**RET1060: Assignment 2 – Essay**

*Participants in the module should submit an essay of approximately 3,000 words (including a bibliography). They are invited to agree on an essay topic with the module coordinator. The list of topics below is indicative. Students are welcome to develop a topic of their own choice in the general area of religion, human values, and international relations.*

***Deadline, Monday 21 April, 5 pm.***

1. At the inauguration of the Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, the Taoiseach Micheál Martin framed the following core challenge: “to interpret and apply our high-level values in a world that is changing rapidly and faces many ‘existential’ questions in the realm of climate change and technological developments.” Which are the high-level values that could play a larger part in international relations?
2. At the inauguration of the Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Archbishop McDowell reflected on the role of the churches in a pluralist society, evoking “a covenant between social friends.” What are the implications of friendship as a political value?
3. ‘We can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point …the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view, for we have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity’ (Pope Francis). Is world history currently at a ‘point of inflection’? Are there historical precedents?
4. A Summit on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programmes (CAADP) will be held in Kampala in January 2025 under the auspices of the African Union. The ‘Kampala Declaration,’ currently under preparation, will provide a vision for transforming Africa’s Agrifood Systems over the period 2026-2035. What are the core challenges if we are to achieve food security for an estimated global population of 10 billion in 2050 while respecting the target of 1.5 **°** C set by the Paris Agreement of 2015?
5. On 8th May 2025, the Royal Irish Academy is hosting a conference on the topic, “Reconstructing the global order: imperatives and possibilities for cooperation in turbulent times.” In an inherently pluralist world, where can the conversation about the future begin?
6. Is it true that markets need a political context and a culture of trust that they themselves are incapable of producing?
7. Discuss the interaction of public authorities, companies, and not-for-profit organisations in a well-functioning market economy – for example, with reference to the respective roles of social enterprises, statutory services, and commercial entrepreneurship in the provision of early childhood care and education.
8. ‘The rapid development of AI has profound social and political implications at the global level. We cannot presume a priori that AI will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and serve the cause of fraternity, freedom, and peace’ (Multi-stakeholder report on the ethics of AI, Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, 2024). Identify some of the separate issues that arise in relation to access to resources (chips), data, algorithms, and applications and discuss some of the ethical issues arising from AI in the worlds of work, education, and the information environment.
9. What are the principal scientific and technological changes that will impact on global diplomacy in the coming decades? Where are the ethical and political decisions being taken?
10. What are the main elements in the political thought of Mahatma Gandhi?
11. Finland will exercise the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2025, the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Finland’s President Niinistö, speaking on 22 November 2021, refers to ‘the letter, the model, and the spirit of Helsinki.’ In the same speech, President Niinistö states: ‘We are looking at ways to combine the Helsinki Spirit approach with the Our Common Agenda process at the United Nations.’ Suggest ways in which a future peace in Europe might contribute to a revival of global diplomacy.
12. Historically, cooperation between policy makers, other stakeholders, and religious actors has been a sensitive issue, for good reasons. How can we find the language, approach and mechanisms to get everybody back round the same table and working together? What would it mean to achieve ‘mutual literacy’ between public authorities and religious actors?
13. Is there a common life or collective well-being that is more than the sum of our private interests? Does it make sense to speak of the ‘human family’?
14. ‘We need to examine the patterns of our behaviour in the light of all that we ought to know and can know’ (McDonagh, Manocha, Neary, Vazquez Mendoza, 2021). In relation to our *obligation to know*, suggest some of the main factors in play in 21st century global society.
15. ‘Peace is a true idea’ (Senator George Mitchell, 2023). Does every peace process reflect a forward-looking vision of justice? Can a peace process centred on one place and situation be influenced by developments at a regional or global level? Discuss with reference to Northern Ireland, Colombia or any other conflict or conflicts.
16. In the 21st century, are we seeing a change in the nature of diplomacy? How important is ‘public diplomacy’?
17. Do the social media strengthen or weaken democracy?
18. *We do pray for mercy;/And that same prayer doth teach us all to render/The deeds of mercy* (Shakespeare). Discuss mercy as a political value.
19. What looks the strongest has outlived its term.
    1. The future lies with what's affirmed from under...
       1. (Seamus Heaney, *From the Canton of Expectation*)
    2. Discuss hope as a political value.
20. Suggest some themes, readings, and/or activities for an educational programme (in the style of the present module) aimed at preparing students for a life of service to society in mid-21st century.
21. ‘It is not just the rising metrics of power that count; it is also the accompanying cultural and intellectual resurrection that is key to global rebalancing (S. Jaishankar, Foreign Minister of India, 2024).’ In 2021, the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stated that the European Union’s values have come ‘from the cultural, religious and humanist heritage of Europe.’ Is it helpful to look at global politics through a civilizational lens?
22. Here in Ireland, is there scope for the new Government to initiate a multi-stakeholder structured dialogue involving churches, faith communities, and philosophical organisations and reflecting the provisions of Article 17, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union? Would such a dialogue have an essential shared island dimension? What themes would shape the agenda? How can we measure a successful society in the 21st century?