

foi et développement

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL LEBRET-IRFED

49, rue de la Glacière - 75013 Paris - FRANCE

Tel 33(0)1 47 07 10 07 - Fax 33(0)1 47 07 68 66

e-mail: lebret-irfed.fd@wanadoo.fr / lebret-irfed@club-internet.fr

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For a Christian Practice of Globalization

Alain Durand*

Do Christians have anything specific to say about globalization? This question brings us directly to another: "Does the Word of God have something to say to us about globalization?" This question can be somewhat disconcerting, because the Word of God doesn't date from today, Holy Scripture being closed a long time ago, and globalization is something quite modern. How could the Bible say something about a reality so foreign to it? The question is also quite thrilling because it is challenging and provocative for our faith and for theological reflection. We need to see if faith has the resources for responding to this situation. If it turned out that faith has nothing to say, it would be troubling, for it would mean that the faith is mute before a major phenomenon of our time.

How can we go about addressing this question? Karl Barth is said to have declared that theology is done with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Doubtless a somewhat simplistic way to talk about theology, but a good one to show that the two poles must be spelled out together. For instance there's an immediate question, "Which newspaper do you read?" Depending on whether you read *Le Figaro* (conservative), *La Croix* (Catholic), *l'Humanité* (leftist) or *Le Monde Diplomatique*, you will not be reading reality in quite the same way and you will not come up with quite the same theology. So, at the outset, we must recognize that a certain reading of reality will condition what I say. This reading may of course be questionable, like all readings

of reality, it will be particular, shared by some, criticized by others.

In order to address the question of globalization theologically, what method will I use? I shall not develop this question of method, but simply indicate what underlies my reflection: the "correlation method", as Paul Tillich describes it. He is a German theologian who fled Germany under the Nazis and took refuge in the United States where he then taught.

To utilize the method of correlation, means first of all that you do not start off from the Word of God as in a deductive method. You don't do theology by simply deducing certain truths from another group of superior truths, whether they be dogmas, creeds or the Bible. It's not an inductive method either, where one would simply take reality as the starting point to induce a certain number of truths that we should believe. A half century ago, theology was largely deductive. More recently, we have seen a more inductive approach, more concrete.

We will use neither a deductive nor an inductive process, but we will put the Word of God and the present situation face to face. We will allow the Word to speak with the present situation as starting point and to address the questions it contains. We will also allow the Word to throw light on our experience. Neither deduction nor induction, but reciprocal interactions between the Word and the situation, an ongoing interfacing. I have tried to let this

movement of active correlation play itself out, and then tried to take in the light which was shed. This way, it does not matter whether one begins by one side or the other, by the present situation or by the Word of God, by the newspaper or the Bible, the important thing being their encounter. Thus, briefly stated, is the method that underlies my work..

OPENNESS TO THE UNIVERSAL

Let's get to the heart of the matter. Globalization is a process of universal exchanges of goods, values, persons. It is universal circulation and a "world in becoming," going beyond the local and crossing frontiers. What's at play in this process, is the growing openness to the universal dimension as well as the building of a certain unity of humanity. When I say unity of humanity, I am not pronouncing myself on the type of unity. This unity can be that which exists in the relationship of master to slave, as this is also a kind of relation of unity; it may be one of equality, as between brothers: in short, a unity of domination or a unity of solidarity.

When we consider this aspect of globalization and we begin to examine the Word of God, we perceive that Biblical story is also full of a vast movement of growing openness to the universal and a quest for the unity of humanity. I believe that this is pursued to the very end in the Bible. We see that everything starts with the story of the liberation of a minuscule people, I was almost going to say

* Alain Durand, a Dominican priest, is director of DIAL (Diffusion de l'information sur l'Amérique latine), 38, rue du Doyenné, 69005 Lyon, France. Tel. 33 (0) 4 72 77 00 fax: 33(0)4 72 40 96 70 website: <http://www.globenet.org/dial>

ridiculously small in proportion to the immense empires that existed at the time. So we go from the liberation of this small people to the idea that what has happened there ends up by having a meaning for the whole of humanity. This is why we are Christians. Starting with the election of a people, at the other end one finds the election of all humanity.

The height of this “going beyond limits” is attained in the New Testament when the Good News is proclaimed to the pagans. This is crossing all boundaries. This process brings to mind the quote: *There will no longer be man, or woman, slave or free person, Jew or Greek.* With the coming of Christ, these boundaries are abolished and we find ourselves in a story with an horizon, at least the ultimate one, is that of a reconciled world in the totality of its dimensions, reconciled in its relationship with God, with others, and with the cosmos.

This unity and this universalization found in the very story of the Bible, takes place around a fundamental axis: that of a liberating salvation. It’s a development of history under the sign of liberation. Its paradigm is the exodus from Egypt with its liberation from slavery. This is the foundation of Biblical history. When I say foundation, I don’t mean that it’s simply at the origin or temporal beginning, but that it is also basic because it is continuously present throughout the story. Moreover, frequently in the Bible, numerous behaviors asked by God are attached to the fact that Israel had been a slave in Egypt and had been liberated by God: *Remember that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.* It is a “universalization” that is brought about through the abolition of relationships of slavery engendering a unity in which relationships of domination are transformed into relationships of fraternity. That is the horizon which is proposed to our history. One can say that in the New Testament there is a micro-realization of this objective: it’s the fraternal community of Jerusalem, the first Christian community.

In this on-going journey, there are also deviations, the Tower of Babel being the major symbol of them. When one reads the biblical narration of Babel while wondering about globalization, the beginning is very interesting. It starts as follows: *The whole earth used the same language and the same words.* When you read the story, you realize that the

sought after unity is founded on power and size (excessiveness) and that it’s that type of unity which gives rise to non-communication. The explosion of language into different tongues comes about after this quest for unity founded on power. I believe that we can see in this symbolic story the unmasking of a process which runs throughout globalization today and which points out a dead end better not taken. Aren’t we living today in a contradiction between, on the one hand, an incredible accumulation of power and on the other hand a horizon of universal communication which, though technically possible, is made very difficult precisely because of that very accumulation of power?

Opposite this story of Babel, we can place the story of Pentecost where on the contrary we see at work unity which relies on the Spirit of God, a unity which engenders communication. We enter into the domain of communication with the story of Pentecost and we enter into it so deeply that in this story people speak to one another and for a long time we don’t quite know what they are saying to one another as though the content was no all that important. What was important was the fact that they were communicating. Communication, that’s the good news! If one enters into communication in this story, it’s because one has left the domain of power, symbolized by Babel.

I believe that one can say that globalization is an historical movement which can be in coherence with God’s plan for humanity. When I say *can be in coherence*, I’m not saying, *which realizes the project of God for humanity*, because we need to be very prudent in this area. When one is a theologian, there is a tendency to discern too easily the plan of God. If we find some “coherence” between what we can know of God’s plan and what is happening around us, that’s already something. I would say then that globalization is an historic movement which can be in coherence with the history of God amongst us in the measure that this movement goes beyond and crosses barriers which separate and isolate peoples. That is a positive point of globalization, so long as this unification, this universalization of the “human universe”, doesn’t happen by increasing relationships of domination between peoples or between social categories within nations, but makes possible rela-

tionships of justice and fraternity among peoples.

The Word of God can help us understand that globalization is perverted today by its neoliberal mode of realization. One of the fundamental perspectives in judging globalization is to consider it not in and of itself, but in its neoliberal mode of operation today. This precision is fundamental and it allows us to discern a certain number of issues without rejecting globalization as all absolutely evil, and to focus the question on neo-liberalism in itself and not solely on a planetarization of exchanges between peoples. We are invited to move from a neoliberal globalization to one of solidarity.

PERSON, AS RESPONSIBLE SUBJECT

We can see that, in the Bible, humanity’s movement towards openness, beyond frontiers and towards an horizon of unity, is parallel to another movement which I would call that of holding persons as responsible for their acts. In the Bible, the person is gradually recognized as more and more responsible for his actions. Already from the beginning of the Covenant, God addresses man as subject of his own actions. He doesn’t look at him as an object of mercy, but as a responsible subject, an actor. This is a huge revolution in the relationship of the human person to God.

As subject, the human person will be a partner in the Covenant, not only a beneficiary. This is the point of departure and the process develops from there. For example, an important step is taken at the moment of the affirmation of individual responsibility in the perspective of retribution: the teeth of the son will no longer be set on edge by their parents’ eating green grapes. The person is affirmed more and more to be a responsible subject and that he is alone responsible for his actions. We can call it the emergence of the person. In the New Testament, this emergence of the person is going to take on considerable magnitude since Christ is going to integrate all those who are expelled, excluded, marginalized because they are sick, or for religious reasons, or political reasons. He is going to reintegrate them, and treat them as persons. One of the places where this emergence is expressed, is when Christ vigorously

affirms the superiority of the person over the Law.

Where are we with this issue today? Very often, modernity is qualified as the time of the birth of the individual. The movement of individualization within modernity can not purely and simply be deduced from the emergence of the person as I have just described it. It has been inscribed in history through a certain number of mutations. When we speak of the birth of the individual, we're not talking about it in terms of the moral category of individualism. We are talking about a sociological category. It's the birth of a subject who is more and more left to himself in a society where so called natural bonds have been broken. The subject is no longer absorbed in a community to whose thought he conforms, although this may still be the case of a "person" who lives in a traditional rural community. A rupture, I believe, has taken place.

If we take into account these givens, it seems to me that in order for us to live this movement of openness and global exchange in a way coherent with our faith, we need to conjugate it with that of the constitution of the person as a responsible subject, responsible for himself as an individual and as a social person.. This perspective brings up many things of a practical nature. I'm not sure, for example, that the objective of our educational system is to develop the person as subject - in the sense of being responsible for his existence . Nor that this is the objective of political parties, unions or churches or any other institutions.

Constitution of the person as subject is a perspective which is not self evident in the context of globalization. It's clearly not present on the economic level, because we find there many processes of massive exclusion. There is very little sharing of responsibilities when it comes to economic decisions which determine our lives. This is also true on the cultural level, because we are faced with the danger of a certain "massification" of spirits, and a certain leveling out by reduction to the least common denominator. All of which does not help in developing persons as subjects. Worldwide television today hardly urges people to take their lives and responsibilities in their hands.

PRIORITY FOR THE POOR

It seems to me that there's another constant in biblical history that globalization invites us to take into consideration and that's the priority given to the poor. This is part of the "data base" in biblical history. It begins with the liberation of slaves, and continues with the prophets taking a stand against the oppression of the poor, and ends up in the New Testament with Jesus' proclamation at the beginning of his ministry: The time has come when the lame will walk, the lepers will be healed, prisoners liberated and the Gospel will be announced to the poor. One might say that the relationship to be maintained with the poor, the excluded or those in difficulty, becomes the criteria for one's relationship with God. According to Matt.25, it's the criteria which attests to the authenticity of our lives. Jesus presents the Kingdom of God as being above all open to the poor.

With this in mind, we can see that we are in a world where there are more and more poor and ever growing inequalities. Certainly, we can't say that everything is worse everywhere. There has been important progress made in the fight against poverty during these last years at the international level, notably in what concerns health, literacy, and access to drinkable water. But, globally, we find ourselves in a world where there are, at least in terms of absolute numbers, more poor people than before and where, in a massive way, there is an augmentation of inequalities. The numbers reported in this domain are really staggering. I believe that one can say that globalization, at least in its actual neoliberal form, is a movement which is greatly responsible for the situation of the growing number of poor and the increase of inequalities.

The whole Bible invites us, as believers, to judge this historic movement from the perspective of the effects which it produces on the poor, and on the most helpless of our society. It's the same criteria for judging political policies. This point of view is strictly according to the Gospel: to look at and to try to assess reality from how it affects the poor. That doesn't mean that it's only Christians who can have this perspective, but it does belong to our patrimony.

From the point of view of the poor, we can say that the current neoliberal globalization is a movement which is by and large in contradiction with God's intention for humanity, which is to say one of universal human fellowship advantageous to the poor.

THE GOSPEL CONDEMNATION OF RICHES

I want to touch upon a question linked to the previous one: that of riches. Two aspects of globalization are intertwined: One is the issue of the growth of production of riches which globalization permits. There is a considerable increase in the circulation of riches throughout the world. Whatever the location of the production, the wealth produced can end up anywhere. Sometimes, if you are speaking about the riches that information represents, for example, there is no need to talk about location because one can have access to it instantaneously from anywhere. The second aspect of globalization to take into consideration here is that this circulation of riches takes place in the form of an accumulation around certain poles. It's the phenomenon of inequalities which I evoked earlier. With the growth of wealth, there is an accumulation of this wealth around certain poles, which brings about extreme inequality at an international level.

Let us again read the Bible with this preoccupation in mind. We notice that, on several occasions, riches are clearly condemned in the New Testament, but it is in the domain of social relations, and not primarily about riches as a quantity of material goods. Riches are not seen here as a pure accumulation of goods and an evil in itself . What is denounced above all in the Bible is the social relationship which is brought about by riches, that is to say the relation of domination of the rich over the poor. That is the principle reason for the condemnation. Take the story of Lazarus. It's not because the rich man eats that he is denounced; but because he doesn't see the poor man who is present there.

Riches are also denounced - and this is more classic, and what one encounters in other religions- because they absorb the desire of the person. The danger of riches is that they become a god who takes over and perverts the heart. Passing and ephemeral objects, which can be eaten by moths, become the person's treasure. It's more of a

moral consideration about the human heart. But we need to add right away, that in the New Testament, the opposition between God and Mammon doesn't simply concern morality. The opposite of money is not moral virtue, but God. Properly speaking a theological opposition. It's God or Mammon. That opposition touches upon faith as faith in God.

Lastly, the opulence of the rich is considered as an insult to the misery of the poor, in the sense that the elementary needs of the poor are not satisfied, whereas the rich satisfy their desires for luxury (here I make a distinction between need and desire, need being that which is necessary for me to live a decent life in the society where I find myself, and desire being excess in the pursuit of riches and money). In face of our reality, that consideration, clearly sends us back to the poor distribution of goods, but it also refers us back to the idea that there is a right order to things, by which I mean there are first of all the indispensable needs of the person. These have to be satisfied. Matthew 25 illustrates them. These basic needs must be satisfied for everyone before anything else.

It's from this Biblical view of riches, that we can draw some questions about our own situation. Concerning riches and relations of domination, we can ask ourselves: doesn't globalization reinforce the domination of the rich, rich countries over poor countries? And as it's not just a question of countries, let's say the power of wealth over people who are in situations of distress?

As to the priority of needs to satisfy, we can ask ourselves if globalization doesn't reinforce a reversal in the order of satisfaction of needs. What type of consumer goods is proposed today, what is given priority in economic production? Aren't we witnessing an overthrow of true human priorities? Is the world economy giving priority to the basic needs of all? The answer is evident: no.

The last idea based on what has been said above about riches is this: In what measure does the neoliberal model of globalization make us enter into an undefined and uncontrolled system which produces goods for themselves, that is to say a production which ends up being an end in itself? Production of riches seems to have for its finality the perpetuation of the process of production. The economic process, with its

permanent expansion, becomes such an end in itself that it finishes by making even political power subservient to it. Political policies of the majority of governments are such that they aim at creating a maximum of space for the free development of economic powers. *More and more governments esteem that their role isn't to regulate markets, but to facilitate their non ending expansion.* (PNUD, Report 1997, p.99) Globalization is certainly a danger for humanity in the measure that the expansion of the reign of merchandise means the submission of human relationships to the law of market economy. Shouldn't true development search for ways to create a process other than the one in our society which ends up giving predominance to marketplace laws and values?

As Andre Gorz has aptly stated, development in the sphere of production is never *sufficient* in today's logic. *The category "sufficient" isn't an economic category, it's rather a cultural or existential one. To say that what is sufficient suffices, is to indicate that no good will be served by having more, that the "more" won't be better.. what is sufficient is what is better.* (Métamorphose du travail. Quête de sens, Éd. Galilée, 1988, p. 142)

THE SOLIDARITY OF GOD WITH VICTIMS

I believe globalization pushes us to question the Bible in another area: that of power and authority. Globalization leads to a fabulous accumulation of economic might, an accumulation which is in the hands of relatively few actors, even if it's difficult to identify them, and who can perturb the world economy. These actors, and here's what's most serious about this, escape all democratic control. What we have to deal with is a concentration, even if it is fluctuating, of the power of decision-making, a concentration, which I repeat, goes together with unequal growth and a lack of participation for most of the world's citizens. Such a situation, whose most blatant sign is world poverty, produces victims. What is at stake, is not so much a question of riches, but a question of power. They cannot be equated with one another, even if they are closely related.

The Gospel has much to say about victims of power. God in Jesus identified with the victims. He didn't identify himself with the powerful, nor with those who were successful, but he

ended up lamentably on a cross, excluded and expelled from human society after an unjust trial. What Faith says in the above is that the one banished and expelled from human history is the One who is risen. It is very important to spell out carefully the meaning of resurrection: it isn't the resurrection of just any man, or humanity in general, it is the resurrection of a man who had been expelled and banished: it's from that angle that resurrection has meaning.

We can say that from then on, God assumed total solidarity with the victims. Hence forth, we can no longer confuse truth and power in our societies, because the One who is Truth had been a victim of power. And we can no longer confound victory and justice, because at the heart of our history the unjust can be victorious. As the theologian Jung Mo Sung (Brazilian of Korean origin) said: *We know, thanks to the Resurrection of Jesus, that victory isn't proof of justice, and that the just aren't always victorious.* (Economia y teologia. Reflexiones sobre mercado, globalizacion y Reino de Dios, in Alternativas n 9, 1998, p.16)

In addition to this question of God's identification with victims, we need to join the idea that it is above all to them that the Kingdom of God belongs. It's always the same text of reference: Jesus announcing the meaning of His ministry (Lk 4, 16 -21) Here, He enumerates signs which touch on the body, and not only the soul and spirit of the human person. These signs consist of putting people back on their own feet or in better condition: to make the lame walk, to heal the leper, to visit the prisoner. They are in the corporeal as well as in the relational realm. One can find the same type of program for believers in Matthew 25. Jesus is recognised by similar signs when the Baptist sends his disciples to ask if He is "the One who is to come" These signs manifest the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

What are the signs of the nearness of the Kingdom of God in today's society? If there aren't any, that would mean that God has deserted our earth. It would doubtless mean also that, even though we don't "produce" the Kingdom of God, we have some responsibility for making these signs emerge. What gestures, ours and those of the Church as a whole, can signify the nearness of the Kingdom of God in the world?

The double certitude, God's preference for the victims and the belief that the Kingdom of God is at work in the world, represent the two pillars of our hope.

It's the armour of our spiritual resistance: to know that we are in a world where God has taken the side of the victims and where the signs of the Kingdom are at work. It's one source of spiritual resistance in a world where the just or innocent are crushed. If one were to suppress one of these two poles, something would be wrong: God would side with the victims, but outside of history, or God would act in history but without being on the side of the victims.

THE FINALITY OF EXISTENCE

With the coming of the Kingdom of God, the "order of the end of times" appears at the heart of our history.

We can say that, taken from this perspective, our essential task consists in re-integrating into human life, daily life included, all of the realities which are of the order of the end, which belong to the order of the finality of existence. Do not wait until things get better to start making place for the "ordering of things according towards their finality", because perhaps in the measure that we begin this "ordering" things will be able to get better.

I believe that the Word of God, as much as our own thinking on the current situation, urges us to take into account for ourselves and others, what can be termed, according to Emmanuel Levinas, the order of the "visage" (face in English), that is to say the order of the transcendental in the person. It is urgent to make place in our societies for those realities which are considered realities belonging to the order of finality: the person of the other, the word, exchanges, gift, pardon, creativity, celebrations, all these realities belong to the order of finality because they are an end in themselves, because they belong to the order of the meaning of existence.

I don't want to develop this any further, but let's think about the question asked a while back: we are in a system of productivity which is undefined and uncontrolled, that is to say it reabsorbs ceaselessly the time and energies that progress in productivity should liberate so that one could do other things. This is one of the big questions of our society.

It's also a question that can be seen along with the question of reduction of work hours, which isn't only a question of a better distribution of tasks, but also it's about being free to do some "non-productive" activities. At the end of *Capital*, Karl Marx spoke of the kingdom of necessity - which covers the area of satisfaction of needs and of production- and the kingdom of liberty, space for the gratuitous fulfilment of the person. In order for this kingdom to be born, there is one condition, said Marx, and it's the reduction of work time. Without that, the kingdom of necessity will always nibble away at the space of the kingdom of liberty.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The question of culture and of values is fundamental when discussing globalization.

We are in a world, where a certain number of objects circulate around the globe. Some of these objects can be called technical objects, for example, a car. A car is an object marked by culture simply because it is a technical object; whether it comes from Japan, which has a different culture than ours, or from the United States or from France, there aren't major differences in the car. It's a technical object and it's the same everywhere. But there are other things, which are very marked by a cultural difference, but to which the whole world has access without having to travel. They are, for example, crafts or Latin American or Indian clothe, African masks, lacquer boxes from the Philippines, various religious objects that you can now see in big department stores or specialist shops.

Those objects, which are rooted in a culture, become what one could call objects in a state of cultural floatation. I am borrowing this expression from a sociologist, Donzelot, who is a renowned analyst of exclusion in our society. He says that exclusion always ends up by putting people in a state of floatation. I think that at the cultural level in our societies, those objects are in a state of floatation; they are there, without roots. All you need to do to procure one of these objects is go out your front door. They can be purchased for a modest price, without having the least contact with the culture which produced the object nor with the producers of the object. These are cultural objects in floatation.

What results is a sort of "trivialization" of human cultural diversity. I don't want to be too negative, for sure, but nevertheless we have to admit that this is happening today; there's a danger of levelling out and suppressing cultural diversity.

Recently, an article appeared in the *Courrier International* with this title: The United States, globalization which favours the culture of the turnip. This is indeed an original statement! The subtitle explained: *Hollywood studios make most of their profit from foreign sales, which induces them to gear their films to an international audience. Result: extravaganzas poor in dialogue and rich in muscles.* The danger is cultural trivialization and levelling out to the least common denominator. There are also positive aspects of the circulation of cultural goods, because it makes great works of art available to persons who would normally not have access to them. But this phenomenon is reserved presently to the elite.

It's very serious to lessen cultural differences and diversity. From a theological perspective and in a way that is not easy to explain, I believe that the process endangers something in the human person which permits us to know God: if one diminishes human differences, I believe it is making it difficult to discover God as "the Other" - different. There is always a radical link between knowledge of the human person and knowledge of God. So, inversely, in the measure that globalization would facilitate - and I think that in some ways it does- meeting other peoples and cultures, it can enrich the substratum of the human person which serves as a basis for our non-conceptual approach to God. I believe that the discovery of "otherness" in persons predisposes us to a certain emptying of self (*comme en creux*) and to an eventual discovery of the "otherness" of God. Perhaps we have the chance today of integrating into our faith the diversity of peoples, human diversity, and that's something new for our Western Church.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

First of all, we must say that the Word of God hasn't been disseminated throughout the world by creating its own pathways, but has followed those paths marked out by the political or economic powers in place. St. Paul didn't circulate

throughout the Roman world without following the roads made by the Romans. We know that in the 15th and 16th centuries, the same thing happened in Latin America: the Church followed the colonizers and used the roads which they had traced. Missionaries used the same itineraries to announce the Word of God. The same thing happened in the 19th century.

Globalization, spear-headed by today's economy, would seem to facilitate the circulation of religions. But the difference between the era of colonial expansion and current globalization is that the latter doesn't give a privileged place to the spreading of the Church's word, but rather opens up a space for numerous religious movements. This phenomenon is very important. Certainly, there can be situations when a political power curbs one or other religious group, but I believe that the tendency now is to allow a variety of different religious groups in the diverse regions of the globe. Thus France has become one

of the most important countries for Buddhism in Europe. This is to say that globalization, after the period of missionary expansion when the Catholic word was "queen", has now opened up a space for interreligious dialogue. It has opened this space up in France as well as everywhere in the world. From that perspective, the gathering at Assisi heralded this newness.

We are in a world where we cannot simply think of ourselves as true believers, but above all as believers among other believers. We can no longer affirm our faith without opening ourselves to other religious groups, without welcoming what they have to bring us. In that sense, globalization invites us to a faith which no longer posits itself as an exclusive truth, but accepts the existence of other paths. In short, a faith which no longer thinks of itself as having a monopoly on religious truth, as has been the frequent tendency of the Catholic institution.

Globalization invites us to practice being a truly welcoming Church, a Church of dialogue, and not a Church suspicious of others' beliefs or a Church which "recuperates" others' beliefs by claiming that they are an expression of what the Church holds. It's truly an invitation to an openness to "otherness" (alterite) and at the same time, it's a transformation in the long term of the Church which presents herself as the mistress of Truth. Globalization is an invitation to go from an authoritarian, dogmatic Church to a Church of dialogue, a welcoming Church, a Church that knows and at the same time discovers, even at the level of her own faith, that she has things to receive from other religions. This is a dimension of globalization, which isn't in the economic realm, and which surpasses the purely cultural domain, but a dimension that is very important for all believers in the future.

Alain Durand
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