



## Nuclear Weapons and Catholic Ethics Curriculum

Catholic Peacebuilding Network: Project to Revitalize Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament

The world is at a crossroads on nuclear weapons. The risk of nuclear war is greater than at any time since the Cuban Missile crisis. Instead of simply commemorating that crisis and the lessons learned from it, it is being reenacted in new and dangerous ways in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the nuclear powers are in the midst of the largest nuclear “modernization” program since the height of the Cold War and much of the arms control regime has been abandoned. At the same time, [The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), which bans nuclear weapons, has gone into effect, and Pope Francis has reinforced the Holy See’s long-standing efforts to eliminate, marginalize and delegitimize nuclear weapons, declaring that even the [possession of nuclear weapons is immoral](#).

[The Project to Revitalize Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament](#) is helping to mobilize a new generation of specialists in nuclear arms control and disarmament, as well as a new generation of engaged citizens. These curriculum modules are one part of a larger effort to engage students and young professionals. These online curriculum modules will make it easy for those teaching undergraduate or graduate courses in a wide range of disciplines to incorporate one or more class sessions on Catholic approaches to this issue. While the primary audience is college professors, these modules could also be useful for upper-level high school courses.

They complement a new book on the moral, pastoral, and policy dimensions of the Catholic Church’s approach to nuclear weapons: [Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons](#), edited by Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Carole Sargent (Georgetown Univ. Press, 2023).



*“Weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, create nothing but a false sense of security. They cannot constitute the basis for peaceful coexistence between members of the human family, which must rather be inspired by an ethics of solidarity.” - Pope Francis, Address to the International Symposium, “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament,” 2017*

# Module 1 Nuclear Disarmament and a Just Peace

Every pope during the nuclear age has insisted on the moral imperative of building a positive peace not based on nuclear weapons. Catholic leaders have led global efforts to reduce and ban nuclear weapons, from the Non-Proliferation Treaty to nuclear weapons free zones to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Critics argue that nuclear weapons are unlike other weapons that have been eliminated, and that nukes cannot be disinvented. Why does the Church urge that the world move away from the nuclear brink? Are nuclear arms control and disarmament moral imperatives? What ethical issues might arise if the world were to reach nuclear zero?

## PRIMARY RESOURCES:

**Pope Francis (2017), Address to the International Symposium, "Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament," the Vatican.**

Address in which Pope Francis concludes that the possession of nuclear weapons is immoral.

[Available online.](#)

**Maryann Cusimano Love (2023), "Just Peace and Nuclear Disarmament," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 172-179.**

Contextualizes the debate about the ethics of nuclear weapons in light of a broader ethic of peacebuilding.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Michael Desch and Gerard Powers (2018), "No More Nukes? An Exchange," *Commonweal* 145, no. 3: pp. 15-17.**

Responding to the address by Pope Francis, Desch argues that the pope's call for nuclear disarmament is unrealistic and would make war more likely. Powers critiques Desch's realist approach to nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#)

**"Nuclear Proliferation, Deterrence and Disarmament: Evolving Catholic Approaches" [panel discussion] (2016), University of Notre Dame London Gateway, 1:54:25. (see especially beginning at 0:40:00)**

Patricia Lewis, Maryann Cusimano Love, Bishop Robert McElroy, and Lord Des Browne discuss the moral and policy implications of nuclear disarmament.

[Available online.](#)

**Gerard Powers (2023), "Nuclear Disarmament: Ethical Challenges At or Near Zero," in *Forbidden*, pp. 153-171.**

A moral vision of a world without nuclear weapons must be married to a moral analysis of the new challenges that may arise as the world approached and achieved nuclear zero.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**"New Nukes and New Risks" [panel discussion] (2022), Fordham University Center on Religion and Culture, 1:34:08.**

Archbishop Gabriel Caccia, Rose Gottemoeller, Maryann Cusimano Love, Amb. Juan Manuel Gómez-Robledo, and David Gibson discuss prospects for arms control and disarmament in light of Ukraine and other recent developments.

[Available online.](#)



*"Hence justice, right reason, and the recognition of man's dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stock-piles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned." - Pope St. John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, 1963*

# Module 1 Nuclear Disarmament and a Just Peace (cont.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

**Pope Francis (2019), Address at Atomic Bomb Hypocenter Park, Nagasaki.**

Commemoration of the victims of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and a call for nuclear disarmament.

[Available online.](#)

**"Nuclear Disarmament and Pope Francis' Visit to Japan" [podcast] (2019), *The Kroc Cast: Peace Studies Conversations*, 0:23:53.** Maryann Cusimano Love, Gerard Powers, and Tobias Winright discuss nuclear disarmament, the Catholic Church, and Pope Francis' visit to Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki from November 23-26, 2019.

[Available online](#) and through podcast outlets.

***Nuclear Tipping Point* [film] (2010), Nuclear Threat Initiative, 0:55:23.**

Follows the work of former Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, and Senator Sam Nunn in their efforts to end the world's reliance on nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#) (See also their [series of five op-eds](#) making their case.)

**Kelsey Davenport (2023), "Reviving Nuclear Disarmament Education," in *Forbidden*, pp. 251-262.**

How to provide education about ongoing nuclear threats and counter apathy about nuclear weapons.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Susi Snyder (2023), "Profiting from the Bomb," in *Forbidden*, pp. 314-317.**

Explains how investors can have an impact on companies that profit from nuclear weapons.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Mary Retta (2023), "How the Pentagon Influences Colleges and Universities," *Teen Vogue*, September 27, 2023.**

Raises questions about increasing partnerships and financial ties between universities and the US military.

[Available online.](#)

**Helen Young [film] (2017), *The Nuns, the Priests, and the Bombs*, 01:27:00.**

A film exploring nuclear activism by Catholic clergy and religious.

[Available for rent and group screening.](#)



1. Catholic leaders and the Holy See have called building positive peace, denuclearization, and nuclear disarmament moral imperatives, and Pope Francis has made nuclear disarmament a hallmark of his papacy. Michael Desch and others argue that the Church's call for nuclear disarmament is naive and utopian because, unlike other weapons which have been abolished, nuclear weapons will always be with us. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each position?
2. If nuclear arsenals are immoral, as Pope Francis has said, what are the moral implications for Catholics to work toward denuclearization: for students? for universities? for those in the nuclear military? for politicians who vote for military budgets? for voters who support politicians that endorse nuclear deterrence and even use?
3. What are the new moral challenges that may arise at or near global nuclear zero? Are there ways to provide security without nuclear weapons?



*"Nor can we fail to be genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices. If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned. For they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race." - Pope Francis, Address to the International Symposium, "Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament," 2017*

## Module 2 Human and Environmental Costs

Understanding the ethics of nuclear weapons requires considering the current harms of developing, producing, testing, storing, and maintaining them, as well as mining nuclear materials. Harms include radiation sickness and other serious health impacts, especially on women, children, and families; devastating environmental consequences; and an erosion of democracy and human rights from the lack of truth-telling, transparency, accountability, and inclusion in decision making, particularly for poor and indigenous communities. In addition, the trillions of dollars spent on nuclear arsenals diverts resources from urgent priorities for the protection of human life and sustainable development. Catholic social thought focuses on human life and dignity, especially of the poor and marginalized, solidarity, subsidiarity, the family, and care for creation, providing distinct ethical approaches to nuclear weapons.

### PRIMARY RESOURCES:

**Archbishop John Wester (2022), "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament," 50 pp.**

Part one reviews US nuclear policy in light of Church teaching. Part two (pp. 27 ff) evaluates the role and responsibility of New Mexico, the location of 2 of 3 nuclear laboratories and the US's largest repository of nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#)

**Matthew B. Bolton and Elizabeth Minor (2021), "Addressing the Ongoing Humanitarian and Environmental Consequences of Nuclear Weapons: An Introductory Review," *Global Policy* 12, no. 1: 81-99.**

A global overview of the facts about past nuclear weapons activities in different countries and some of the known and potential ongoing consequences of past nuclear weapons detonations and implications for current policy.

[Available online.](#)

**Margaret Pfeil (2023), "Formation of Conscience Regarding the Development, Possession, and Use of Nuclear Weapons," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 205-219.**

Asks what needs to be done to form consciences of US citizens regarding possession and use of nuclear weapons.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Anne Guro Dimmen (2014), "Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons from a Gender Perspective," ILPI-UNIDIR Vienna Conference Series, Paper no. 5, 8 pp.**

Presents the ways that women are more vulnerable biologically and socially to the impacts of nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#)

**Ella Weber [audio report and transcript] (2023), "How Did Nuclear Weapons Get on My Reservation?" *Scientific American*, Dec. 14, 2023, 0:18:36.**

An investigation into how intercontinental ballistic missiles came to be siloed on ancestral lands in North Dakota.

[Available online.](#)

**William P. George (2019), *Mining Morality: Prospecting for Ethics in a Wounded World* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic), pp. 187-223.**

Examines the impact uranium mining for nuclear weapons development has had on Africa, especially Niger.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)



*"The arms race wastes precious resources that could be better used to benefit the integral development of peoples and to protect the natural environment. In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons, are an affront crying out to heaven." - Pope Francis, Address at the Atomic Bomb Hypocenter Park, Nagasaki, 2019*

# Module 2 Human and Environmental Costs (cont.)

## PRIMARY RESOURCES (cont.):

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (2020), "For the Disarmament of Injustice," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *A World Free from Nuclear Weapons: The Vatican Conference on Disarmament* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 29-37.

An analysis of the economic and political consequences of increased weapons spending.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

"Modernizing Doomsday: The True Cost of Our Nuclear Arsenal" [podcast] (2020), *At the Brink* season 6, ep. 1, 44:48.

A panel of experts discusses what is being planned for US nuclear modernization, the destabilizing effects of proposed new weapon systems, and the staggering costs that will hamstring future spending on both non-military and conventional military budget items.

[Available online](#) and through podcast outlets.

Dale Dewar (2018), "Uranium Mining: Environmental and Human Health Effects," in J. Black-Branch and D. Fleck (eds.), *Nuclear Non-Proliferation in International Law - Volume IV* (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press), pp. 229-235.

A critical review of the few known and many unknown effects of the nuclear industry upon the environment and the health of humans.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Averi Fegadel (2023), "Green Victimization of Native Americans: Uranium Mining as a Form of Toxic Colonialism and Genocide," *Critical Criminology* 31: 489-505.

Examines social and ecological injustices against Native Americans resulting from uranium mining in the American southwest.

[Available online.](#)



1. Ask students to follow Archbishop Wester's lead and assess the role of their state, city, or university in the nuclear weapons complex. How many jobs are tied to nuclear weapons? What are the consequences for human health and the environment? What are some key institutions and organizations that are involved in supporting or opposing the nuclear status quo?
2. Does your university receive funding from companies that profit from nuclear weapons? What steps could your university take to divest from nuclear weapons? What might be the impacts on ROTC scholarships or research money?
3. The local bishop(s) would like to address the nuclear issue. How would students advise him? Should he (they) follow Archbishop Wester's lead or are there other ways to catalyze a moral debate over nuclear weapons in their area?



"[H]ow can we fail to lament the incalculable outpouring of economic resources and human energies expended in order to preserve for each individual State its shield of ever more costly, ever more efficient weapons, and this to the detriment of resources for schools, culture, agriculture, health and civic welfare." - Pope St. Paul VI, "If You Want Peace, Defend Life," World Day of Peace Message, 1977

# Module 3 Nuclear Ban Treaty and Disarmament

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force in 2021, prohibits nuclear weapons. Countries that possess nuclear weapons and many that ally with them oppose the treaty. Following the successes of humanitarian arms control and the abolition of other weapons, the TPNW is the first treaty to address the harms to women, health, and the environment from nuclear weapons, is the first to establish a scientific advisory group to guide the negotiations, and creates processes for dismantling existing weapons and verifying compliance with a ban, for when nuclear armed states may join in the future. Like the Church's statements on nuclear weapons, it aims to help delegitimize nuclear weapons and create an international norm against them.

## PRIMARY RESOURCES:

Maryann Cusimano Love (2020), "The Papal Vision: Beyond the Bomb," *Arms Control Association* 50, no. 4: 6-10. Discusses the nuclear ban treaty in the context of a broader analysis of how the Catholic Church uses its "institutions, ideas, and imagination" to shape norms and influence policy related to nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#)

Drew Christiansen (2018), "The Vatican and the Ban Treaty," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 15, no. 1: 89-108.

A detailed analysis of the Holy See's role in the negotiations leading to the nuclear ban treaty.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

"Approaches to Nuclear Disarmament: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons" [panel discussion] (2020), *The Pope and the Bomb: Beyond Deterrence*, The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, 1:18:22.

Amb. Bonnie Jenkins, Amb. James Goodby, and Jonathan Granoff discuss the importance of the TPNW in connection with Pope Francis' calls for nuclear disarmament.

[Available online.](#)

Patricia Lewis (2020), "Nuclear Weapons: Peaceful, Dangerous, or Irrelevant?" in T. Sauer, J. Kustermans, and B. Segaert (eds.), *Non-Nuclear Peace: Beyond the Nuclear Ban Treaty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 39-57.

Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation measures were part of the old nuclear paradigm shaped by nuclear weapons states. New approaches to nuclear weapons, such as the Nuclear Ban Treaty, are now being sought.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Rebecca Johnson (2019), "The Nuclear Ban Treaty and Humanitarian Strategies to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons," in B. Steen and O. Njølstad (eds.), *Nuclear Disarmament: A Critical Assessment* (London: Routledge), pp. 75-93.

An overview of the logic and rationale underpinning the civil society and diplomatic campaigns that brought the nuclear ban treaty into being.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Brad Roberts (2018), "Ban the Bomb? Or Bomb the Ban?" European Leadership Network Policy Brief, 12 pp.

Argues that the TPNW is problematic for some of the same reasons enunciated by the states that refused to sign.

[Available online.](#)

Ivana Nicolich Hughes (2024), "Nuclear Deterrence is the Existential Threat, Not the Ban Treaty," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Jan. 22, 2024.

Assessment of nuclear deterrence, co-signed by Pax Christi.

[Available online.](#)



"The truth of peace requires that all – whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them – agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament." - Pope Benedict XVI, "In Truth, Peace," World Day of Peace Message, 2006

# Module 3 Nuclear Ban Treaty and Disarmament (cont.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For an overview of the Treaty and relevant documents, see:

UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons."  
[Available online.](#)

Mary Beth D. Nikitin (2021), "Nuclear Ban Treaty: An Overview," Congressional Research Service.  
[Available online.](#)

Pope Francis (2022), Message to First Meeting of States Parties to Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The pope offers support for the TPNW and summarizes moral arguments for nuclear disarmament.  
[Available online.](#)

International Committee of the Red Cross (2021), "Why Does the Nuclear Ban Treaty Matter?" Magnus Lovøld, ICRC Policy Advisor on nuclear weapons, discusses the implications of the TPNW.  
[Available online.](#)

Harald Müller and Carmen Wunderlich (2020), "Nuclear Disarmament without Nuclear Weapons States: The Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty," *Daedalus* 149, no. 1: 171-189. Assessment of how the TPNW relates to the existing nuclear order and its four central norms: constraints on use, political restraint, non-proliferation, and disarmament.  
[Available online.](#)



1. Divide the class into two groups. One group can represent one of the [nine nuclear armed states, states hosting nuclear weapons, or nuclear endorsing states](#) and make the case against the TPNW. The other group can represent the Holy See or other [signatories or states parties of the TPNW](#) and civil society groups including victims, and make the case for the TPNW. After the debate, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each position.
2. Some opponents to the TPNW argue that religion and morality do not matter in international politics, while other opponents argue that nuclear weapons states will be "responsible" with their weapons. What are the basic ethical assumptions about the international system (e.g., the role of norms and international institutions, the possibilities for change, who has a seat at the table, the types of peace that are possible) that underlie such positions? How could TPNW supporters respond?
3. The TPNW followed the successful model of previous humanitarian arms control treaties, which among other methods, democratized the arms control process, heard from the victims of the weapons and religious voices, and circumvented the stalemated processes blocked by a few nuclear states who did not want to relinquish their weapons. What are the pros and cons of these approaches? Can changing norms change policy over time?



"A nuclear arms race is inherently self-perpetuating; a vicious spiral that prompts progressively destabilizing actions and reactions. . . . The only solution that ensures enduring global safety is the multilateral and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons." - Archbishop John C. Wester, "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament," 2022.

# Module 4 Use and Deterrence

This module provides an analysis of some of the key ethical questions involved in nuclear weapon possession, threats, development, and use, including the theory of deterrence, which hypothesizes that nuclear weapons possession and threats may be justified because they may prevent others from using nuclear weapons out of fear of retaliation. The Catholic Church has been a leader in ethical reflection on nuclear weapons for decades, and the module includes an examination of the Church's continued teachings on these issues.

## PRIMARY RESOURCES:

Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN (2014), "Nuclear Deterrence: Time for Abolition," in M. Nebel and G. Reichberg (eds.), *Nuclear Deterrence: An Ethical Perspective* (Geneva: Caritas in Veritate Foundation Working Papers 6), 87-97.

The contribution of the Holy See to the 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. [Available online.](#)

Maryann Cusimano Love (2023), "The Ethics of Nuclear Stewards," in *Forbidden*, pp. 287-296.

Analyzes the ethical responsibilities of military personnel with regard to nuclear weapons.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Lisa Sowle Cahill (2023), "The Conundrum of Deterrence," in *Forbidden*, pp. 229-237.

Examines the challenge of deterrence as the political and policy framework within which nuclear activists must act.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Gerard Powers (2018), "Papal Condemnation of Nuclear Deterrence and What is Next," *Arms Control Today* 48, no. 4: 6-11.

This essay contextualizes Pope Francis' condemnation of the possession of nuclear weapons in terms of previous Church teaching and describes possibilities for future Church engagement on nuclear weapons.

[Available online.](#)

Gregory Reichberg (2023), "Philosophical Debate on Nuclear Deterrence," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 47-58.

An analysis of moral arguments underpinning the justification of nuclear weapons for deterrence.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States (1983), *The Challenge of Peace*, paras. 122-199.

Widely considered a seminal document on the ethics of nuclear weapons, this excerpt addresses the ethics of nuclear use, nuclear deterrence, and nuclear disarmament.

[Available online.](#)

Bryan Hehir (1989), "Ethics and Strategy: The Views of Selected Strategists," in T. Whitmore (ed.), *Ethics in the Nuclear Age: Strategies, Religious Studies, and the Churches* (Univ. Park, Tx.: Southern Methodist Univ. Press), pp. 12-32.

Places the US bishops' position in the context of wider debates on nuclear weapons at the end of the Cold War.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)



"Whatever be the facts about this method of deterrence, men should be convinced that the arms race in which an already considerable number of countries are engaged is not a safe way to preserve a steady peace, nor is the so-called balance resulting from this race a sure and authentic peace." - Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965



# Module 4 Use and Deterrence (cont.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

**Bernard Prusak (2023), "Prophetic Indictment or Deliberative Discussion," in *Forbidden*, pp. 193-201.**

Examines whether nuclear deterrence is deserving of unconditional indictment or whether it remains an issue about which people of good faith may disagree.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Tobias Winright (2023), "Just War Lessons We Should Remember," in *Forbidden*, pp. 37-46.**

Argues that Pope Francis' teaching on nuclear weapons is in keeping with classical principles of just war theory.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**William Barbieri (2023), "The Moral Ecology of Deterrence and Abolition," in *Forbidden*, pp. 59-66.**

Analyzes deterrence in light of Pope Francis' broader moral vision of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'*.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

**Joseph Nye (2023), "Nuclear Ethics Revisited," *Ethics & International Affairs* 37, no. 1: pp. 5-17.**

Offers a ten-point agenda for just deterrence using principles from the just war theory.

[Available online.](#)

**Joan Rohlfing (2023), "The Myth of 'Just' Nuclear Deterrence," *Ethics & International Affairs* 37, no. 1: 39-49.**

Argues that Nye's "just deterrence" relies on flawed assumptions about current systems of deterrence that do not adequately account for the risks of system failure.

[Available online.](#)



1. Are nuclear weapons inherently (per se) immoral, or are there some conceivable uses of nuclear weapons that could be discriminate and proportionate?
2. In *The Challenge of Peace*, the US bishops elaborated criteria for the strictly-conditioned moral acceptance of deterrence. They say that it is immoral to threaten that which it would be immoral to do. Therefore, threats of mutually assured destruction and nuclear arms races are immoral. Are nuclear weapons held only for deterrence purposes? What forms of nuclear deterrence, if any, might be morally acceptable?
3. In 2017, Pope Francis said that not only was the use of nuclear weapons immoral but also the possession of nuclear weapons (i.e., deterrence). If we were to approach Nuclear Zero with some states relinquishing nuclear arms, are there non-nuclear forms of deterrence that could be effective against nuclear holdouts or possible nuclear breakouts?
4. The Church says building a just peace is more ethical, sustainable, and stable. Are there cases where countries have moved from relationships of threat and conflict to more just peace? Is that possible for nuclear armed states? What steps would be needed to move beyond nuclear deterrence and arsenals? What can Catholics do to receive this teaching? Is the pope saying it is immoral for a Catholic to work in the nuclear military? Is it immoral for a Catholic politician to vote for the military budget that contains billions of dollars for nuclear deterrence? Is it immoral for universities to take money from the nuclear weapons complex?



*"I wish to reaffirm that the use of nuclear weapons, as well as their mere possession, is immoral. Trying to defend and ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security and a 'balance of terror', sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust inevitably ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any possible form of real dialogue. Possession leads easily to threats of their use, becoming a sort of 'blackmail' that should be repugnant to the consciences of humanity." - Pope Francis, Message to President of First Meeting of States Parties to TPNW, 2022*

# Module 5 Hiroshima and Nagasaki

In August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both cities were destroyed and more than 150,000 civilians, including children, were killed. Thousands more have died in the decades since the bombing as a result of radiation sickness and other related illnesses. This module explores the morality of this decision and the implications for the Catholic Church's position on nuclear weapons today.

## PRIMARY RESOURCES:

Mark Allman (2008), *Who Would Jesus Kill? War, Peace, and the Christian Tradition* (Winona, Minn.: Anselm Academic), pp. 38-60.

Provides a brief overview of different approaches to moral reasoning.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Kenneth R. Himes (2020), "Hiroshima and Nagasaki: 75th Anniversary Reflections," *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 2: 507-524. A combination of deontological and consequentialist arguments that the atomic bombings were neither morally justified nor necessary.

[Available on Academia.edu.](#)

Wilson D. Miscamble (2011), *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs and the Defeat of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), pp. 112-124.

Argues that the atomic bombings were morally problematic but necessary to end the war and prevent much greater loss of life had the war continued and a ground invasion of Japan become necessary.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Leo Maley, III and Uday Hohan (2001), "Hiroshima: Military Voices of Dissent," *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, Ohio State University.

This blog highlights key military voices that opposed the atomic bombings at the time.

[Available online.](#)

Daniel Hall (2023), "The Testimony of Witnesses," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis' Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 76-89.

Explores how the *hibakusha*, the atomic bomb survivors, continue to play a critical role in the nuclear debate.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Masaka Wada (2020), "Surviving the Atomic Bomb," in D. Christiansen and C. Sargent (eds.), *A World Free from Nuclear Weapons: The Vatican Conference on Disarmament* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press), pp. 13-15.

A brief reflection from a *hibakusha* at a Vatican conference on nuclear disarmament.

[Available through your institution's library.](#)

Dorothy Day (1945), "We Go on Record," *Catholic Worker*, Sept. 1, 1945.

Denunciation of the atomic bombings.

[Available online.](#)



"Remembering the past is committing to the future. To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. Remembering Hiroshima is committing to peace. To remember that the people of this city have suffered is to renew our faith in man, in his ability to do good, in his freedom to choose what is right, in his determination to turn disaster into a new beginning." - Pope St. John Paul II, Address at Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima, 1981

# Module 5 Hiroshima and Nagasaki (cont.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

“Minutes, Target Committee, Los Alamos, May 10-11, 1945,” pp. 1-5.

Minutes of the Los Alamos Target Committee assessing Japanese targets for the atomic bomb.

[Available from the US National Archives.](#)

“Catholics Commemorate 75 Years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki” [webcast] (2020), 0:30:49.

Archbishop Mitsuaki Takami, Bishop David Malloy, and Maryann Cusimano Love offer short reflections on the meaning of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings today.

[Available online.](#)

“Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ’s Account of Ministering to Victims of the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb,” [Jesuits.org](#).

Arrupe’s first hand account of ministering to victims of the atomic bombings. Includes text excerpts and short recording.

[Available online.](#)

Yuki Miyamoto (2022), “How Buddhist and Catholic survivors responded to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings,” [Religious News Service](#), August 4, 2022.

An overview of theological reflections on the bombings by some Buddhist and Catholic victims.

[Available online.](#)

### Part 1: Divide up the class for a debate.

Group 1: Make a deontological argument that the atomic bombings were immoral.

Group 2: Make a consequentialist argument that the atomic bombings were immoral.

Group 3: Make a consequentialist argument that the atomic bombings were morally justified.

Group 4: Make a deontological argument that the atomic bombings were morally justified.

### Part 2. General discussion.

1. What is the major weakness of a purely deontological or purely consequentialist approach?
2. Does the debate between a deontological and consequentialist approach present a false choice? Should we instead adopt a mixed consequentialist / deontological approach?
3. Who is missing from these discussions of the ethics of nuclear use? What are some problems with "victor's ethics," with the victor defining the ethical terrain? Do the ethical concerns look different when the voices of different generations, women, indigenous peoples, and concerns about the environment are included?



*“This place makes us deeply aware of the pain and horror that we human beings are capable of inflicting upon one another. The damaged cross and statue of Our Lady recently discovered in the Cathedral of Nagasaki remind us once more of the unspeakable horror suffered in the flesh by the victims of the bombing and their families.” - Pope Francis, Address at the Atomic Bomb Hypocenter Park, Nagasaki, 2019*