**RET1060 (2025) – Assignment 1 – Written Reflections**

*Participants in the module should submit written reflections on eight of the following twenty one statements/quotations. Reflections should be concise. Approximately 300 words per answer would be appropriate. References in support of your reflections can be kept to a minimum and should be listed all together at the end of your submission.*

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

1. Hope

What looks the strongest has outlived its term.

The future lies with what's affirmed from under...

(Seamus Heaney, *From the Canton of Expectation*)

*Is there a common criterion of evaluation – a “standard of hope” – linking one situation to another and enabling us to give the future a certain shape or character, even before the detailed picture becomes clear?*

1. Mercy

*We do pray for mercy;*

*And that same prayer doth teach us all to render*

*The deeds of mercy*

(Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*).

*Discuss mercy as a political value.*

1. Climate

Everyone now knows that the climate question is at the heart of all geopolitical issues and that it is directly tied to questions of injustice and inequality. (Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth*, p. 3)

*How should we evaluate the outcome of COP 28 in UAE and COP 29 in Azerbaijan? What are the prospects for COP 30 in Brazil in November 2025 ?*

1. Global food security

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.

As of summer 2024, the FAO and other UN agencies calculate that the number of people unable to afford a healthy diet is more one third of the global population.[[1]](#footnote-1) Approximately one in eleven people (in Africa, one in five) face hunger and food insecurity. Acute food insecurity is more pronounced in some regions than others, but a large number of people face food insecurity in almost all regions, including in high-income countries.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*What are some of 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?*

1. Food and the sacred

Religious traditions associate food with concepts and values such as sharing, celebration, community, and solidarity (Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Dublin City University, ‘Collective Action for Ending a Collective Problem: A Multi-stakeholder Project on Global Food Security,’ 25 July 2023).

*Can you suggest some practical arguments in favour of including the representatives or nominees of churches and faith communities in multi-stakeholder processes promoted by UN agencies in the area of food security?[[3]](#footnote-3)*

1. Pre-political values

‘Every democracy can only be as good as the societal forces that sustain it … ‘(Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde). In Böckenförde’s vision, the granular provisions of the law depend on, and nurture in turn, a worldview and way of life.

*Is there a common life or collective well-being that is more than the sum of our private interests? How should we understand the dialogical relationship between high-level values and practical politics? How can we nurture this dialogical relationship?*

1. Polarisation

The following working definition of polarization, informed by eight hallmarks, can be studied in detail in a recent IFIT discussion paper:[[4]](#footnote-4)

Polarisation: a prominent division or conflict that forms between major groups in a society or political system and that is marked by the clustering and radicalisation of views and beliefs at two distant and antagonistic poles.

*Is there scope for academics and practitioners to develop new fields of study focussing on polarisation, de-polarisation, and the progressive realisation of democratic values?*

1. Financial architecture/global financial system

The international financial architecture, crafted in 1945 after the Second World War, is undergoing a stress test of historic proportions – and it is failing the test … [it] already had structural deficiencies at the time of its conception … [it] is entirely unfit for purpose in a world characterized by unrelenting climate change, increasing systemic risks, extreme inequality, entrenched gender bias, highly integrated financial markets vulnerable to cross-border contagion, and dramatic demographic, technological, economic and geopolitical changes …The existing architecture has been unable to support the mobilization of stable and long-term financing at scale for investments needed to combat the climate crisis and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals … (the UN Secretary General’s policy brief of June 2023). [[5]](#footnote-5)

*What steps would make the international financial architecture more fit for purpose? Can steps be taken to change the way the assets embedded in the global financial system (more than $500 trillion) are deployed?*

1. Learnings from the pandemic

The most obvious ‘learning’ from the pandemic is the need for effective governance. In practice, this requires an appropriate level of Government intervention … Questions of equity arose in the provision of vaccines and public health services. A second learning is that any bifurcation in the provision of healthcare … is increasingly difficult to rationalise within a coherent overarching vision of society … A third learning is that the concept of ‘efficiency’ in the global economy, as promoted in recent decades, is in need of re-examination. During COVID, security of supply became an important factor alongside price in the procurement of medical supplies … A fourth learning from the pandemic is that the ‘liberal’ understanding of the role of incentives within the economy is failing from a rational standpoint. During the pandemic, the term ‘front line’ acquired a new meaning. These key actors were not ‘incentivised’ as investors and financial, professional, and managerial elites are often considered to require incentives.[[6]](#footnote-6) (Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Dublin City University and Irish Inter-Church Meeting, ‘Economics of Belonging Project, Interim Report, February 2023)

*How can we capture for our future benefit the sense of community we have often experienced during the pandemic? Does society need an overarching vision or sense of direction? How can we work towards this objective*

1. War and armaments

At issue is whether the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the enormous and growing possibilities offered by new technologies, have granted war an uncontrollable destructive power over great numbers of innocent civilians … it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘’just war” … Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims. (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 258 - 261).

*Global military spending amounts to more than $2300 billion and is increasing.*

*Is there scope for a return to the disarmament agenda of the UN Charter? Is there scope to find a new metric comparing the scale of defence expenditure with other expenditures?*

1. Migration

If the size of today’s refugee flows is worrying, it pales into insignificance when compared to the potential scale of displacement from climate change, degradation of the water tables, or a depleted ecosystem. There may be hundreds of millions of people on the move in future. The World Bank estimates that 343 million people worldwide live within 5 metres of sea level, 13 million in Bangladesh alone. How we react to today’s refugee challenges will be critical in determining future responses and future global peace. (Steve Killilea, *Peace in the Age of Chaos,* 2020)

*Does the European Union have the decision-making capacity to ensure a predictable, balanced and reliable system to manage migration?*

1. Emerging topics in science: the question of a ‘differential approach’

Implantable brain-computer interfaces, genetics, performance-enhancing drugs, planetary exploration, quantum, AI, autonomous weapons, making meat in the lab … The GESDA Science Breakthrough Radar provides an overview of science trends and breakthrough predictions at 5, 10 and 25 years in 42 science and technology emerging topics, a synthesis of the related fundamental debates and actions in society, and an exploration of opportunities for concerted action through initial contributions on the implications for international affairs, global challenges, and the SDGs.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Which are the most important emerging topics in science? Is it possible to develop a differential approach to technological development - discouraging activities that produce damaging outcomes and investing in technologies that are essential for a just socio-ecological transition?*

1. Artificial Intelligence

‘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).

*Discuss some of the ethical issues arising from AI in the worlds of work, education, and the information environment. Where are the key decisions on AI being taken, and which are the spaces in which the future governance of AI might be addressed?*

1. Our Common Agenda and the SDGs

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, provide for Summits at four-yearly intervals. The first SDG Summit since 2019 was held in New York in September 2023. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the action plan based on the SDGs, encourages member states to ‘conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels.’ These voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are not a box-ticking exercise; they require continuous learning.[[8]](#footnote-8) VNRs are for the consideration of the UN membership as a whole. In September 2024, world leaders adopted a Pact for the Future that includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. As the year 2030 approaches, the relevant UN bodies face the task of evaluating the SDGs in the light of the progress made between their adoption in 2015 and the target year 2030. It can be expected that UN member states will soon start to develop a post-2030 agenda, develop additional themes and improving working methods.

*Can the UN of the 21st century live up to the ideals of the post-war period? Can the Sustainable Development Goals become the starting point for a common medium-term plan for humanity?*

1. Cross-cultural approaches to a design for living

If we try to predict the dominant philosophical perspective half a century from now, we may find that rather than having replaced the traditional language of virtue, responsibility, and benevolent care, the modern language of freedom, rights, and democracy will have been enriched by it, and that modern values and ancient wisdom will have blended to form a more mature mode of human thinking and living. (Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism/A Political Philosophy for Modern Times*, 2014)

‘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, *Why Bharat Matters*, 2024).’

*Can Chan’s ideas or those of Foreign Minister Jaishankar form a basis for an EU – China and/or an EU – India dialogue on ‘structural’ political values?*

1. Social Media

By “third space” is meant the space, neither remunerated work nor mere entertainment, in which some of our most worthwhile activities belong: parenthood and family, prayer and religious observance, political and social engagement, an interest in the responsible mass media, and the love of literature, art, and scholarship. This philosophical space should become the ballast in our lives, limiting the impact of the social media and advertising. (Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, report on the meeting at the Helix, 24-25 February 2022).

*Are there ways in which the social media are contributing to a breakdown in social relationships?*

1. Religion

Religion did not go away …There has been a draining of brainpower and cultural energy away from the great religions of the West … That draining away took place not only in the West but also in the Third World nations colonised for 300 years by Western powers … when religious learning is underdeveloped, then members of religious groups behave badly when confronted by new challenges … Lacking traditional wisdom, they react to events out of unrefined human passion … (Peter Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 2019)

*Should international organisations use their convening power to bring about new, multi-layered consultative processes, inclusive of the representatives of religion? Do religious actors need to develop new forms of leadership? What is the significance of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union?*

1. Human fraternity

Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need (Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahamed Al-Tayyib, “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” 2019).

*Does it make sense to speak of the ‘human family’? Is politics possible in the absence of social friendship?*

1. Follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021 – 2022)

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany ... (Schuman Declaration, 1950)

*How can Schuman’s vision of solidarity, reconciliation, and creative change be translated into the terms of today, in the European Union and beyond?*

1. 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

The Helsinki Spirit is a mindset. And more than that: it is a working method to overcome divisions and mistrust. It is a willingness to engage in genuine dialogue, even with adversaries and competitors. It is a desire to seek common denominators, even in the midst of fierce disagreements. It is a determination to build trust, even when divisions between blocs run deep. (Speech by the President of the Republic of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, 22 November 2021)

*What is the relevance of the ‘Helsinki Spirit’ as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025?*

1. Peace is a true idea

Speaking in Belfast in April 2023, Senator George Mitchell stated that ‘peace is a true idea.’ In other words, the Good Friday Agreement is not just a ‘political fix’ or a collection of ideas strung together skilfully to please various constituencies. The Agreement is coherent and *makes sense;* it reflects in some way the *logos* of reconciliation; something has changed … it is helpful to see *inclusive politics* in Northern Ireland as the compass of the 1998 Agreement, a core commitment supported in a systemic way by many other creative elements: constitutional understandings, including a possible route to a united Ireland; popular ratification; police reform; decommissioning; the Human Rights Commission; the British-Irish dimension; ‘dealing with the past; ’ the ‘peace dividend’; the role of the EU; and other provisions (Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Visit of a Colombian Delegation, 9 – 14 June 2024, Report).

*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.*

1. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2024. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024* – *Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. Rome.
https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1254en [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Trussell Trust/Glen Bramley et al., ‘State of Hunger: Building the Evidence on Poverty, Destitution, and Food Insecurity in the UK, Year Two Main Report’ (May 2021), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [*https://www.undp.org/facs/publications/rethinking-our-food-systems-guide-multi-stakeholder-collaboration*](https://www.undp.org/facs/publications/rethinking-our-food-systems-guide-multi-stakeholder-collaboration) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://ifit-transitions.org/publications/first-principles-the-need-for-greater-consensus-on-the-fundamentals-of-polarisation/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21824.doc.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On 7 January 2023, the Financial Times reported on its front page that the Chief Executive of Bet365 was paid £260 million in the year to March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://radar.gesda.global [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Some states have not yet undertaken VNRs [↑](#footnote-ref-8)