Buddhism. Catholic and Buddhist military chaplains often disagree with leaders of their religions, but in Protestantism such conflicts are rare. In order to gain the advantage in the evangelism war, Protestant leaders have endeavored to maintain and, if possible, strengthen their relationships with military elites. In this vein, Protestant leaders in the early 1980s responded positively to programs that the military had planned to increase popular support for the military regime ruling South Korea at the time. Needless to say, military elites have rewarded them with more opportunities for evangelism (Kang

2017, 181–222, 277–284). Through this process, the collective mentality of military elites and religious elites have grown increasingly similar.

There is also a factor unique to Protestantism that contributes to the infiltration of militarism into the Protestant Church. In contrast to the difficulties of Catholicism and Buddhism to recruit military chaplains, competition for selection as a military chaplain is very intense in Protestantism. Most seminary students take the military chaplain selection test while they are in college. If they pass, they are ordained after graduation from the seminary and join the military chaplaincy. In order to maximize the number of candidates who pass the exam, the seminary and the denomination offer scholarships and other benefits to them. Thus, being a military chaplain in Protestantism means recognition as a promising young elite of the denomination. In fact, pastors who have completed their military service obligation as a military chaplain are recruited into the main positions of their denominations. Most young military chaplains succeed in attaining good positions in the church after serving in the army for three to five years. From a long-term perspective, the upper echelons of the denomination are mostly filled with pastors with military chaplain experience. Thus, in Protestantism, the military chaplaincy serves as a mechanism for recruiting church elites who have been acculturated into militarism. In this way, a militaristic mentality dominates Protestant Church elites over generations.

This contrasts sharply with Catholicism, where it is rare for a priest with experience as a military chaplain to be appointed to the high office of the church. The difference between Protestantism and Buddhism is even more striking. In Buddhism, monks who have served as military chaplains are entirely excluded from the religious power structure (Kang 2017, 263–277).

### **Militant Doctrine of War**

The war doctrine of Korean churches is also important. Once a particular doctrine of war has been established through the official organization of the Church, all believers are obliged to follow it. The effect of militarism on the churches may be promoted or suppressed, depending on whether this



doctrine shifts toward peace or war. The war doctrine of Korean Protestant churches is characterized by poverty of pacifism, dominance of holy war or crusade theory, and a just war theory that is not so different from the crusade or holy war theory.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it has a generally belligerent character. Discourses of war often lack the rigorous logical consistency found in doctrinal-theological discussions. Here, we will not be limited to a rigorous doctrinal-theological area, but will discuss attitudes and approaches to war more broadly.

In Korean Protestantism, discourses of war first appeared during the World War I. According to Yang (2013), the Protestant war discourses in colonial Korea are divided into three periods: (1) Prior to the Manchurian Incident of 1931, antiwar and nonviolent resistance discourses were mainly proposed; (2) Between 1931 and 1937, any discussion of war itself virtually disappeared; and (3) After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, discourses of war re-appeared. At that time, in contrast to pre-1931, holy war discourses dominated. Protestant mainstream groups, save for a few who expressed pacifist positions on a personal level, cooperated with Japan's war effort (Seo 2004, 18–20). These holy war discourses have been influential ever since Korea's 1945 liberation from Japan.

Those Protestants advocating holy war theory often cite stories of war and violence in the Old Testament. The strong tradition of biblical literalism and verbal inspiration in Korean Protestantism has contributed to its ready acceptance of holy war discourses. This post-1937 situation of Korean Protestantism was not very different from the situation among Korean Catholics (Yoon 1998, 2001; Kang 2006, 96–101) and Buddhists (Lim 1993; Tikhonov 2009) in the same period. Catholic and Buddhist leaders not only praised the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War as holy wars, but also assisted in those conflicts in various ways.

During the Korean War, holy war discourses revived in Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism. Protestant and Catholic leaders actively

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1. The Christian doctrine of war is usually divided into three categories: pacifism, just war theory, and holy war or crusade theory. Positive attitudes toward war appear strongest in holy war or crusade theory and weakest in pacifism, just war theory being the middle ground.

supported the South Korean and UN war effort and encouraged lay believers to do so as well. Such support included military recruitment, propaganda, social welfare activities, and military chaplaincy. Anticommunist propaganda and evangelistic activities targeting North Korean prisoners of war should also be added. Both Protestants and Catholics campaigned against any negotiations for a truce, while urging the complete defeat of communist forces. As a result of these activities, Christianity became a symbol of anticommunism. The cost of active war participation and cooperation was dire. Protestant churches suffered the greatest damage. About 240 ministers were killed or kidnapped by North Koreans or leftists, and about 970 churches were burned or destroyed (No 1992, 231; Heo 2004, 160–161; Seo 1995; Park 2010; Yeo et al. 2001).

The fact that Korean Christian churches defined the Korean War as a holy war or an proposed; communist crusade reveals their separation from the theological mainstream of world Christianity. First, the Holy See (Vatican) and Western Protestant churches were clearly severed from holy war or crusader theory after World War I. Second, the Holy See and Western Protestant churches made major revisions to the just war theory after World War II. The aim of these revisions was to prevent the just war theory from ever again being used as a convenient means of justifying war. The essence of this doctrinal change was to make as rigid as possible the conditions for regarding a certain war as just. As a result, after World War II, the just war theory shifted greatly toward pacifism. The convergence of just war theory and pacifism, and the pacifist transformation of just war theory, were the most important changes that occurred in the Christian doctrine of war after World War II (Kang 2003, 235–260). However, at the time of the Korean War, Korean Christian leaders held on to the old war doctrines that were abandoned internationally after World War I.

War discourses became active again when South Korean troops were dispatched to Vietnam in 1965. At the time of the Vietnam War, there was no enthusiastic praise of war among Korean Christians as during the Korean War; the tone was more cautious. A typical example was the Korean Catholic Church, which did not announce any official position or judgment on the war (Yoon 2002). In contrast, the NCKC, representing

Korean Protestantism, understood the Vietnam War from the viewpoint of a confrontation between the expansionist forces of communism and the free world's attempts to stop them and actively supported the deployment of Korean troops to Vietnam, though they were not enthusiastic about the war itself. The Korean army was frequently referred to as the "crusaders." Moreover, even the progressive denominations in Korea adhered to a position similar to the fundamentalists in the United States, namely, arguing not for a peaceful resolution of war, but for complete and final victory through an expansion of the war (Ryu 2004b, 217–218).

With the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1991, South Korean troops were deployed overseas for the second time since independence. By this time, the liberal branches of Protestantism, centered around the NCKC, were clearly disconnected from the holy war or crusade theory. Good examples are the contributors (Han Soong-hong, Sohn Kyu-tae, and Kang Sa-mun) to an April 1991 special issue of the monthly *Gidokgyo sasang* (Christian Thought) titled "War and Religion in the Middle East." Most of the major figures of the NCKC embraced just war positions. However, some even criticized just war theory and came closer to pacifism. The fact that foreign books on Christian war doctrines written in terms of just war theory or pacifism were translated into Korean in the 1980s and 1990s also influenced these changes.

However, the majority of the 8 contributing authors to the book *Gunjin sinhak* (Military Camp Theology), edited and published by the Army Office of the Chief of Chaplains in 1985, still adhered to the holy war or crusade theory. The same was true for the 12 authors of *Gunseongyo sinhak* (Military Mission Theology), edited and published by the Military Missions Ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in 1990. There is no doubt that conservative or fundamentalist theologians preferred holy war theory. Holy war is sometimes termed "God's War" or "Jehovah's War." While some conservative Korean theologians argue that they support just war theory, their theory is often oversimplified or distorted. The just war theory they speak of thus becomes, as it were, a holy war theory disguised as a just war theory. The Christian Council of Korea (CCK), Korea's largest Protestant organization, has closely embraced holy war theory (Kang 2005).

On the whole, until recently, discussions on war doctrine were not active in Korean Protestant churches. In this situation, military chaplains, and the theologians related to military camp theology or military mission theology, naturally led discussions on war doctrine. Thus, the militant war doctrines supported by military chaplains and conservative theologians appeared to represent the position of the entire Korean Protestant Church.

### **Doctrinal Anticommunism**

Korean Christian churches incorporated anticommunism into their doctrinal systems from the colonial period (1910–1945), mainly in the form of *social doctrine*. The communists were regarded as enemies to be defeated. After 1945 liberation, Korean Protestants' confrontations with communists became more frequent and violent. In this process, the Christian churches gradually came to function as an army in the anticommunist struggle.

The *religionization* of anticommunism in Korean Christianity began in the colonial era. In the case of Catholicism, this process was conducted by importing already established anticommunist doctrines into Korea. An article introducing the Pope's official documents criticizing communism and socialism first appeared in 1921, and dozens of such articles were published by the end of the 1930s (Kang 2003, 191–198). Protestant churches also began to form anticommunist attitudes in the 1920s. Unlike Catholicism, however, the religionization of anticommunism in Protestantism was the invention of Korean church leaders. The 9th General Assembly of the Korean National Christian Council in September 1932 enacted the "12 social doctrines." The preamble to this included the following phrase: "We oppose all materialist education, materialist thoughts, class struggle, social reform by revolutionary means, and reactionary oppression" (Kang 2007, 58–62). In the colonial period, however, violent conflicts between Christians and communists were rare.

The ideological terrain of Korean society shortly after liberation was heavily left-oriented (Son 1991, 160). But the ideological terrain of Catholic and Protestant churches at the time were overwhelmingly right-oriented.

In North Korea, the right-wing forces centered on Protestantism fought violently with left-wing forces. South Korean Protestantism was extremely right-wing, so that even moderate nationalist leaders such as Kim Gyu-sik and Kang Won-yong, who were active in the Left-Right Coalition Committee, were not allowed to become elders or pastors. The Protestant churches of South Korea naturally became a powerful rightist stronghold. Especially, Protestant churches composed of believers from North Korea acted as a source of right-wing activism (Kang 1996, 214–220, 270).

The Korean War (1950–1953) broke out in this context. During the Korean War, anticommunism developed into a powerful religious good-evil dualism. Discourses identifying atheistic communism with Satan became widespread. Furthermore, “communism equals Satan” discourses combined with an “eschatological worldview” and the “myth of the elected people.” Thus, Protestant anticommunism developed as a sort of Korean version of soteriology (Kang 2007, 74). According to this, Koreans were chosen by God to fight the last eschatological war with communism.

It should be emphasized that it was after liberation, not during the colonial period, that the violence and aggressiveness of Protestant anticommunism came to prominence. Many Protestants participated in massacres of civilians around the time of the Korean War. In return, many Protestants were killed by North Korean forces and leftists (Choi 2015). In the course of the Korean War, Protestantism became “the religion of anger, the religion of the slaughterers” (J. H. Kim 2018, 202). During the Vietnam War, Korean Protestant leaders were thrilled by the birth of the so-called Immanuel Company within the South Korean Army in Vietnam, a military unit composed solely of and praised it as “crusade of faith” and “crusade of justice” (Ryu 2004b, 202–203). During the time Korean troops were participating in the Vietnam War, the so-called Jeon-gun Sinjahwa Undong (whole army evangelism movement) took place in South Korea. In this movement, the Joshua Unit and Elisha Unit were born. Protestant leaders were once again thrilled with these achievements and established the Military Evangelical Association of Korea (MEAK) in 1972 to sponsor the military chaplaincy (Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1975, 58–59, 69–86; Kang 2007, 356–361). Throughout the two anticommunist wars—

the Korean War and Vietnam War—Korean Protestant churches themselves became anticommunist crusaders.

The anticommunist worldview has also infused strong missionary passions into the churches and faithful in South Korea. “The fact that the Christian population was still only a minority in Korean society was a big contradiction, given that the inevitable destiny of fighting at the forefront against communism ... was given to Korea. Therefore, in order to win the global struggle between good and evil, which is the core of the confrontation between Christianity and communism, it becomes very urgent to ‘Christianize’ Korea” (Kang 2007, 74). The anticommunist passion of Korean Protestantism triggered the Minjok Bogeumhwa Undong (national evangelization movement) in the 1960s and 1970s. Conversely, the national evangelization movement was part of the general anticommunist struggle.

Unlike the Korean Catholic Church, whose martyr cult was over a century old, the Korean Protestant Church’s martyr cult began only in the 1980s. And unlike Catholic martyrs who fell victim to the persecutions of the Confucian Joseon Dynasty in the nineteenth century, almost all Protestant martyrs were killed by communists around the time of the Korean War. The core of Protestant martyr piety lies in anticommunist martyrdom. It is no exaggeration to say that the martyrs in Korean Protestantism are those who resisted communism at the cost of their lives. In this context, Korean Protestants are repeatedly inculcated with the message: take martyrs as exemplars and be prepared to die in confronting communism.

As a result of the liberalization of overseas travel, South Korean Protestant foreign missions exploded in the 1990s. The 1990s was also a period of Northeast Asian détente following the end of the Cold War. The largest number of Korean Protestant missionaries went to China and the China-North Korea border areas. However, the Chinese and North Korean governments have both prohibited missionary activities by foreigners, and many Koreans who were secretly engaged in such activities were arrested, deported, went missing, or even killed. Furious at these events, Korean Protestant leaders condemned North Korean and Chinese leaders as the forces of Satan and persecutors of Christianity.

The initiation of South Korean foreign missions coincided precisely

with the switch by conservative Korean Protestants in 1989, when they gathered as the CCK, from a policy of nonparticipation based on sacred-secular dualism to social participation. From early 2003, they went a step further to that of political activism. Conservative Protestantism advocates extreme anti-North Korea and anticommunist stances through massive political rallies in the form of prayer meetings. At these political rallies, “red” and “Satan” are used synonymously (S. J. Kim 2009, 49). From 2004, some conservative Protestants began to form Protestant political parties. Ryu (2004a, 64–65, 71) has argued that recent anticommunism among Korean Protestants has an eschatological character approaching premillennialism. According to this: (1) the end of the world is imminent; (2) communism is the antichrist to appear at the end; (3) the United States, chosen by God to save the world, must fight against antichrist communism; and (4) in this fight, Korea should help America as a loyal partner.

Since the movement to enact the Anti-Discrimination Act began in South Korea in 2007, conservative Protestantism began to link gender equality issues with anticommunism in an attempt to attack sexual minorities. Protestant leaders have argued that feminists are variant Marxists, or that advocacy of the human rights of homosexuals is a conspiracy by leftist forces to expand their influence. They have even created the term *jongbuk gei* (a gay who follows North Korea). Furthermore, according to Ju Hui Judy Han (2016, 7), “Conservative Protestants and homophobic political leaders have even linked LGBTQ equality with terrorism and radical Islam, as can be seen in the recent CLP (Christian Liberal Party) slogans of ‘No to homosexuality, no to Islam, no to anti-Christianity,’ all in the name of national security.” Protestant anticommunism has demonstrated amazing vitality despite the passage of time. In today’s Korean society, Protestantism is obviously the largest factory of militant anticommunism.

### **Militarism in Everyday Life**

This section will focus on the informal mechanisms that encourage militarism to rule the daily lives and consciousnesses of believers, although

these mechanisms are not institutionalized as official norms or doctrines.

### *Spiritual Warfare Frame*

Unlike war doctrine, discourses related to spiritual warfare are not formally institutionalized as doctrine. Nonetheless, the spiritual warfare frame is widespread among conservative Protestants in Korea and has a profound impact on the ways they think and act. This situation of Korean Protestantism contrasts sharply with the case of Korean Catholicism. In the Korean Catholic Church, only a very small number of right-wing Catholics maintain a spiritual warfare frame and their influence in the Church is minimal (Kang 2014).

Among the major social groups of South Korea, Protestants are the only one to understand the everyday world through the frame of war. The world view that a gigantic cosmic war between good and evil is developing defines the identity of believers as warriors, transforms the church organization into an antidemocratic and hierarchical one suitable for combat, and drives the relationship between church and secular democratizing society into hostile tensions.

In Christian history, the term spiritual warfare is not unfamiliar. Peter Wagner (1997, 2015), who presently exerts the greatest influence on the spiritual warfare frame of South Korea, distinguishes three dimensions of spiritual warfare. The first is ground-level spiritual warfare, which is the fight against demons influencing individuals. The second is an occult-level spiritual warfare, which is the fight against more organized demonic groups, such as Freemasonry, New Age spirituality, and Oriental religions. The third is a strategic-level spiritual warfare, which is the fight against a group of powers called “territorial spirits.” Territorial spirits are considered to be spiritually imprisoning thousands of people through their dominance over cities, regions, countries, ethnic groups, businesses, educational institutions, religious organizations, and the media.

The traditional spiritual warfare of Christianity refers to the ground-level spiritual warfare mentioned above and the fight against temptation and sin that arise from the evil nature of the human body. The concepts



of occult-level and strategic-level spiritual warfare that Wagner and his colleagues have described have transformed the traditional concept of spiritual warfare in three ways. First, they expanded the concept, which had been limited mainly to the psychological sphere, into the social, cultural, political and economic spheres. Second, they have extended this concept from the individual to the collective dimension. Third, by over-expanding the military analogies, they strongly incorporated the traits of social activism into the spiritual warfare concept.

According to Lee Jae-wan (2011, 36), the new concepts of spiritual warfare as Wagner describes began to emerge from the early 1990s. These new concepts were imported directly into Korea. In Korea, spiritual warfare is combined with the logic of religious warfare. The confrontation between the cosmic forces of ultimate good and evil, a divine truth and falsehood is the essence of a religious war. And here worldly struggles imitate a cosmic war (Juergensmeyer 1993, 155–159).

There are many targets of spiritual warfare, including ideological leftists, Muslims, moral liberals, homosexuals, other major domestic religions such as Buddhism, and religious minorities such as the Unification Church, Shincheonji, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Ahn (1995, 2015) claimed that the nature of spiritual warfare is that of a "worldview encounter," and he presents more than 20 "unbiblical" worldviews that Protestants must fight against. These include almost all religions except Protestantism and Catholicism. Moreover, Ahn argues that these unbiblical worldviews are forming a "united front" against Protestantism. This frame regards leftists, Muslims, Buddhists, and homosexuals as all under the control of "evil spirits." Since it is impossible to communicate or compromise with those who are manipulated by evil spirits, the identity of believers who internalize these frames cannot but become that of spiritual warriors or potential martyrs.

Most of the spiritual war theorists present the collective intercession as the primary weapon in spiritual struggle, but in reality, various secular weapons are mobilized. Let us take the example of homosexuality. Lee Tae-hee (2016, 22), a pastor and lawyer who is leading the spiritual war on homosexuality in South Korea, defines homosexuality as "a Satanic strategy that destroys God's creation order in the name of freedom, equality, and

human rights.” He further argues that spiritual warfare with homosexuality proceeds in three forms: worldview war, cultural war, and legislative war (2016, 40–41). According to Lee, homosexuality cannot but be politicized. In fact, since 2007, Protestants have used various means, including online comments, text bombs, fax bombs, as well as protest telephone calls, signature campaigns, press conferences, newspaper advertisements, and campaigns against candidates defending the rights of sexual minorities. Of course, text bombs and fax bombs are particularly militaristic practices. Protestants have either directly interfered with the Seoul Queer Festival or held a rally against it. They have also conducted forced *conversion therapies* or *gay cures* for homosexuals.

Religions that compete with Protestantism are also not safe. Korean Protestants have exhibited the following behaviors as part of their spiritual warfare over the past few years: holding a large-scale rally and praying that the temples representing an area would collapse, entering a Buddhist temple hall and conducting *ttangbapgi gido* (prayer walking), damaging a Buddhist statue at a Buddhist university, destroying the Dangun statues that were erected in elementary and junior high schools. Due to intensive protest phone calls by Protestants “to show the power of God’s army,” plans to install prayer rooms for Muslim athletes during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics were abandoned. The aggressive and exclusionary attitude towards Islam is also linked to Islamophobia incitement, which began around 2008 by some Protestant leaders (Kang 2012b, 538).

The spiritual warfare frame also negatively affects the organization and operation of Protestant churches, and even worship and prayer life. In some South Korean mega-churches, extremely militant forms of worship are found and the importance of “prayer as a battle” is emphasized (Yi 2018, 160–164). The spiritual warfare frame justifies the dictatorship of a senior pastor for more effective performance in combat. Church organization is hierarchically re-organized to accord with battle. This makes useless the various institutional devices that guarantee democracy in a church. Unconditional obedience is demanded of *soldier-believers*. The spiritual warfare frame also works to justify the patriarchal gender structure within the Protestant Church. According to Jung-soo Kim (2003, 6), “the

asymmetrical power relationship between a male minority power holder (pastor), who commands and decides, and the majority of lay women, who carry out the order and decision, is analogous to the relationship between the commanding general and the soldiers rushing to the command. From a women's point of view, Korean churches are backed by an androcentric militarist culture." The spiritual warfare frame is also used as a weapon to suppress voices of criticism both inside and outside the church. A critic is often labeled a traitor or persecutor. Church finances operate in an extremely opaque and closed manner. This frame has also been used as a means of privatizing the church, as well as a means of passing senior pastor positions to their sons.

### *Foreign Mission*

The realm where spiritual warfare frame is most effective is that of foreign missions. As mentioned earlier, Korean Protestant foreign mission began to explode in the late 1980s. In the same period, foreign missions of Korean Catholicism, Buddhism, and Won Buddhism expanded rapidly as well. The number of Protestant missionaries dispatched to foreign countries surpassed 10,000 in 2002 and more than 20,000 by 2009. Korean Protestant churches are sending the second largest number of missionaries to other countries, after the United States. The greatest number of these missionaries are dispatched to China, the bridgehead to North Korean missions (Kang 2012b, 478–484). This shows how Protestant foreign missions share a direct link to anticommunism.

Many missionaries believe that other religions are dominated by *evil spirits*, and therefore think of mission abroad as a form of spiritual warfare to fight and conquers these influences. In the words of Lee Jae-wan (2011, 127), "Mission is essentially a fierce battle against Satan and his followers desperately resisting world evangelization. Missionaries are spiritual commandos at the forefront of spiritual warfare who save souls suffering from the forces of Satan in the invisible and violent battle with the forces of Satan." Some of the short-term mission team members have attempted the aforementioned *ttangbapgi gido* in urban downtown areas or in temples of

Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist countries, as a part of their spiritual battle, and have often conflicted with locals at the risk of deportation or even imprisonment (Kang 2012b, 521–531).

It should be noted that the spiritual warfare frame has been combined with the so-called missionary movement toward *unreached* people and frontier missions, which have been widespread since the early 1990s. According to this, missionaries should be sent primarily to countries with low Christian ratios, and they should focus on building churches and acquiring converts on-site. However, the countries with the lowest percentage of Christians are mostly socialist, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist. As mentioned earlier, most of these countries prohibit foreigners from conducting direct missionary work among local people. As a result, many Korean missionaries have had to conceal their identities and conduct missionary activities in secret. As a result, the field of foreign mission was transformed into a battlefield. Many Korean missionaries who engaged in illegal missionary activities were expelled, imprisoned, or even murdered. In fact, three Korean Protestant missionaries were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, while several others were either killed or have disappeared in the China-North Korea border area. Others have been arrested while conducting clandestine missionary activities in North Korea (Kang 2012b, 531–534).

Accounts of such conflicts and sacrifices are soon delivered to Korean Protestant churches. Numerous believers and churches in Korea are involved in foreign missions through sponsoring networks. Many believers also experience missionary life through short-term mission trips. Missionaries murdered in Iraq and Afghanistan have been treated as martyrs in Korean Protestant churches, while news of missionary confrontations in North Korea and in the North Korea-China border area serve to augment the anticommunist feelings of believers. As briefly discussed, the triumphalist and crusading attitudes of Korean Protestant foreign missions are causing intense conflicts with local cultures and religions. In Korea, on the other hand, such conflicts help form fighting mission-communities among Protestants by strengthening the emotional ties between the frontlines and the rear of foreign missions.

*Evangelism and Church Construction as a Battlefield*

In Korean Protestantism, growth (faster quantitative growth), offerings (more donations), and building (the construction of larger churches) form a sort of new Trinity. In Korean Protestantism, increasing the size of a church's congregation will increase offerings, and so top priority in terms of financial allocation is given to land purchases and church construction. In an interview with the weekly magazine *SisaIN* in March 2010, Yang Hee-song summarized this with the slogan, "Let's get together, make money, build it." None of these three items—growth, offerings, construction—are directly related to spiritual warfare frames. But we need to recall that the spiritual warfare frame of the 1990s derived from church growth theory. According to this, an increase in the number of believers, churches, worship attendees, and amount of offerings in a particular area is the fruit of a successful spiritual war.

In South Korea, evangelism and church construction proceed like a battle. There are several factors in this, first among them being frequent denominational division. The greatest number of denominational divisions have occurred in the Presbyterian church, the largest Protestant denomination in Korea. In Korean Protestant churches denominational splits have been active since the late 1950s. Numerous denominational divisions have created enormous competitive pressures even within Protestantism. Small-scale new denominations place top priority on quantitative growth. New denominations force their pastors and evangelists to establish new churches and increase the number of believers. The second factor is excessive *individual-church-ism* (*gaegyohoejuui*). No Chi-jun (1995, 32) defines individual-church-ism as "the attitudes or policies that give priority to issues within individual churches, especially their maintenance and expansion." However, we can approach individual-church-ism in terms of the power relations between the individual church and the larger denomination, especially in terms of the degree of control the denomination headquarters exerts on the individual church. Among Presbyterian, Methodist, Holiness, and Baptist churches, which have been the four largest Protestant denominations in Korea, the Presbyterian and

Baptist Churches are close to the congregationalism type, in which the authority of the denomination headquarters over individual churches is weak and the autonomy of individual churches is emphasized. On the other hand, in the Methodist Church, the influence of the annual conference and bishop on individual churches had been strong. But this church has adopted to individual-church-ism since the 1970s. The Holiness Church, which went back and forth between a centralized power structure and congregationalism, also moved toward individual-church-ism after Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule (Kang 1996, 275).

The combination of frequent denominational splits and individual-church-ism creates a very *Korean* phenomenon, which is the third factor: *an exceptionally small and destitute start*. Apart from the Anglican Church, which still maintains a centralized bishop system, the phenomenon of a "small and poor start" is consistent with the life cycle of most Protestant churches in Korea. This phenomenon is also a crucial difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. In Catholicism, the diocese pays a large part of the land acquisition and the construction costs of a new church. The typical process of church growth in Protestantism proceeds as follows. Young pastors and evangelists who have graduated from the seminary establish their own churches solely at their own expense without financial support from the denomination headquarters. In Korea, this is called *gyohoe gaecheok* (church planting). Most young ministers establish their own churches by renting part of an existing commercial building. As soon as possible, they need to increase their congregation size, collect offerings, and purchase a site to build the permanent church. What's more, they should start the construction as soon as possible. It is extremely rare that construction on a new church begins with sufficient funds in hand; the work commences in haste regardless. From that moment, they gradually but aggressively complete the building as if it were a battle. Believers are routinely forced to make more contributions. However, if these processes cannot be completed within the first three to five years, the church close due to a lack of funds. Moreover, even if completed, this is not the end. When they complete the first church construction project, they must purchase additional land to build a parking lot and education and office facilities. The

first church building soon becomes too small, necessitating the purchase of yet more land to build larger buildings and more parking spaces (Kang 2012b, 227–235).

Under the pressure of enormous competition for survival, this series of processes is endlessly repeated. These processes proceed amidst various adverse circumstances: the growth of the Protestant population in South Korea is stagnating, while the number of pastors and churches continues to increase; attendees of small churches are constantly transferring to larger churches; and news is spreading that the small churches that fail to grow will go bankrupt. This growth-first ideology, or *growth-first-ism* (*seongjangjeiljuui*), which emphasizes the quantitative growth of the church, naturally dominates the minds of pastors and believers.

Thus, among Protestant churches in Korea, growth and church construction become a struggle of life and death. Decades of such struggle tends to promote a militant organization that is optimized for such a struggle. The senior pastor himself becomes the commander in the evangelical battle and orders believers to participate in “total mobilization evangelization” (*chongdongwon jeondo*). Believers who have been assigned goals and deadlines are sent to their evangelical fields of battle. The new trinity of growth-offerings-construction that emerged from Korean Protestantism has contributed to the generation of a unique militaristic landscape.

## Conclusion

The enthusiastic approval for dispatching Korean troops to participate in an unjust war and the fierce opposition to conscientious objection to military service reflect Korean Protestantism’s deep embeddedness in militarism. I have discussed above the factors that promoted the coupling of Protestantism and militarism in South Korea. For this purpose, I analyzed the relationship between Korean Protestant churches and militarism in two dimensions.

Firstly, there are those institutionalized mechanisms that contribute

to militarism's penetration into the churches. Military chaplains as morale builders of the army promulgate a militant version of Christianity, and act as a proxy for the army in the church. Combined with the fierce competition for the selection of chaplain officers, the military chaplaincy also functions as a mechanism for recruiting into the church elite those who have adapted well to militarism. The war doctrine of Korean Protestant churches is characterized by poverty of pacifism, popularity of the holy war theory, and a just war theory that is in fact similar to the holy war theory. The militant anticommunism of Korean Protestantism also has an affinity with militarism. The religiously re-interpreted anticommunism, elevated to the doctrinal level has been transformed into a strong national security ideology in conjunction with the division of the Korean Peninsula.

Secondly, there are also informal practices that allow militarism to impact the daily lives of believers. Among these, the spiritual warfare frame seems to be the most important. The spiritual warfare frame defines believers as warriors, transforms church organization into an antidemocratic one suitable for combat, and foments deep church-society tensions. The Korean Protestant churches' triumphalist foreign missions have caused and are causing intense conflicts with host cultures and their religions. Back in Korea, on the other hand, such conflicts serve to form a kind of fighting mission-community by strengthening the emotional ties between the frontlines and the home front of the foreign missions. Finally, Protestant pastors of small start-up churches are faced with intense competition and a constant crisis of survival. The desire to increase congregation size and construct ever-larger church buildings and facilities intertwine to create a vicious cycle. This endless struggle for survival naturally fosters a more militaristic organization.

These factors have all contributed to the creation of militarized Protestantism in South Korea. And Korean Protestantism's power makes militarism a larger and more visible issue in Korean society. In the 1970s, liberal or progressive Protestants accounted for less than 20 percent of South Korea's Protestant population (Kang 2013b, 265–268). Since the quantitative expansion of conservative Protestant churches from the 1970s, the proportion of liberal-progressive Protestants who did not support militarism



was unable to increase. Thus, it is estimated that over 80 percent of the South Korean Protestant population, which now stands at about 10 million, is under the influence of Protestant militarism. Since the 1970s, the Korean religious terrain has been restructured around Protestantism, Buddhism, and Catholicism (Kang 2003, 139–141). As South Korea’s 2015 census shows, Protestantism is the largest of these three. Also, as many surveys have consistently shown over the past few decades, Korean Protestants are largely distributed among the middle and upper classes and the highly educated. Within South Korea’s power elite group, especially in realms of economics and politics, the proportion of Protestants is even higher (Kang 2012a, 317–326; 2013a, 109–117).

Considering the strong political-social influence of Korean Protestantism, the existence of militarized Protestantism casts a dark shadow over Korean democracy and peace prospects on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, Protestant militarism threatens peace within South Korean society, which is growing increasingly diversified in terms of culture, ethnicity, and gender.

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