From Demonic Faith to Redemptive Faith: The Ambiguity of Faith in the Intersection of Religion and State Violence

Wonchul Shin

Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA 30030, USA; shinw@ctsnet.edu

Received: 22 April 2020; Accepted: 15 May 2020; Published: 26 May 2020

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the ambiguity of faith in the intersection of religion and state violence. I pay attention to the state-operated system of apartheid in South Africa and critically analyze the Afrikaner community’s faith that motivated and justified vicious state violence against people of color. I name this faith demonic faith and present two key features of demonic faith in the South African case: idolatrous absolutization and destructive dehumanization. I also examine how the Afrikaners’ demonic faith came to its existence through the complex dynamics of their existential anxieties, desires, and distorted ways to fulfill the desires. I then argue for the ineffaceable possibility of redemptive faith, and theoretically construct how two features of redemptive faith, consisting of courage and empathy, could have empowered the Afrikaners to break the shackles of demonic idolatry and destruction. Redemptive faith is tragically paired with demonic faith, but truth serves as a key criterion to guide us in this tragic ambiguity of faith.

Keywords: faith; state violence; the demonic; idolatry; destruction; redemption; courage; empathy; truth

1. Introduction: What Is Faith?

In the 1970s, Colonel Swanepoel, one of the most notorious torturers who worked for the Bureau of State Security (as known as BOSS) under the South African state, testified in court that his talent of torture—what he claimed as “his special gift for psychological persuasion”—was the gift of God (Chidester 1991, p. 81). This horrifying testimony cannot be reduced to a matter of personal faith, but has to be situated in a certain faith confessed in the Dutch Reformed Church (hereafter called the DRC) which has been the “most powerful formative influence in shaping the values, norms, and institutions of the Afrikaner community” (Ritner 1967, p. 17). Decades ago, Rev. J. D. Stridom, an influential pastor of the DRC who became Prime Minister of South Africa from 1954 to 1958, gave his congress address reflected this faith of the DRC: “Only carrying out the policy of apartheid in the light of God’s Word and with God’s blessing would provide deliverance from the darker danger of colour-mixing and bastardization” (Ritner 1967, p. 24). For him, the implementation of the policy of apartheid is the “Afrikaner’s divine mission, his special calling—the evangelization and civilization of the heathen (people of color) in South Africa” (Ritner 1967, p. 26). The toxic faith did not remain within the individuals or churches but went beyond for providing theological motivation and justification of activities of the South African state, including the institutionalized oppression, dehumanization and even demonization of people of color under the apartheid system. The Kairos Theologians1 names the statement of this faith “State Theology” and presents four key patterns of

---

1 Frank Chikane, first director of the Institute for Contextual Theology, and Father Albert Nolan, a Catholic theologian, formulated a group of theologians and pastors and drafted the Kairos Document, “a document...
how this faith has worked for the South African state: (1) “the use of Romans 13:1–7 to give an absolute and ‘divine’ authority to the State,” (2) the use of the idea of ‘Law and Order to determine and control what the people may be permitted to regard as just and unjust,” (3) “the use of the word ‘communist’ to brand anyone who rejects ‘State Theology,’” and (4) “the use that is made of the name of God” (The Kairos Theologians 1986, p. 3).

Given the South African case, this paper aims to critically examine the question what is faith: specifically, what is the faith that motivated and justified the Afrikaners’ use of sacred texts, symbols and practices in a particular religious tradition, the Dutch Reformed Church tradition, for absolutizing the South African state and the apartheid system and perpetrating the dehumanization and demonization of people of color through various forms of violence. In this paper, I name this faith demonic faith—”the state of being grasped by” what Paul Tillich called the demonic—and present how the actions of this faith represent two key structural features of the demonic: idolatry and destruction.

After examining the Afrikaners’ faith in light of demonic faith, I will turn to the question of how a demonic faith comes to its existence. For this question, I will present an anatomy of the dynamics of demonic faith—the complex interactions of the Afrikaners’ existential anxieties, desires, and distorted measures to fulfill the desires—by drawing on Tillich’s philosophical account of three existential anxieties and Edward Farley’s theo-philosophical analysis of the dynamics of evil. The destructive power of demonic faith seems to overwhelm us and paralyze our imagination, but I will argue for the indelible possibility of redemptive faith. I will theoretically offer two key features of redemptive faith—courage and empathy—and how redemptive faith could have empowered the Afrikaners to resist the power of demonic faith and break the shackles of demonic idolatry and destruction.

Along with the Kairos Document, this essay acknowledges the rich legacy of theological critiques of apartheid developed by South African theologians (de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983; de Gruchy 1991; de Gruchy and de Gruchy 2005). These scholarly works present us normative theological frameworks to critically evaluate apartheid as a form of heresy. For example, Allan Boesak, a black DRC minister, argues that apartheid is “pseudo-gospel,” the DRC’s theological construction to justify apartheid or the so-called “Church policy” and makes one’s racial identity trump “the image of God with inalienable rights” (Boesak 1983, pp. 5–6). At the same time, in The Chuch Struggle in South Africa, John W. de Gruchy offers a “meta-narrative, a broad theoretical and theological framework” to descriptively analyze “how and why apartheid was declared a heresy” (de Gruchy and de Gruchy 2005). In other words, along with the normative theological framework, he also presents a descriptive framework to understand how the Afrikaners’ collective faith went theologically and morally wrong. Specifically, he points out the “need” of new interpretation of Afrikaners’ history after being defeated by the Imperial British in early twentieth century (de Gruchy and de Gruchy 2005, p. 29). This essay aims to further strengthen the normative and descriptive theological frameworks to evaluate and analyze the Afrikaners’ faith in the era of apartheid. For this, I found Tillich’s thick descriptive languages valuable. His keen theo-philosophical framework to describe humanity’s existential states and crises will help us to develop a theological anatomy of the Afrikaners’ faith that justifies, normalizes, and sustains state violence against South African citizens of color.

that soon gathered signatures from around the country, and was made public late in September 1985” (de Gruchy and de Gruchy 2005, p. 197). The Kairos Document is significant as it was largely “a black Christian response to the crisis situation [apartheid] in South Africa” that challenges “the legality of the State” and calls for “acts of civil disobedience” (Kairos Theologians 1986, p. 198).

2 Paul Tillich regards faith as a matter of one’s existential state or life itself rather than a mere cognitive belief. He defines faith as “the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself” (Tillich 2000, p. 172). In this paper, what Tillich calls faith resonates with my concept of the redemptive faith—the state of being grasped by the power of the redemptive divine—which breaks the shackles of the demonic.
2. Demonic Faith: Idolatry and Destruction

In his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich presents an account of the demonic under his ontological analysis of human life and its ambiguities. He defines human life as “the actualization of potential being” in multiple dimensions and presents three functions of life: (1) self-integration in the moral dimension (2) self-creation in the cultural dimension, and (3) self-transcendence in the religious dimension (Tillich 1976, pp. 30–32). The three functions, however, operate within the “conditions of existence, such as finitude, estrangement, conflict, and so on,” so they are essentially interwoven with the “existential ambiguities” in the life process (Tillich 1976, p. 12). In the religious dimension, the self-transcendence of life shows the “ambiguity of the divine and the demonic”: the demonic does not simply negate the divine—the holy itself or the ultimate ground of self-transcendence—but participates in the divine in a “distorted way” (Tillich 1976, p. 102). The distortion of self-transcendence, “the elevation of one element of finitude to infinite power and meaning” or “the claim of something finite…to divine greatness” is the key feature of the demonic (Tillich 1976, pp. 102–3). In religion, the demonic takes a form of idolatry: “the elevation of the medium of [divine] revelation to the dignity of the revelation itself” (Tillich 1973, p. 133).

In addition to the feature of idolatry, Tillich provides another key feature of the demonic: destruction. In his *The Interpretation of History*, he argues:

The demonic contains destruction of form, which does not come from without, does not depend on deficiency or powerlessness, but originates from the basis of the form itself, the vital as well as the intellectual (Tillich 1936, p. 91)

Again, the demonic does not negate form itself, but maintains “the tension between form-creation and form-destruction” (Tillich 1936, p. 80). A person bears form in his or her life, so personality as the bearer of form is the “most prominent object of demonic destruction”: the demonic destroys the personality through “robbing it of being and emptying it of meaning” (Tillich 1936, pp. 86, 88). The demonic destruction of the personality may come to fulfillment in a social structure or institution when “[w]ill to Power and Eros abuse the social form and its just claim to sacrifice for their destructive aim” (Tillich 1936, p. 92). In this social demonry, for example, the state’s finite holiness and its right to sacrifice is destructively manipulated, and it destroys the “personality standing in social connection and the social structure itself, which is built up by the former” (Tillich 1936, pp. 91–92). In other words, the destruction of the personality and the social structure are the key features of the demonic.

The two key features of the demonic provide a compelling basis for examining the faith of the Afrikaners. First, their faith, expressed in ‘State Theology’ and the theological justification of the policy of apartheid, shows demonic idolatry. In ‘State Theology,’ the state is overtly elevated to the absolute and divine authority, and all activities of the state, including state violence, are divinely sanctioned as the absolute enforcer of God-given law and order.

The theological justification of the apartheid in the DRC masked a covert claim of their particular racial identity of the White-Afrikaners as divine greatness. Based on the doctrine of election and double-predestination in the DRC tradition, the Afrikaners developed a “strong sense of moral and religious self-righteousness,” and regarded their particular racial identity as the ultimate ground of their religious, cultural and moral superiority over other non-White racial groups (Jubber 1985, pp. 275–276). The Afrikaners covertly absolutized their sense of superiority given their racial identity by (mis-)using the sacred texts and doctrines in the DRC tradition for the theological justification of the racial segregation policy. The official representative of the DRC declared in 1948 that “Apartheid can rightfully be called a Church policy” (Jubber 1985, p. 274). In short, the elevation of the White-

---

3 In his essay “Paul Tillich and the Theology of German Religious Socialism,” Marsden (2009) provide a helpful socio-political context in which Tillich’s theological analysis of the demonic was situated.

4 Zucker (1969) also argues that the key feature of the demonic in Tillich’s theology is “idolatry.” However, he misses another key feature of the demonic: the destruction of the personality and the social structure.
Afrikaner identity to the absolute or God-given superiority over non-White groups is a concrete enactment of the demonic faith, the demonic idolatry.

Second, the demonic idolatry of the Afrikaners led to another key feature of the demonic: destruction of the personality and the social structure. Under the absolutized authority of the state, the most destructive violence against humanity—psychological and physical torture—was perpetrated. In 1988, a Roman Catholic priest who is a person of color, Father Smangaliso Mkhathwa was tortured while held in police custody and testified about his painful and humiliating experience of torture:

I was left standing on the same spot for at least 30 h—with blindfold and handcuffs always on. My genitals and buttocks were left exposed for at least 29 h. A watery substance was smeared on my legs and thighs—this together with the cold air caused much discomfort. A creepy creature or instrument was fed into my backside. From there it would crawl up and down my legs, thighs, and invariably ended up biting my genitals. When I cried with pain they would laugh (Chidester 1991, p. 76)

When he cried with pain, the torturers laughed. Through this act of mocking the suffering face, Father Mkhathwa’s humanity was denied. As the demonic robs the personality of being, torture, perpetrated by the state actors who inspired and justified by the demonic faith, dehumanized people of color. In addition, the demonic faith expressed in ‘State Theology’ created its own “concrete symbol of evil” and labeled anyone who resists the state and opposes its theology as a ‘communist’ and uncritically demonized all ‘communists’ (The Kairos Theologians 1986, p. 7). This demonization of persons is a concrete sign of the demonic destruction of the personality.

Also, the demonic faith of the Afrikaners destroyed the social structure through the abuse of state power. The social structure, which is supposed to provide resources of well-being for all people in South Africa, was lapsed into a system of structural violence against certain racial groups, non-White, non-Afrikaner, people of color. The distorted social structure known as the apartheid system forced people of color to sacrifice themselves for the sake of maximizing the political, social, cultural, and economic powers of the Afrikaners. Given the institutionalized discrimination, oppression, and exploitation, the demonic faith constituted a culture of the dehumanization of people of color. Classifying the person of color as “animal” or “subhuman”—denying his/her humanity—was normalized and taken for granted under the apartheid regime (Chidester 1991, p. 9).

The Afrikaners confessed this demonic faith. Their faith was possessed and controlled by the power of the demonic. Demonic idolatry was enacted through the absolutization of the state and their particular White-Afrikaner racial identity. Demonic destruction was also enacted through the dehumanization and even demonization of people of color under the institutionalized structural violence known as the apartheid system. This demonic faith, however, was not confessed and enacted in vacuum. The Afrikaners faced certain existential conditions—existential anxieties and desires—formulated in their historical and social contexts, and the demonic faith came to existence in the process of responding to these conditions. In other words, the dynamics of the demonic faith underlie demonic idolatry and destruction. In the next part, I will present an anatomy of dynamics of demonic faith.

3. The Dynamics of the Demonic Faith: Existential Anxieties, Desires, and Distortion

In his The Courage to Be, Tillich presents the ontological structure of being: “being ‘embraces’ itself and nonbeing” and “nonbeing is dependent on the special qualities of being [it negates]” (Tillich 2000, pp. 34, 40). This paradoxical structure of being is always present in the process of human life,

---

5 Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain (Scarry 1985) provides us a profound analysis of torture: torture is a kind of ritual that transforms the victim’s pain into the state power. In the case of Father Mkhathwa, the South African state executed its power through the ritual or torture to deny the humanity.

6 For the notion of structural violence with its relationship with other forms of violence such as direct and cultural violence, please see Johan Galtung’s seminal essays “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” (Galtung 1969) and “Cultural Violence” (Galtung 1990).
since it is inevitably bounded by its own finitude. Given this ontological structure of human life, each individual experience, existential anxiety, “the existential awareness of nonbeing,” or “experienced as one’s own finitude” (Tillich 2000, p. 35).

According to Tillich, this existential anxiety can be categorized into three types of anxiety: (1) anxiety of fate and death, (2) anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, and (3) anxiety of guilt and condemnation (Tillich 2000, p. 41). First, the anxiety of fate derives from the “finite being’s awareness of being contingent in every respect, of having no ultimate necessity” (Tillich 2000, p. 44). In other words, this anxiety is based on one’s experience of vulnerability to the external fate which he or she cannot control as desires. The threats of contingency, vulnerability, and/or uncertainty create the anxiety of fate at a relative level and of death at an absolute level (Tillich 2000, p. 43). Second, the anxiety of emptiness is evoked by “the threat of nonbeing to the special contents of the spiritual life” which offer certain meanings in a specific dimension of human life” (Tillich 2000, p. 47). The anxiety of meaninglessness is about “the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence” (Tillich 2000, p. 47). Third, the threat of nonbeing to one’s moral self-affirmation arouses the anxiety of guilt in relative terms and the anxiety of condemnation in absolute terms (Tillich 2000, pp. 51–52). Given the finitude of being, a “profound ambiguity between good and evil” is present in every action of each individual (Tillich 2000, p. 52). This inescapable moral ambiguity in the process of human life provokes the anxiety of guilt and condemnation.

In the South African case, the three types of anxieties were aroused by several historical and social conditions which the Afrikaners faced from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century: (1) the anxiety of fate and death and of guilt and condemnation during and after the Anglo-Boer Wars and (2) the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness in the so-called ‘native problem’ and the ‘Poor White Question.’ These anxieties in concrete contexts set up existential conditions and crises in which the dynamics of the demonic faith came to fulfillment.

The anxiety of fate and death was evoked by the threat of contingency, vulnerability, and uncertainty in the Anglo-Boer Wars from the 1870s to the 1900s. As a result of increasing British intervention in South Africa, the Afrikaners engaged a series of deadly wars against the British. The wars between the Afrikaners and the British created chaos and destroyed Afrikaner social structure, depriving them of a sense of certainty. The British forcefully removed the South African civilian populations to concentration camps: tragically, “nearly 28,000 Afrikaner civilians, most of them children, died of dysentery, measles, and other diseases in the camp” (Thompson 2001, p. 143). More importantly, the British finally won the wars, though the Afrikaners desperately fought to the end, and then they experienced what Tillich called “the rule of contingency” (Tillich 2000, p. 44): they had to succumb to their uncontrollable fate. 7 Given the effects of deadly wars, the Afrikaners were overwhelmed by the existential anxiety of fate and death.

When the Afrikaners engaged the wars against the British, they sheltered “an enormous sense of injustice about British intervention”: for example, Francis Reitz’s book A Century of Wrong represents the Afrikaners’ sense of “self-righteousness” (Beinart 2001, p. 65). For the Afrikaners, the Anglo-Boer wars were the embodiment of their ideas about “morality and justice,” sanctioned by God for “independence and identity against the combined forces of Mammon and Ham” (Beinart 2001, p. 65). However, they were defeated by the British. They fell into “the humiliation of defeat” in their ‘just and moral’ struggle against the British (Walshe 1978, p. 396). This deep sense of humiliation resonates with what Tillich calls as “the anxiety of guilt (and condemnation).” Their sense of moral certainty with the divine sanction was significantly challenged. They fell into the ambiguity between good and evil. In the midst of chaotic moral universe (as the Afrikaners felt), the anxiety of guilt was aroused.

After enduring the wars, the Afrikaners faced the so-called ‘native problem’ and the ‘Poor White Question.’ In the 1920s, given the overpopulation of the Afrikaners in rural areas (as “White” residences), many of them had to move to urban areas where non-White racial groups resided (Ritner

---

7 The Afrikaners’ defeat by the British and ultimately their uncontrollable fate reflects what Jonathan Crewe calls “Boer melancholia,” the state of Afrikaners’ mind associated with “loss of power” (Crewe 2017, p. 16).
For the Afrikaners, these problems of racial-mixing and poverty threatened their White racial identity and consequently their sense of superiority over non-Whites. From the beginning of migration to South Africa, the Afrikaners' racial identity, coupled with the religious doctrines in the DRC, had served as the fundamental ground for constructing meanings in their lives as migrants, centered on a robust sense of religious, cultural, and moral superiority. They regarded themselves as “members of God’s one true church” and believed that they were “elected by God and predestined to act as they did” in the new land (Jubber 1985, p. 275). In other words, for the Afrikaners, their pure racial identity functioned as the ground of a system of meaning-making, specifically a superiority-producing system. However, the whole system was threatened by the problem of racial-mixing: the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness was aroused. Again, the threat to their racial identity was also a threat to their sense of superiority. The latter threat was even intensified by their loss of economic power (or superiority) over non-Whites stemming from the mass migration of Afrikaners to urban centers. It is not coincidental for politicians of the Nationalist Party seriously took up the “issue of white poverty” as a main political agenda (Beinart 2001, p. 81). For them, combating this challenge lies at the heart of rebuilding the Afrikaner/White identity and consequently protecting their sense of superiority from the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness.

The three types of existential anxieties of the Afrikaners in their historical and social contexts shaped certain deep desires: desire for security and desire for superiority (i.e., the drive for security and meaning was give ‘stability’ through the entrenchment of religiously coded racial superiority). In response, the Afrikaners turned to demonic faith—idolatry of state and religion together with the attempted destruction of the personhood of non-whites—confessing and enacting this faith in a distorted process of fulfilling their desires. The dynamics of the Afrikaners’ demonic faith consists of complex interactions among those elements: (1) the existential anxieties in their historical and social contexts, (2) desires, and (3) distorted methods of fulfilling the desires, the abuse of religious texts, symbols, and doctrines in the DRC tradition.

The anxiety of fate and death shaped the Afrikaners’ desire for security. Given the threat of contingency, vulnerability, and uncertainty generated by the wars, the Afrikaners desired to be secured, to overcome their external fate, to control their life as desire, and to remove uncertainty. Then the demonic faith, specifically the demonic idolatry, came to existence in a distorted way of fulfilling the desire for security: through the idolatrous absolutization or the elevation of the finite to the divine. After the Anglo-Boer Wars, the Afrikaners formed the Nationalist Party in 1914 and initiated the prolonged process of absolutizing the South African apartheid state which secures their powers to control all dimensions of life against the threat of contingency and uncertainty: the political, social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres. As overtly stated in ‘State Theology,’ the absolutization of the state was perpetrated by abusing Scripture, specifically Romans 13:1–7, and falsely invoking the name of God. Certainly, the Afrikaners found themselves being secured, but indeed they were falsely secured through the demonic idolatry: the elevation of the fallible nation-state to the divinely absolutized.

The anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness shaped the desire for superiority. For the Afrikaners, the problems of racial-mixing and poverty threatened the purity of their White racial

---

8 In Ritner’s article (Ritner 1967), he reported that the number of poor white was estimated to have reached one in five of the total Afrikaner population in the 1930s.
9 This “poor white identity” is not a unique local issue limited in South Africa, but there are various other locations in which the poor white identity has been historicized and analyzed: see James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Johnson 1995) and W.E.B. DuBois’ *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (DuBois 1992).
10 For this part, I am indebted to Edward Farley’s analysis of the dynamics of evil (Farley 1996).
identity and the sense of superiority, including moral superiority over non-Whites, so they desired to recover the strong sense of superiority over other racial groups. In contrast to the desire of security, the Afrikaners’ desire for superiority is the product of the already-distorted meaning making system on their racial identity. Then the first desire and its distorted method contaminated the second desire and its method of fulfilling it: the Afrikaner desired to absolutely secure their sense of superiority.

In order to achieve the doubly distorted desire, the Afrikaners devised the system of discrimination, oppression, and economic exploitation of people of color, known as the apartheid system. They abused the sacred texts and religious doctrines in the DRC tradition and offered the theological motivation and justification of the apartheid policy by naming it a Church policy. Historian T. Dunbar Moodie argues that the Afrikaners fabricated a form of civil religion constituted “a sophisticated theological interpretation of God’s acts in Afrikaner history with an explicitly republican eschatology” (Moodie 1975, p. 98). Specifically, they reinterpreted “the proto-history of Genesis 1–11” in the Old Testament and the story of Pentecost in the New Testament: they hijacked the notion of ‘ethnic diversity’ and reinstated “separate development” (a euphemism for apartheid) for “the co-existence of various people in one country” (de Gruchy and de Gruchy 2005, pp. 69–71). Under the apartheid system undergirded by the Afrikaner civil religion, the Afrikaners maximized their sense of superiority over non-Whites through the monopoly of socio-political, cultural, and religious powers. As I argued, this apartheid system, the systematic monopoly of powers by a certain racial group, is the demonic destruction of the social structure.

Under this destructive social structure, the demonic destruction of the personality of non-Whites was viciously perpetrated. Constituting the culture of dehumanization and even demonization of people of color was the cruel method to absolutely secure the Afrikaners’ sense of superiority. The Afrikaners found themselves being better and/or superior over the sub-humans treated like animals or things that have to be exploited. They enjoyed the sense of moral superiority as the absolute good by condemning and demonizing anyone who is against them through the religious symbolization of the absolute evil. For the Afrikaners, torture served as the most effective means to secure the absolutized superiority: it is a “ritual that translates pain into power” (Chidester 1991, p. 81). The bodily exertion of violence offered the Afrikaners the canalized power and superiority over people of color. The pain of the tortured—screaming, crying, and fearing—was manipulated as a source of materializing the Afrikaners’ sense of superiority. In this destructive way of fulfilling the distorted desire for absolutized superiority, the vicious feature of the demonic faith—destruction—came to fulfillment.

4. Toward Redemptive Faith: Courage and Empathy

As we discussed earlier, Tillich emphasized the existential ambiguities in the life process, and I particularly focused on the ambiguity of the divine and the demonic in this paper. The vicious features of the demonic and the dynamics of the demonic faith, enacted by the Afrikaners under the South African apartheid regime, seem to overwhelm us and paralyze our imagination to go beyond the forceful domination of the demonic over our faith and life. However, given the ambiguity, the demonic itself presupposes the divine. In other words, even though the power of the demonic is powerfully destructive, it cannot totally destroy the divine as the ultimate ground of our faith and life.11

The ambiguity of the divine and the demonic resonates with R. Scott Appleby’s notion of “the ambivalence of the sacred” (Appleby 2000). Drawing on Rudolph Otto’s philosophical analysis of the holy, Appleby points out “the paradoxical legacy of religion in the ambivalent character of human responses”—religious violence or religious peacebuilding—to the sacred (Appleby 2000, p. 19). Here, it is important to emphasize that the ambivalence does not reside in “the sacred itself” but “only in the imperfect human perception of the sacred” (Appleby 2000, p. 30). In other words, like Tillich, Appleby points out humanity’s finitude, specifically our ambiguous responses to the sacred. “Violent

11 My definition of the divine as the ultimate ground of our faith and life is based on Tillich’s notion of God as “the ground of being” (Tillich 1973, p. 235).
as well as nonviolent [peaceful] acts” by humans ‘in the name of God’ fall within the range of ambiguous responses (ibid.). For example, on the one hand, Bahaa al-Din al-Najj, a nineteen-year-old Palestinian Muslim responded to Allah’s will through his suicide bombing in the Israeli police compound in Gaza killing himself and numerous civilians. On the other hand, a few blocks away from the site of bloody violence, many fellow Muslims responded to Allah’s will by “bandaging the wounds and restoring the health of the inhabitants of Gaza” (Appleby 2000, pp. 26–27).

As a state of ambivalence represents “the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing” (Appleby 2000, p. 29), our finite responses to God, what Tillich calls the divine and the demonic, coexist in tension. Indeed, the divine—embodied by the Muslims’ nonviolent actions for healing and peace—presents us a possibility of breaking the shackles of the demonic, and the actualization of this possibility is what I call redemption in this paper. I define redemptive faith as the existential state of being grasped by the courageous and empathic power of the divine, not by the power of demonic. In contrast to demonic faith which directs us toward the distorted ways of fulfilling our desires, including already-distorted desires, redemptive faith refines our desires and guide us into faithful and ethical ways of fulfilling our desires. Against the two key features of the demonic faith—idolatry and destruction, the redemptive faith consists of two key features—courage and empathy—and each feature empowers us to break the demonic idolatry and destruction respectively. Now I turn to explore a theoretical possibility of how these features of the redemptive faith could have resisted the demonic idolatry and destruction in the South African case.\(^\text{12}\)

The first feature of the redemptive faith, courage, corrects the distorted way of fulfilling the desire of security. As examined above, the Afrikaners responded to their desire for security through the absolutization of their nation-state and racial identity. They found themselves being secured, but indeed their sense of security is false, since they deceptively elevated the finite to the infinite or the absolute. Rather than this deceptive absolutization of the finite, the Afrikaners’ desire for security can be fulfilled through the power of the divine which truly secures them on the ultimate ground of their faith and life. In other words, borrowing Edward Farley’s notion, the Afrikaners bear a possibility of “being-founded” in the presence of the divine (Farley 1990, p. 144). The experience of being-founded—the actualization of this possibility—is the experience of redemption, which would enable the Afrikaners to hold the redemptive faith. Then, the redemptive faith would equip them with courage in three existential postures: (1) “relativizing,” (2) “consent,” and (3) “the risk of being” (Farley 1990, p. 144).

Under the first feature of the redemptive faith, courage, the posture of demonic idolatry, the distorted way of fulfilling the desire for security, can be transformed into an existential posture of relativizing. For the Afrikaners, this existential posture would empower them to resist the demonic temptation of absolutizing the nation-state and their White racial identity in order to falsely achieve their sense of security. While their posture of absolutizing “refuses to acknowledge the inherent fragility, corruptibility, and finite limitations” of the nation-state and the White racial identity, the posture of relativizing in courage restores the “historical character” of the two finite objects and consequently “their contextuality, their fragility to change and demise, and even corruptibility” (Farley 1990, p. 147). In other words, courage can liberate the Afrikaners from the distorted way of fulfilling the desire for security, the posture of absolutizing. The demonic whispers that unless values are ultimate and unconditional, they must be meaningless. However, courage makes it possible to accept the relative and fragile reality of values without succumbing to meaninglessness (i.e., values can be accepted as of relative value).

The existential posture of relativizing in courage pairs with another existential posture: consent. The posture of consent is a “fundamental and existential acceptance of the tragic character of being” (Farley 1990, p. 148). As Tillich emphasized the existential ambiguities in the life process, the tragic elements are ontologically structured in the existence of being. The “reality, goodness, and beauty of

\(^\text{12}\) This paper mainly aims to explore a theoretical possibility of transformation from demonic faith to redemptive faith. Discussion on some pragmatic ways for this transformation would be another research project after this paper.
being” are inevitably enmeshed with “chaos, suffering, and tragic incompatibilities” (Farley 1990, p. 149). In other words, we are thrown into certain tragic situations which we cannot totally control or negate. The Afrikaners are not exempted from these elements: they fell into contingency, uncertainty, and even suffering under their historical context of armed conflict. However, courage can enable them to hold the posture of consent: “the existential and emotional acknowledgement” of the tragic elements, such as “randomness, accidents, and tragic disproportions” (Farley 1990, p. 149).

Finally, the two existential postures of courage—relativizing and consent—are strengthened by a third posture: the risk of being. As discussed, courage is only possible when we are found in the divine, the ultimate ground of our faith and life. Courage, however, does not direct us to turn away from the world, but turn toward the world as a “venturing of the self amidst the perils of the world” (Farley 1990, p. 150). Given the tragic elements actualized in the world, we are prone to be in the postures of “self-protection and withdrawal” in order to “avoid situations that threaten our meaning, integrity, identity, and determinacy” (Farley 1990, p. 150). The Afrikaners were seized by the posture of self-protection and tried to systematically rule out any situation that threatens their meaning, integrity, and identity given their sense of superiority over people of color. The posture of the risk of being is able to free the Afrikaners from the posture of self-protection and motivates them to courageously embrace and venture certain conditions—the native problem or the Poor White questions—which they formerly recognized as things to be removed.

The three existential postures of courage—relativizing, consent, and the risk of being— in the redemptive faith play a role in constructing a hospitable environment in which the second feature of the redemptive faith, empathy, empowers us to break the shackles of the demonic destruction. Grounded in divine empathy, the second feature transforms our desire, including already-distorted desire (i.e., the Afrikaners’ desire for superiority), and offers ethical ways to fulfill the transformed desire.

As defined earlier, redemptive faith is the existential state grasper by the redemptive power of the divine. The manifestation or revelation of the redemptive power comes forth in the metaphoric mode of the divine empathy: Farley argues that “the rich contents of redemption, the event of Jesus as Christ, and the symbolics of God all point to a single metaphor for God’s activity [in relation to the world], the metaphor of divine empathy” (Farley 1996, p. 295). Following his argument, the second feature of the redemptive faith is grounded in the divine empathy. The divine empathy incorporates the following concepts in philosophical texts: (1) “empathy” as a “transcendently based capacity to perceive the other in its experiencing”; (2) “sympathy or fellow-feeling” as both a “perception” and a “participation in the life of the other”; (3) “compassion” as a “participation in the suffering or misery of the other”; and (4) “love” as an “unqualified suffering self-impertation of one’s being to or for the sake of the other” (Farley 1996, p. 295). Grasped by the divine empathy, the redemptive faith shapes our empathy, which refines our desire and then offers ethical ways of fulfilling the refined desire. Through the refinement of desire and the equipment of the ethical ways, we are empowered to resist the vicious destruction in the demonic faith.

Going back to the South African case, under the toxic influence of the demonic idolatry—the postures of absolutizing and self-protection—the Afrikaners were preoccupied with the desire for absolutized superiority in order to escape and even root out the threats to their meaning-making system and their sense of superiority over non-White racial groups. For the Afrikaners, courage in the redemptive faith opens a possibility to embrace the dangerous conditions, and then empathy transforms their desire for absolutized superiority into desire for mutual flourishing. Rather than monopolizing every possible resource for the sake of consolidating the absolutized superiority, under the influence of empathy, the Afrikaners could desire to (1) perceive and appreciate “the beautiful other,” (2) participate in the suffering of other, and (3) work for building “an environment of mutual enhancement” (Farley 1996, p. 302).

In empathy, the Afrikaners could be guided to ethically fulfill the transformed desire for mutual flourishing. As examined above, the Afrikaners destructively fulfilled the desire for absolutized superiority through the dehumanization and even demonization under the distorted social structure known as the apartheid system. Specifically, they viciously exerted the bodily power in torture and
took advantage of the suffering and pain of people of color for materializing or canalizing their sense of superiority. However, empathy can present the Afrikaners at least three ethical measures, not destructive, for responding to the desire for mutual flourishing.

The first ethical measure is the appreciation of the inherent dignity of each individual. Given this measure, the Afrikaners could be guided to acknowledge what Emmanuel Levinas calls the face of the other. According to Levinas, the face is “the presentation of an entity as an entity,” “its personal presentation,” “an expression, the existence of a substance, a thing in itself” (Levinas 1987, p. 20). In other words, the face of the other expresses one’s own inviolable dignity: the ineffaceable individuality, particularity, uniqueness, beauty, and even vulnerability to suffering, which cannot be possessed and abused for the sake of the benefit of particular group. In the story of Father Smangaliso Mkhatshwa, his face, his inviolable dignity or humanness, was violently negated when the torturers laughed before his suffering body in the torture chamber. However, empathy opens a possibility for the Afrikaners to non-violently appreciate the face of each person of color. This non-violent, thus, ethical appreciation of the face of other is aroused by the representation of the face itself. The face of the other presents the ineffaceable qualities in a non-violent way: rather than using forceful power or violence, it opens up its vulnerability in “the absolute nakedness of a face, the absolutely defenseless face, without covering, clothing or mask” (Levinas 1987, p. 21). The face is total resistance to the demonic destruction, but it resists in “the total nudity of his [her] defenceless eyes”: this is why Levinas names the face “the ethical resistance” (Levinas 1969, p. 199). In other words, the ethical appreciation of the face of other is simultaneously the ethical resistance to the dehumanization and demonization in the demonic destruction.

The non-violent appreciation of the face of the other leads to the second ethical measure: the participation in the suffering of the other. The face of the other represents both the inherent beauty and vulnerability. Given the tragic structure of being or the existential ambiguities in life process, each individual is vulnerable to suffering and pain. Hence, the first ethical measure incorporates perceiving the other’s suffering and pain, and then empathy further motivates us to participate in them. The Afrikaners not only negated the suffering faces of persons of color, but also cruelly abused their bodily pains for canalizing the sense of superiority. Nonetheless, in the mode of empathy, the Afrikaners could be led to open their eyes to see the suffering faces of persons of color and even participate in their suffering and pain.

The two ethical measures address the dimension of inter-human relationship, and the third ethical measure mainly concerns the dimension of social structure. Empathy directs us toward the restoration of the distorted social structure for mutual flourishing. As examined earlier, the social structure in South Africa had lapsed into a system of structural violence against non-White racial groups. This social system as the concrete enactment of the demonic destruction is based on the mentality of zero-sum game: the Afrikaners devised the social system to monopolize socio-political, cultural, and religious powers. In contrast, empathy guides the Afrikaners to build a social structure inspired by the spirit of win-win game. Both the Afrikaners and people of color in South Africa might mutually benefit from the social structure and cooperate with each other for enhancing each individual’s well-being regardless of race, class, and gender.

The second feature of redemptive faith, empathy, emerges from divine empathy as the ultimate ground of human empathy. Empathy refines our desire, including the already-distorted desire. In the South African case, it transforms the Afrikaners’ desire for absolutized superiority into the desire for mutual flourishing. Empathy then offers us ethical measures to fulfill the refined desire: for the Afrikaners, it presents the three ethical measures—the non-violent appreciation of the face of the other, the participation in the suffering of the other, and the restoration of the social structure for mutual flourishing. In empathy, we are empowered to resist the demonic power, specifically the demonic destruction of the personality and the social structure.

5. Conclusions: The Criterion of Truth

Throughout the paper, I examined a question of what is faith that justified and even motivated the Afrikaners’ use of sacred texts, symbols and practices in a particular religious tradition for (1)
absolutizing the South African state, the apartheid system, and their particular racial identity and (2) perpetrating the dehumanization and demonization of people of color through various forms of violence. I argued that the Afrikaners confessed the demonic faith, and the two key features of the demonic faith—the demonic idolatry and destruction—were actually enacted by the vicious actions of the Afrikaners. However, I pointed out that the demonic faith has not developed in a vacuum, and presented the dynamics of the Afrikaners’ demonic faith: the complex interactions of the three existential anxieties in their concrete historical and social contexts, two desires for security and (absolutized) superiority, and the distorted measures of fulfilling the two desires—abslutization and dehumanization/demonization respectively. Then, I suggested the possibility of the redemptive faith given the ambiguity of the demonic and the divine. I explored how the two key features of redemptive faith—courage and empathy—can empower the Afrikaners to resist the demonic power and break the cycle of demonic idolatry and destruction.

Again, the redemptive and divine elements are tragically paired with the idolatrous and destructive demonic opposites. Although this tragic ambiguity necessarily guarantees the ineffaceable possibility of redemptive faith, it also points out that we cannot guarantee our total immunity to demonic faith. Tillich says:

It is probably possible and in accordance with the prophetic spirit to see in the events of a time signs of redeeming fate, and it is necessary and absolutely demanded to unveil the demon and to seek and use all the weapons of resistance; but there is no certainty of success, for there is no certainty that a finite reality, even if it be Christian culture, is indestructible. The demon inspires such a false certainty (Tillich 1936, p. 122)

Given this tragic ambiguity, we call for some criteria to discern whether we are grasped by the demonic faith or the redemptive faith. As Tillich already pointed out above, the working mechanism of the demonic is deception or falseness. As examined earlier, the Afrikaners were secured by deceptively elevating the finite to the infinite or the divine. They thought that their sense of superiority was restored by the dehumanization and demonization of people of color, but indeed their humanness was also distorted through their exertion of violence. Therefore, truth serves as the key criterion to discern the demonic faith. In light of the criterion of truth, the facelessness of the demonic faith, the deceptive appearance, will be debunked, and we are prepared to resist against the temptation of the demonic idolatry and destruction. Although truthfulness is not the sole criterion, I conclude this paper with my suggestion of truth as the key criterion of discerning the demonic faith and the initial step toward justice, non-violent resistance against the demonic idolatry and destruction.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Appleby, R. Scott. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Beinart, William. 2001. *Twentieth-Century South Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Boesak, Allan. 1983. He mand us all, but. In *Apartheid Is a Heresy*. Edited by John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, pp. 1–9.

Chidester, David. 1991. *Shots in the Streets: Violence and Religion in South Africa*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Crewe, Jonathan. 2017. Boer Melancholia: Ingrid Winterbach’s Niggle. *English in Africa* 44: 15–33.

De Gruchy, John W. 1991. * Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

De Gruchy, John W., and Steve de Gruchy. 2005. *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 25th Anniversary ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

De Gruchy, John W., and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds. 1983. *Apartheid Is a Heresy*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. 1992. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. New York: The Free Press.
Farley, Edward. 1990. *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
Farley, Edward. 1996. *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
Galtung, Johan. 1969. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6: 167–91.
Galtung, Johan. 1990. Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research* 27:291–305.
Johnson, James Weldon. 1995. *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. New York: Dover.
Jubber, Ken. 1985. The Prodigal Church: South Africa’s Dutch Reformed Church and the Apartheid Policy. *Social Compass* 32: 273–85.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.
Marsden, John. 2009. Paul Tillich and the Theology of German Religious Socialism. *Political Theology* 10: 31–48.
Moodie, T. Dunbar. 1975. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley: Univ of California Press.
Ritner, Susan Rennie. 1967. The Dutch Reformed Church and Apartheid. *Journal of Contemporary History* 2: 17–37.
Scarry, Elaine. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
The Kairos Theologians. 1986. *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church; A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, 2nd ed. Johannesburg: Skotville Press.
Thompson, Leonard Monteath. 2001. *A History of South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Tillich, Paul. 1936. *The Interpretation of History*. Translated by N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons.
Tillich, Paul. 1973. *Systematic Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 1.
Tillich, Paul. 1976. *Systematic Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 3.
Tillich, Paul. 2000. *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed. New York: Yale University Press.
Walshe, Peter. 1978. Inside South Africa: Exploitation, Dissent and Repression. *Cross Currents* 28: 395–420.
Zucker, Wolfgang M. 1969. The Demonic: From Aeschylus to Tillich. *Theology Today* 26: 34–50.

© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).