

# **Weapons of Mass Destruction in Context; Investigating the Links between Militarization and Godlessness of Modern Politics**

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## **Abstract**

Modern brutality, which found its culmination in using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against humanity, is the dark side of the principal teachings of the Enlightenment. The great thinkers of the Enlightenment, blaming religion as the main source of violence, removed God from the center of Western political and social thought to replace it with human. Although they were not conscious of the outcomes of their philosophy, in the course of time, it made modern societies more power-hungry and less accountable for their actions. To investigate this issue, relying on Theodor Adorno and other critics, the rudiments of the Enlightenment will first be analyzed. Then, looking at the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this article investigates the way in which militarization, and its peak, the atomic bomb, became an unintended outcome of the Enlightenment. In the next step, we will discuss the reactions of American Churches to the bomb to examine how differently a God-centered perspective may act against using or proliferating WMD. This leads to the role that the belief in God may play in increasing the sense of accountability in man's social and political behavior. The article concludes that based on historical evidence, there is no indication that a human-centered model is more immune from violence than a God-centered one.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, Humanism, Militarization, Weapons of Mass Destruction

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## 1. Introduction

The Iranian nuclear program, accused by the West of pursuing military goals, has been the subject of intense debates in world politics since the turn of the century. Although Iran rejects such accusations, the United States and other Western powers, along with Israel, who own devastating nuclear arsenals, condemn Iran for following a nuclear path. International condemnations, sanctions, severe pressure, and constant military threat are the costs that Iran has to pay for its presumed nuclear program. Donald Trump, who praised the US [nuclear] army to be the most powerful on earth, threatened Iran in his tweets of "total annihilation", an ironic position, claimed to maintain world peace and prevent war and violence.

However, one may ask about the logic of such attacks against Iran. If nuclear bomb is a disastrous weapon, and if the international community endeavors a world free of nuclear bombs, Western powers and Israel, who are the sole owners of nuclear bombs in the region, should first engage in the process of denuclearization. If having nuclear technology for military purposes is wrong, why do wrongdoers want to prevent others from owning this technology? It is, however, not difficult to answer this question for Western audience. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a religious political system; it is believed, in the Western common knowledge after the Enlightenment, that religious politics inclines toward brutality and violence (Appleby, 2000, p. 1). For the thinkers of the Enlightenment, secular modernity is viewed as the source of liberty and rationality, while the memory of the Mediaeval era, supervised by religious authorities, represents violence and irrationality.

This article aims to investigate the common Western belief to

understand whether modern secular politics has been less inclined to violence, in comparison with prior religious politics in the West. The sheer scale of violence of the twentieth century, and in particular the nuclear threat that emerged from the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have brought the world together under a constant fear that civilizations may be destroyed by their own achievements. The twentieth century, which harvested the fruits of the Enlightenment, and is considered the great age of economic development, democracy, and national self-determination, was at the same time the bloodiest in recorded history. The death toll of about 187 million human beings was equal to more than one-tenth of the world's population in the dawn of the World War I (Hobsbawm, 2002). It was also the century that made defenseless civilians increasingly become the targets of military calculations. Whereas during the 1914–18 war, civilians comprised only one-twentieth of the victims of war, during the 1939–45 war, that proportion rose to two-thirds. It is estimated that in current wars, nine-tenths of the victims of wars are civilians (Kean, 2003, p. 56). Among the chief factors that have made non-combatants feel extraordinarily unsafe and vulnerable, are the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

*Encyclopedia Britannica*, under the entry 'Weapon of mass destruction' defines WMD as the weapons with the capacity to inflict death and destruction indiscriminately and in a massive scale. WMD can be of nuclear, biological, or chemical nature. For the first time, WMD were used during World War I, in which chlorine gas and mustard gas were fired in artillery shells against entrenched troops. Instances of using chemical weapons by both sides in the World War II are also reported. However, the most shocking event of the use of WMD was the US atomic attack on Hiroshima, in which" 66,000 people [were] instantly killed by the

blast and heat of a single nuclear weapon. (By the end of the year, radiation injury brought the death toll to 140,000)" (Tikkanen, n.d.). Three days later, Nagasaki was hit and another 40,000 people were indiscriminately massacred. In another case of using WMD, the US army massively used chemical weapons in the Vietnam War (1961-75). It is estimated that one million surviving victims are still suffering from the most horrific chemical war in the history, launched by the United States against the people of southern Vietnam, in a battle, which, Washington claimed, was for "saving [Vietnamese] from communism" (Karadjis, 2003). The final case of the actual using of WMD in the twentieth century occurred when chemical weapons were used several times by Saddam Hussein in the course of Iraq-Iran War (1980–88). It is reported that in those attacks, 10000 combatants and civilians were killed and another 100000 injured. Iran believes that such genocide against humanity would have not been possible without a green light from the West, and the silence of international organizations (*Farsnews*, 2011).

Using historical methods and Popperian situational analysis, this article argues that such brutality, which has only found its culmination in using WMD against humanity, is in fact the dark side of the principal teachings of the Enlightenment. Although the great thinkers of the Enlightenment were not conscious about the actual outcomes of their philosophy, the fact that they removed God from the center of Western political and social thought, to replace it with human, in the course of time made modern societies more power-hungry and less responsible for their actions. The article's hypothesis is that a review of modern history indicates that modern secular ideologies have no privileged status over religion as the inclination to violence is concerned. To investigate this issue, we will start with a literature review on the interrelation between religion and violence, and then relying on Theodor

Adorno and other critics' theories, as the theoretical framework of this paper, we will analyze the rudiments of the Enlightenment. Then, looking at the Western history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we will investigate the way in which militarization became an unintended outcome of the Enlightenment. Following that, we will focus on using the atomic bomb and critically evaluate the rationale behind committing such horrendous crimes against humanity. After that, we will discuss the reactions by American Churches to the use of the atomic bomb, which leads to the role that the belief in God may play in increasing the sense of accountability in man's social and political behavior. Finally, we will discuss the fake God-centered models, which are in fact human-centered with rather similar outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

Since the late twentieth century and after several acts of terror in the name of Islam, the interrelation between religion and violence became the subject of important debate in Western academia. Numerous books and articles attempted to revive this old debate and analyze the situation in which religion was taken a new *other* for the Western civilization in the threat vacuum of the post-Cold War era. This literature may be divided into two major categories.

The first category includes the literature, which asserts that religion is more inclined toward violence. Richard Wentz, in *Why People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion*, highlights an absolutist nature of religion, which leads people to commit acts of violence under its banner. He holds that religiousness is a universal human characteristic and because certain people are incapable of living with non-absolutes and uncertainty, they use religion as a marker of identity, in such a way that it is promoted or defended

against others (Wentz, 1993, pp. 13- 37). Martin Marty in *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good*, stresses the decisiveness role of religion and takes this characteristic as the source of the problem. "Those called to be religious naturally form separate groups, movements, tribes, or nations. Responding in good faith to a divine call, believers feel themselves endowed with sacred privilege, a sense of chosenness that elevates them above all others" (Martin & Moor, 2000, p. 25). Finally, Bhikhu Parekh, in his paper entitled "The Voice of Religion in Political Discourse" discusses the irrationality of religious belief. He maintains, "although religion can make a valuable contribution to political life, it can also be a pernicious influence, as liberals rightly highlight. It is often absolutist, self-righteous, arrogant, dogmatic, and impatient of compromise. It arouses powerful and sometimes irrational impulses and can easily destabilize society, cause political havoc, and create a veritable hell on earth" (Parekh, 1999, p. 72).

The second category includes the literature that reject any link between religion and violence. William Cavanaugh in *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* holds that religious violence is a myth fabricated by modern nation states in favor of their own interests. He remarks, "This myth can be and is used in domestic politics to legitimate the marginalization of certain types of practices and groups labeled religious, while underwriting the nation-state's monopoly on its citizens' willingness to sacrifice and kill. In foreign policy, the myth of religious violence serves to cast nonsecular social orders, especially Muslim societies, in the role of villain" (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 4). John Esposito in *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* maintains that the post-Enlightenment tendency to define religion as a system of beliefs restricted to personal or private life, rather than as a way of life, is in fact "secular fundamentalism," which

has come to represent for many a self-evident and timeless truth (Esposito, 1999, p. 258). The third writer who attempts to remove any links between contemporary fundamentalist terrorist groups and religion is Olivier Roy. According to Roy, fundamentalism is both a product and an agent of globalization, since it accepts without nostalgia the loss of pristine culture, and advocates the opportunity to build a universal religious identity, delinked from any specific culture. In addition, “[f]undamentalism is synonymous with westernisation, and above all is also (but not exclusively) a tool of westernisation” (Roy, 2004, p. 26).

Having discussed the two positions concerning religion in the current literature, it seems that for investigating any links between religion and violence, the case of WMD can be revealing. The case of WMD, which illustrates an unprecedented phase of violence in human history, has had no link with religious ethos and was a technological product of modern sciences and modern rationality, used by a modern secular nation state. This paper attempts to use this case to investigate the links between secular/religious paradigms and violence.

### **3. Foundations of the Enlightenment**

‘The Enlightenment’ is usually defined as a period in which modern Europe began to emerge from the supposed era of ignorance of the Middle Ages to an “enlightened” era. It is roughly equivalent to the long eighteenth century, meaning the period from the mid-seventeenth century until the last decades of the eighteenth century. A renowned self-definition of the Enlightenment has been proposed by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). As one of the most central figures of this school, he sees the exercise of human reason and freedom as the main rudiments of the Enlightenment, which

intertwines theory and practice. The use of reason tells human beings not only what to think, but also how to act free from any constraints (Kant, 1996, in Wilson, 2007, p. 12).

The credit for the foundations of the Enlightenment can be attributed to Kant's predecessor, the English philosopher, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who was a leading figure in natural philosophy and in scientific methodology in the period of transition to the early modern era. Bacon is best known for his excessive empiricism; he considers knowledge not as contemplative wisdom, but as an active conquest for practical ends. The critics of the Enlightenment start their analysis from this point: "What human beings seek to learn from nature," write Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to explain that the spirit of the school, "is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 2). In this human-centered world, which implies Plato's Protagoras, "man is the measure of all things", a principle that can be traced in the coming steps of the Enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p. 6) add:

In their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command. Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their "in-itself" becomes "for him." In their transformation, the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination. This identity constitutes the unity of nature.



Elaborating on the Enlightenment's oversimplification of natural phenomena, over which only 'reason' can dictate what is significant and what is not, Horkheimer and Adorno illustrate the "rather instrumental" way of thinking in the Enlightenment. Since knowledge should eventually serve humans by helping them exploit everything, technology makes the essence of knowledge. Here they comment that "[i]nstrumental thinking destroys thinking" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 18). In addition, because knowledge is merely an instrument fabricated for satisfying human desires and removing his pains, "power and knowledge are synonymous" (Bacon, 1831, p. 31). In thinking of 'reason' in this way, they clearly resemble the view of rationality developed by Max Weber (1864–1920) in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber holds that the spirit of capitalism is characterized as "that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically" (Weber, 1905, 2000, p. 64). Capitalism, Weber continues, is an approach to the acquisition of profit, in which reason is [like an abacus] merely tasked with calculating the outcomes and losses in any and every situation (Weber, 1905, 2000, p. 64). In brief, in the modern thought, God tended to be replaced by human, religious *duties* with citizens' *rights*, belief with reason, and salvation with worldly profits.

The culmination of Godlessness of Western modern thought, however, dates back to the French positivist philosopher, August Comte (1798–1857). He supplied the most systematic account of a secular 'religion of humanity', and gave it a currency for a while. "A universe without supernatural sanction or presence, Comte argues, can be fully understood only by the empirical, and of course scientific, description of 'positive' phenomena, stripped of the sentimental pieties of traditional religion or romantic pantheism" (Davies, 2001, p. 28). In fact, as the father of

positivism, he believed that religious beliefs and philosophical arguments could work only when we have no access to the positive knowledge. Now, after developing empirical methodologies, we have faith only in what we can find by our immediate senses. Everything else would be nonsense.

The nineteenth century and the early twentieth century witnessed similar mentalities, which attempted to holistically explain and govern nature and society with so-called secular religions, or in other words, ideologies. Removing God from the center and putting themselves in His place, secularist philosophers strived to suggest man-made solutions for all natural and social problems. Certain progressive scientific theories, such as the economic observations by Karl Marx (1818–1883), the theory of Evolution suggested by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and the observations on psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) reinforced this new trend. As a result, man-made ideologies of Marxism, Darwinism, Freudism, and the like began to become more appealing than their God-centered traditional rivals. The rapid advancement of this trend in natural sciences, particularly in producing wonderful inventions of new technologies, convinced many, like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) to think of “the death of God.” Yet, the technological advancement was only one side of the coin.

#### **4. An Unintended Consequence: Militarism**

Modernization has been intended as a comprehensive shift towards the civic culture, driven by industrialization and signaled by the triumph of secularization. Modernization, in this way, led to positive advancements such as obtaining a standard level of

economic development, job creation, literacy, educational and scientific achievements, political freedom, respect for human rights, self-determination, and democracy. Amidst this progress, any type of violence and war was perceived by most of the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century's liberals as a barbaric survival, doomed to eventual extinction. In practice, however, the firm link between modern society and large-scale armed forces and a massive scale of violence has, since the French Revolution, seemed plain.

The story starts with the French Revolution itself. Although many of the outstanding writers of the French Enlightenment, such as Diderot, Voltaire, Turgot, and Rousseau, sharply criticized war preparations and standing armies, the revolution, in which this intellectual movement flourished, was doomed to degenerate into the rise of one of the most successful conquerors of all times: Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), a phenomenon who injected the stake of militarism into the heart of the liberal transformation. He described himself as “a soldier, child of the Revolution, sprung from the bosom of the people” (Lauterbach, 1944, p. 449). He added, “A nation must have a religion, and that religion must be under the control of the government”. He opened the command posts to the commoner, as later Hitler did in Germany, but interpreted the new principle of equality in his own way; “Liberty is a pretext. Equality is all the rage with you and that is why the people are content with a king taken from the ranks of the soldiers” (Lauterbach, 1944, p. 450).

Modern warfare could not be confined to small bodies of technicians. The expectation of the pacifists that democracy and industrialism would eliminate war has also proved wrong. In fact, modern civilization has by no means destroyed the belligerent instincts of man. Quite the opposite, in modern industrial societies,

an army that possesses the loyalty and flows unquestionable obedience to authority, and in this way has abundant faith, has been able to better satisfy the will to power of the authority. In Michel Foucault's words, "the 'Enlightenment,' which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines" (Foucault, 1975, p. 222). The architects of modern society, however, failed to foresee how deeply industrial changes and the modern disciplines would enlarge and entrench the antagonism of humankind.

In a human-centered milieu, ideologies were employed to justify and rationalize this aspect. The emergence of modern ideologies in the place of religion was in fact the mental armament for total war (Townshend, 1993). Among all ideologies, militarism was the most explicit one in conveying violence. As pointed out by certain scholars, there is a distinction between the two terms of "military" and "militaristic", the former is compatible with a civilized society, while the latter, as a ruthless power-hungry ideology often employs legitimate principles into its violent dogmas (Lauterbach, 1944). Nationalism, another modern ideology, has been taken responsible for numerous wars, including the World War I. Again, nationalism should not be mixed with national identity. The latter is a form of identity that crystallizes around a common language or dialect, common historical background, cultural habits and feelings for nature, while the former is an upwardly mobile power-hungry ideology that falsely makes universal claims. "It supposes that it is the natural order of things and that the Nation is a biological fact" (Kean, 1993). Being based on friend-foe calculations, this ideology attempts to simplify concepts and prove that it has strict boundaries with others, who are seen as unworthy of respect or recognition. This is quite in contrast with national identity, which originally emerged as an idea with flexible boundaries, tolerance of difference and openness to others. Many other man-made ideologies such as

Fascism, Nazism and Communism have been responsible for countless bloody wars. From a theoretical point of view, they are just a natural outcome of the dialectic of reason and power, which is rooted in the discourse proposed by the Enlightenment.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the overwhelming influence of the Darwinian Naturalism on social relations resulted in frequent applications of the Darwinian rule of 'the struggle for existence', which in turn, inevitably resulted in the politics of war. In the same logic, certain analysts were opposed to international arbitration, which, to their understanding, was unable to take the place of the processes and results obtained by "the free play of natural forces" (See for instance: Mahan, 1912). If war was "an event of nature" or an "instrument of order," as certain Nazi writers called it, then evidently military considerations had to dominate all peacetime institutions, so far as there was any room left for the concept of "peace" (Lauterbach, 1944, p. 476). In other words, the original liberal dream of international harmony was giving way to "social Darwinism, the belief that nations, like species, were involved in a struggle for survival - not against a hostile nature, but against hostile neighbors" (Townshend, 1993, p. 77).

This militaristic approach of the modern West was not limited to its borders. In fact, the majority of victims, many of whose bitter stories are still untold, lie in the non-Western world. Ironically, the human-centred rationalism, synthesized with Darwinism, made a rationale for oppressing other human races, since in the great hierarchy of being, they were considered lower than the 'white man'. Edward Said observed that based on such mentality, the Orientals were put in the second rank of humanity. As a result, the inferiority of the Orientals was considered as a biological "truth", such as what spelled out in P. Charles Michel's *A Biological View*

*of our Foreign Policy* (published in 1896) and Charles Harvey's *The Biology of British Politics* (1904) (Said, 2003, p. 23). Following this logic, formal annexation of other territories often resulted. "Driven by states' search for new markets and political hegemony, a quarter of the earth's land was formally colonized or re-colonized during the four decades before 1914" (Kean, 2003, p. 50).

Such antagonism is related to the human-centered world, in which mankind, without any accountability to any natural or supernatural entity, assumes himself the sole governor of the universe. The sense of having rights, but no accountability to any higher authority, can remove the limits of human desires. As history has clearly witnessed, this egoistic logic does not limit itself to non-human objects, but could easily find rationales for making hostility against other human groups and individuals. The tragic end of the World War II, which witnessed the sole actual case of detonating an atomic bomb, is revealing.

#### **4.1. The Atomic Bomb**

The first users of WMD (chemical weapons), the German army, as well as the British and the French, who had used poison gas in the World War I, legitimized their action as an attempt to terminate the war and save lives. At the end of the day, in a human-centered discourse, all human actions should be colored as having been done for the sake of human-beings in one way or another. Expectedly, similar justification was presented to the world by America for using the atomic bomb – again to end the war and save lives. General George Marshall, remembered later why there was an agreement during the final days of the summer of 1945 about the atomic bomb:

We had had the one hundred thousand people killed in Tokyo in one night of [conventional fire] bombs, and it had had seemingly no effect whatsoever. It destroyed the Japanese cities, yes, but their morale was not affected as far as we could tell, not at all. So it seemed quite necessary, if we could, to shock them into action.... We had to end the war [Marshall concludes], we had to save American lives (Rhodes, 2004, In Kelly, 2004, pp. 25-26).

The atomic bomb brought total death to its targets cheaply and indiscriminately. People at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, including combatants and noncombatants, Korean forced laborers, American prisoners of war, pregnant women, children, grandmothers, newborn babies, brides and grooms, were massacred. Would General George Marshall have allowed the Japanese, if they had the bomb at their disposal, to drop it on American cities using the same argument? Which logic says that innocent babies should pay the price for the antagonism of two modern states? Was it 100% necessary that the bomb be dropped in a populated city to show the might of America? Wasn't it possible to drop it in the sea or in a non-populated area with a serious warning before using it against actual targets? We do not seem to receive any answers for these questions from a military commander, as in a modern system, a military person is primarily trained to obey the commands and not to think about the logic. Yet, it is interesting to examine the argument of the political authority in charge, President Harry Truman regarding the use of the atomic bomb in Japan. In a statement published on August 6, 1945, the day of the bombing of Hiroshima, the President officially, and of course honorably, announced detonating the bomb. Blaming the Japanese for starting the war in the Pearl Harbor, he explained the various dimensions of this achievement, stating:

[T]he greatest marvel is not the size of the enterprise, its secrecy, nor its cost, but the achievement of scientific brains in putting together infinitely complex pieces of knowledge held by many men in different fields of science into a workable plan. And hardly less marvelous has been the capacity of industry to design, and of labor to operate, the machines and methods to do things never done before so that the brain child of many minds came forth in physical shape and performed as it was supposed to do. Both science and industry worked under the direction of the United States Army, which achieved a unique success in managing so diverse a problem in the advancement of knowledge in an amazingly short time. It is doubtful if such another combination could be got together in the world. What has been done is the greatest achievement of organized science in history (Truman, 1955).

In this speech, Truman illustrated a brilliant Baconian link between knowledge and power, between nature and reason, and between the logic of the Enlightenment and the excessive militarization of the human-centered politics of the twentieth century. He also demonstrated a clear explanation for how the line of reasoning of the Enlightenment saw the mastering of other humans in line with mastering the nature. To his eyes, it did not matter that this crime against humanity dehumanized and sacrificed thousands of lives, and that in the future could take millions of more innocent souls. What mattered for this mind, trained in the logic of the Enlightenment, was that the bomb was "the greatest achievement of organized science in history" (Truman, 1955), and indeed this was the zenith of secular science which provided no sense of accountability for its actions.



## 4.2. How did Religion React?

Having examined the secular perspectives of the military and political authorities regarding the use of WMD, it is important to investigate the corresponding religious perspective as well. In theory, we can expect both success and failure of the religious perspective when it faces the modern rationale for using WMD. On the one hand, the religious vision should be different because it is based on a God-centered discourse, which provides a higher sense of accountability and sees world affairs in a broader perspective. Therefore, it is naturally expected that religious discourse supports a more pacifist approach, and if “just war” is prescribed, it should be limited by certain humanitarian rules and regulations, which should not conform to the use of WMD. On the other hand, religious understandings of people are subject to a variety of interpretations, which are both diverse and dynamic. A mind trained in the logic of the Enlightenment may understand religion more instrumentalistically, and may even ideologize religion in a modern human-centered perspective. In this way, Olivier Roy rightly observed the behavior of certain contemporary religious movements, for whom, *religiosity*, and not religion, is the most functioning factor. Religiosity is more influenced by modernization, westernization, globalization and secularization than by original religious teachings (Roy, 2004, p. 15). Hence, religious thinking is not immune from being manipulated by modern and even secular thinking.

The theoretical analysis matches the practice of American Churches when they faced the dilemma of dealing with WMD in the course of World War II. In fact, they showed both diversity and dynamism of opinions in rejecting and approving the proliferation and use of WMD, and their reaction can sometimes be counted at

times as a successful resistant against the egoistic will of the logic of the Enlightenment, and at other times, as a failure, as they have been absorbed in an egoistic discourse.

While American public opinion has always been divided on detonating the atomic bomb over the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, initially, the action was supported since it ended the war. There were, however, many notable figures who "believed that the dropping of the bombs was either unnecessary or immoral, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Douglas MacArthur, Admiral William F. Halsey, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, John Foster Dulles, and Albert Einstein" (Gunn, 2009, p. 99).

It was in this context that the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) reacted. FCC appointed a group of theologians and religious scholars to inquire into the morality of manufacturing and using nuclear weapons. Entitled the 'Commission on the Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith', and chaired by Professor Robert L. Calhoun of Yale Divinity School, and attended by few renowned scholars including the famous and influential theologian of the time, Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, the commission issued its statement, known at the time as the "Calhoun Report," which appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* on March 6, 1946. The Calhoun Commission remarked "As far as our best minds can see, the only promising defenses against atomic warfare are moral and political, not physical defenses. This momentous fact is fundamental in our present situation" (*The New York Times*, 1946, in Gunn, 2009, p. 99). The report concluded that it was "morally indefensible" for the US to have used an atomic bomb, particularly on cities, and that the United States should not develop, stockpile, or deploy nuclear

weapons in the future (*The New York Times*, 1946, in Gunn, 2009, pp. 99-100).

Two very interesting and revealing intellectual correspondences reported by James Hershberg can also illustrate the rationale behind using the bomb, as well as the ground for opposition from a religious perspective (Hershberg, 2002). The first was between James Conant, the President of Harvard University and Reinhold Niebuhr; and the second was between Conant and Rev. Bradford Young of Grace Church in Manchester, New Hampshire.

In the same day that Conant saw the Calhoun Report, he wrote a letter to Niebuhr, reacting to the report based on a similar argument raised above by General George Marshall. He wrote, “If the American people are to be deeply penitent for the use of the atomic bomb, why should they not be equally penitent for the destruction of Tokyo in the thousand plane raid using the M69 incendiary which occurred a few months earlier?” (Conant, in Hershberg, 2002). In this way, he pointed to Niebuhr’s argument in his book *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, which, according to Conant, justified the permissibility of using immoral means to achieve moral ends. In response, Niebuhr wrote, “While there may be some differences between us on the atomic bomb, they are certainly not as wide as you assume” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). Pointing to Conant’s argument for using the bomb, he admitted that the committee was “careful to insist that no absolute distinction could be drawn from this new level of destructiveness and the levels which a technical civilization had previously reached” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). Hence, Niebuhr admitted that “he took the position that failing in achieving a Japanese surrender, the bomb would have had to be used to save the lives of thousands of American soldiers who would otherwise have

perished on the beaches of Japan” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). He added that the concern of the committee was only that “we would have been in a stronger moral position had we published the facts about this instrument of destruction, made a demonstration of its effects over Japan in a non-populated section, and threatened the use of the bomb if the Japanese did not surrender” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). Finally, he approved Conant’s understanding of his intellectual stance on the problems of ends vs. means, stating, “The pacifist always declares that we cannot do good if it involves the doing of evil, which is an impossibility” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). Having said that, as a good Christian, he believed that “it seems [...] there is too general a disposition to disavow guilt because on the whole we have done good” (Niebuhr, in Hershberg, 2002). Overall, this first correspondence indicates that Niebuhr had no major disagreement with Conant in the permissibility of using WMD. He just wanted a stronger moral position when it was used.

The second intellectual correspondence, however, illustrates a more orthodox position by the religious sector. On December 4, 1945, pointing to the dropping of the bomb, Bradford Young, in a letter addressed to Dr. Conant wrote “we did it by not daring to speak or even think of the scores of thousands of our brother humans who perished by our hand. Or we said, as cruel people have often justified their savagery, It shortened the war” (Conant, in Hershberg, 2002).. On December 7, Conant replied in a letter. At first, he suggested reading *Children of Light and Children of Darkness* to Young. Then he raised his two reasons for the bombing: “first, because it was a valuable supplement to the strategic bombing then in progress and which I hoped would end the war without an invasion; and second, because I felt certain that unless this bomb was demonstrated in combat there was very little

chance of arousing public opinion to a point where they would take sufficiently drastic action to control it in the future” (Conant, in Hershberg, 2002). Young responded to Conant: “I've read Dr. Niebuhr's *Children of Darkness and the Children of Light* and largely follow his reasoning. I also admit that the A-bombing was no worse in its effects than the obliteration bombing” (Young, in Hershberg, 2002). However, he again insisted on his argument that the possibility of a demonstration of the power of the bomb was sufficiently convincing and made its use against human targets unnecessary. Then, replying to the second reason raised by Conant, he added that the decision to destroy two cities as the best way to arouse public opinion to control atomic bomb in the future was based on many uncertainties. At the end, he summarized his argument: “What bothered me was to see you preparing and participating in such a Godlike decision with apparently no sense of presumption, no fear and trembling, no feeling of tragic involvement in a horrible deed” (Young, in Hershberg, 2002).

One more case that can help better evaluate the American Churches' overall position on the use of the atomic bomb is a report by another FCC's commission, which again advised on the religious dimensions of essentially the same questions that had been addressed in 1946. Remarkably, most of the members of this new commission, appointed in 1950, were the same as those in 1946, including notably Reinhold Niebuhr. However, surprisingly, this second report, which was issued during the Cold War era, dramatically reversed FCC's major recommendations from those of 1946. The new commission concluded:

As long as the existing situation holds, for the United States to abandon its atomic weapons, or to give the impression that they would not be used, would leave the non-communist

world with totally inadequate defense. For Christians to advocate such a policy would be for them to share responsibility for the world-wide tyranny that might result. We believe that American military strength, which must include atomic weapons as long as any other nation may possess them, is an essential factor in the possibility of preventing both world war and tyranny (The Department of International Justice and Goodwill, 1950).

It seems confusing that although in 1946, it was morally unacceptable for American Churches to make atomic weapons, in 1950, it became morally obligatory for American Christians to make atomic weapons and to threaten their use. This decisive shift is clearly illustrated by Jeremy Gunn. Comparing and contrasting FCC's 1946 report – in which the only promising defenses against atomic warfare are moral and political, not physical defenses – with the 1950 one, he took this strange shift as if “[f]or the theologians of 1946, it was ‘In God we trust’. In 1950, it was ‘In bombs we trust’” (Gunn, 2009, p. 101).

Two important observations about the Churches' reactions can be mentioned. The first is Churches' failure to completely oppose the dominant discourse of the time. Niebuhr, who was among the greatest American theologians of the time, took a rather realist and pragmatist position and in both cases; he did not show a fundamental difference from the human-centered calculations. From such a perspective, as explicitly noted above, both proliferation and use of WMD can be approved. Even Young, who was more orthodox and less realist and less pragmatist compared to Niebuhr, in his final letter implied that his main reservation was the lack of any pre-notice and somehow admitted that he largely agreed with Niebuhr's line of argument and saw no main difference between the two kinds of bombing, i.e. conventional and atomic. It

seems that the religious sector of the time had not come to a convincing solution for the old dilemma of ends vs. means, and the limits of premising immoral means to be employed for apparently moral ends.

The second observation highlights a positive aspect of the Churches' perspective in comparison with the secular one, that is, the sense of extra responsibility that both Niebuhr and Young demonstrated in their writings. The fact that in their analyses of this act, they had been more fearful, more nervous, more trembling, and more responsible properly indicates the very difference between a secular mindset and a religious one. After all, they did not disavow guilt simply because the logic of political realism led them rationally to do the job. This mere regret can make one more cautious in the processes of political decision-making.

## 5. Conclusion

History clearly illustrates that after the Enlightenment, which replaced the central place of God and His obedience with human reason and freedom, the amount of belligerency and brutality in human being has increased both in quantity and quality. Although the original mottos of the Enlightenment were largely liberal, humanitarian and anti-violence, the actual consequences of this shift in a human-centered world were largely in an opposite direction. The culmination of violence in the twentieth century led to the invention and proliferation of WMP, which was unprecedentedly dangerous and extraordinarily horrendous, and which would provide humanity with an even darker future.

Scrutinizing the process of military and political decision-making in the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and particularly

the case of dropping the atomic bomb on two Japanese cities during World War II, we can find the footsteps of the teachings of the Enlightenment and particularly its instrumentalism. The lack of the factor of accountability to any supernatural entity in modern political discourse is especially more catastrophic. The strong mental power of mankind in the rationalization of his ideas through different sets of ideologies, and taking immediate human desires and pains as the sole criteria for his actions, have made the world increasingly unsafe. The arm race and particularly the nuclear arm race that the world has witnessed in the last half of the twentieth century is rooted in replacing responsibility with freedom, a principle that lies at the core of the modern thinking. Likewise is today's man who is destroying his environment day after day because of his immediate interests without any sense of responsibility for the future habitants of the earth.

Foucault, in one of his writings, discussed the possibility of a *political spirituality* that we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity. He immediately added that he could already hear the French intellectuals laughing, but he knew that they were wrong (Quoted in Afary, 2005, p. 209). One of his closest friends, Claude Mauriac, was apparently among those laughing French intellectuals. Mauriac recounted his conversation in his memoirs, in an entry for November 23, 1978:

Mauriac: I read your paper in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, but not without surprise, I must say. I speak of the last sentence [about "political spirituality"]. Foucault: And you laughed? You are among those that I could already hear laughing? Mauriac: No . . . I only said to myself that as to spirituality and politics, we have seen what that gave us. Foucault: And politics without spirituality, my dear Claude? (Mauriac, 1986, pp. 322-323).



Neither Foucault nor this paper suggest a simple return to the pre-modern era. We have already experienced the dark side of the rule of the Church. The idea is that the Enlightenment quite excessively removed all traces of spirituality from politics and in this way, enslaved every living and nonliving subject/object for the sake of the human beings. This freed human, however, has lost any sense of accountability for his actions.

Having the experience of the last two centuries, we can safely hold that in contrast to what the philosophers of the Enlightenment were thinking, the modern human-centered politics is not immune from violence, and in practice has made a worse historical precedent than religious violence. It is true that the religious faith or a God-centered perspective is not always pure and may be adulterated with egoistic factors, which may let the faithful go astray. This quality is, in truth, rooted in the human nature that everything in human galaxy is always intertwined with fallibility. Yet, the case of WMD demonstrates that the immense danger, which threatens civilization, is rooted in the Godlessness of the modern politics.

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