



The Path Toward Disarmament

A symposium

Archbishop John Wester, Raymond J. Juzaitis, Maryann Cusimano Love, J. Bryan Hehir

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The symposium participants have different ideas about the Church's role in international nuclear politics. Hehir praises the Vatican's nuclear diplomacy as providing a "voice for the voiceless," while Juzaitis argues that the Church should not "directly enter the fray of international politics." Archbishop Wester makes two concrete proposals about disarmament. Which approach is right, if any, and why? How deeply should the Church involve itself in disarmament negotiations? How specific should it be about policy goals?
2. Juzaitis has harsh words for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW): "[T]his so-called 'treaty' is aspirational only," he writes, "containing no verification or enforcement provisions." Love, who participated in the treaty's negotiations, disagrees and holds up the TPNW as an example of just peacebuilding. Do you think one or the other is correct? How ambitious or "idealistic" should disarmament advocates get?
3. "I do not mean that the U.S. should unilaterally reduce its stockpile," writes Archbishop Wester. Why shouldn't the U.S. reduce its stockpile if (as Wester argues) it only needs a few hundred weapons for deterrence? Are there steps that nuclear powers can take to advance disarmament even when negotiations have stalled?
4. As Love notes, one hurdle to disarmament is the belief that "nuclear weapons are different" from conventional weapons in a way that warrants thinking about them separately. Are they? If so, how should we evaluate the development of lower-yield tactical nuclear weapons? Alternatively, are there other, newer technologies with more destructive capacity that we should consider? Is the fixation on nuclear weapons appropriate for today's world, or is it a relic of Cold War anxieties?
5. Hehir notes that Pope Francis's changing approach to questions of war and peace—including nuclear policy—has had critics, especially in Ukraine. What influence do you think nuclear weapons have had in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, particularly given that Ukraine gave up its own nuclear stockpile after the fall of the Soviet Union?
6. Several authors point out intersectional concerns related to nuclear policy—Love and Wester argue that the development of nuclear weapons impacts the environment, Indigenous communities, social-services funding, and more. What would it practically mean to treat these concerns as more than an afterthought? Can you think of proposals to this end that all the symposium participants might agree on?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

"The Forgotten Epidemic," Alexander Stern, January 9, 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/forgotten-epidemic>

"No More Nukes?" Michael C. Desch and Gerard F. Powers, February 23, 2018: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/no-more-nukes>

"Peace, Protest, and Policy," J. Bryan Hehir, June 18, 1982: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/peace-protest-and-policy>

"Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," Thomas Merton, February 9, 1962: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/nuclear-war-and-christian-responsibility>