

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND OUR CATHOLIC RESPONSE



**A Catholic Study
Guide for use with
*Nuclear Tipping Point***



Instructions for the Facilitator

This study guide based on Catholic social teaching is for use with the film, *Nuclear Tipping Point*. It is designed to assist small groups of adults and mature young people in exploring some issues related to nuclear weapons in the light of their Catholic faith. The small group study can be completed in two one-hour sessions.

Synopsis: *Nuclear Tipping Point* is a conversation with four men intimately involved in American diplomacy and national security over the last four decades: former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn. The four men share personal experiences that led to their vocal support for a world free of nuclear weapons and the steps needed to get there. Although produced in 2010, its central message remains relevant. The film is introduced by General Colin Powell, narrated by actor Michael Douglas, and includes interviews with former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Film length: 55:24

For online video:

<https://www.nti.org/about/projects/nuclear-tipping-point/nuclear-tipping-point-watch/> or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwz4hlEKPjA>

Disclaimer: The use of this video is not an endorsement of the individuals who appear or their views on these or other issues; its purpose is to stimulate discussion on nuclear weapons. While the video can be a helpful resource, the views expressed in this film and on the website do not necessarily reflect USCCB policy.

Before the meeting: At least a week before the meeting, make available to participants the Catholic social teaching quotes on pages 2 and 3. On the day of the session, have available copies of pages 2, 3, and 4 for all participants.

Room Set up: Arrange for a TV and/ or computer with internet access to be in the room and set up chairs to face the screen. Select one person to read the prayer by St. John XXIII at the appropriate time (found on page 4.)

Beginning the session: Welcome everyone and remind them of the purpose for the gathering is to reflect in faith on the nuclear threat in our world today. This will take place during two one-hour discussions that include watching the film, *Nuclear Tipping Point*, in two parts and reviewing Catholic teaching. Indicate that the church has a long history of addressing moral questions regarding nuclear weapons and that these sessions will explore the topic from the perspective of both policy experts and Catholic social teaching.

Introductions (5 minutes): Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share one word that captures how he or she feels when thinking about the topic of this session.

Opening Prayer (1 minute): Invite everyone to place herself or himself in the presence of God. Invite the reader to read the prayer on page 4.

Watch the Film (26 or 29 minutes): During Session 1, watch from the beginning of the film until 26:27. During Session 2, watch from 26:28 until the end.

Review the Quotes (4 minutes): Invite everyone to spend a few minutes reviewing the quotes from Catholic teaching on the handouts, which they were given to read ahead of time.

Discussion (19-22 minutes): Explain the guidelines and then use the questions and action suggestion on page 4 to guide a discussion.

Closing Prayer (2 minutes): Invite participants to offer intentions based on the discussion. Close with an Our Father.

Catholic Social Teaching on Nuclear Weapons

The Catholic Church's teaching requires that any use of force be proportionate and discriminate. It must not produce more harm than good and must respect noncombatant immunity and protect civilians. The Church has long opposed the use of nuclear weapons, especially against non-nuclear threats, and the development of new nuclear weapons. The Church urges that nuclear deterrence be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations. The following quotes explore Catholic teaching on nuclear weapons. The quotes are from:

- *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, St. John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, offers a fundamental framework for building a just peace through the creation of a political order that serves the common good.
- *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, the 1964 Pastoral Constitution by the Second Vatican Council, reflects on issues facing our world, such as the arms race, in the light of our faith.
- *The Challenge of Peace*, the 1983 Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, offers criteria for applying Catholic teaching to U.S. nuclear policy.
- *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, a 1993 statement by the U.S. Catholic Bishops on peacemaking in a post-Cold War world.
- *The World Day of Peace Message* from Pope Benedict XVI for January 1, 2009, addresses nuclear weapons.
- *Address at the Atomic Bomb Hypocenter Park (Nagasaki) and Address at the Peace Memorial (Hiroshima)* on November 24, 2019, by Pope Francis reiterates Catholic teaching on nuclear weapons in our day.
- *Statement on Nuclear Disarmament*, by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on International Justice and Peace, February 14, 2020, affirms the efforts of Pope Francis to address the nuclear threat.

“Justice, right reason, and the recognition of man's dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stockpiles 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.... Everyone must sincerely cooperate ... But this requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today's world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust.”

- St. John XXIII, *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, nos. 112- 113

“The horror and perversity of war is immensely magnified by the increase in the number of scientific weapons. For acts of war involving these weapons can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction, thus going far beyond the bounds of legitimate defense. ... Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation.... Scientific weapons, to be sure, are not amassed solely for use in war. Since the defensive strength of any nation is considered to be dependent upon its capacity for immediate retaliation, this accumulation of arms, which increases each year, likewise serves, in a way heretofore unknown, as a deterrent to possible enemy attack. Many regard this as the most effective way by which peace of a sort can be maintained between nations at the present time.”

- Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, nos. 80, 81

“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. Rather than being eliminated thereby, the causes of war are in danger of being gradually aggravated. While extravagant sums are being spent for the furnishing of ever new weapons, an adequate remedy cannot be provided for the multiple miseries afflicting the whole modern world. ... The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree.”

- Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, no. 81

“The need to rethink the deterrence policy of our nation, to make the revisions necessary to reduce the possibility of nuclear war, and to move toward a more stable system of national and international security will demand a substantial intellectual, political, and moral effort.”

- USCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 196

“In the words of our Holy Father, we need a ‘moral about face.’ The whole world must summon the moral courage and technical means to say ‘no’ to nuclear conflict; ‘no’ to weapons of mass destruction; ‘no’ to an arms race which robs the poor and the vulnerable; and ‘no’ to the moral danger of a nuclear age which places before humankind indefensible choices of constant terror or surrender. Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus. The content and context of our peacemaking is set, not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teaching of his Church.”

- USCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 333

“In 1983, we judged that nuclear deterrence may be morally acceptable as long as it is limited to deterring nuclear use by others; sufficiency, not nuclear superiority, is its goal; and it is used as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament.”

- USCCB, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, no. 1

“The eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is more than a moral ideal; it should be a policy goal.”

- USCCB, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, no. 1

“What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims. 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. The resources which would be saved could then be employed in projects of development capable of benefiting all their people, especially the poor.”

- Pope Benedict XVI, *2009 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 13

“Here in this city which witnessed the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of a nuclear attack, our attempts to speak out against the arms race will never be enough. 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, and an affront crying out to heaven.”

- Pope Francis, *Address on Nuclear Weapons*, Nagasaki, November 24, 2019

“With deep conviction I wish once more to declare that the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is today, more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral, as I already said two years ago. We will be judged on this. Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act to bring it about among the peoples on the earth. How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?”

- Pope Francis, *Address at the Peace Memorial*, Hiroshima, November 24, 2019

“The Words of Pope Francis serve as a clarion call and a profound reminder to all that the status quo of international relations, resting on the treat of mutual destruction, must be changed. As Bishops of the United States, we have made similar appeals in the past when we stated, ‘the moral task is to proceed with deep cuts and ultimately to abolish these weapons entirely.’”

- USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, *Statement on Nuclear Disarmament*, February 14, 2020

Small Group Discussion

Discussion Guidelines:

- Remember that the purpose of the discussion is to reflect on this issue in the light of our faith, not to debate with one another.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Use “I” statements. (Take responsibility for what you express. Do not speak for “them.”)
- Help all to participate. (Do not dominate.)
- Stay on the topic and stay focused on the film and on Catholic teaching.
- Be respectful and charitable at all times.

Questions for Part 1:

1. What reactions do you have to what you have seen and heard in the film?
2. Why are Shultz, Kissinger, Nunn and Perry concerned about the growing proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials used to construct them?
3. Catholic social teaching is also concerned about nuclear proliferation. Based on the quotes you have read, what is the moral and religious grounding for the Church’s concern? How is nuclear proliferation related to human life and dignity?
4. The Second Vatican Council condemned weapons of “massive and indiscriminate destruction.” Reflect on the destruction likely if nuclear weapons are used. Consider the stories of the four men and your own knowledge of history.

Question for Part 2:

1. The bishops point out “the need to rethink the deterrence policy of our nation.” What problems with current nuclear policies does the film highlight?
2. What steps do Shultz, Kissinger, Nunn and Perry call for in order to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear threat?
3. Reflect on the way Catholic social teaching connects the arms race, poverty, and the causes of war.
4. The United States Catholic bishops call peacemaking “a moral requirement of our faith.” How are you called to become involved in peacemaking? What steps will you take?

Take Action: Go to votervoices.net/USCCB/home to sign up for action alerts on reducing nuclear weapons and other issues. This resource and many others are available at usccb.org/nuclear to learn more.

Prayer for Peace

Let us, then, pray with all fervor for this peace which our divine Redeemer came to bring us.

May He banish from the souls of men whatever might endanger peace.

May He transform all men into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love.

May He illumine with His light the minds of rulers, so that, besides caring for the proper material welfare of their peoples, they may also guarantee them the fairest gift of peace.

Finally, may Christ inflame the desires of all men to break through the barriers which divide them,

to strengthen the bonds of mutual love, to learn to understand one another, and to pardon those who have done them wrong.

Through His power and inspiration may all peoples welcome each other to their hearts as brothers, and may the peace they long for ever flower and ever reign among them.

Pope St. John XXIII, *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, no. 171