Enlightened Monotheism and Contemporary Challenges

View PDF



Dr. Buzaglo is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. A noted scholar, author, and lecturer, Dr. Buzaglo has written this article for the forthcoming volume, Studies in Modern Religions and Religious Movements, volume 2, edited by Dr. Moshe Sharon and published by Brill; it is printed here with permission of the publisher.This article appears in issue 20 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Abstract

A preliminary examination of the suppleness inherent in the Jewish tradition's concept of *ba'al dat*—"one possessed of religion"[1]—offers several promising possibilities in view of the present-day challenge ensuing from impending mergers of religious zealousness with unprecedented technological capabilities. In this paper I examine how the possibilities available to the bearers of monotheistic traditions can serve them in taking action through increased cooperation to face global threats. I expand upon one such possibility, one that maintains loyalty to tradition yet nonetheless lays the foundations for joint political action, a possibility made available by a reworking of the *ba'al dat* idea and supported by a convention more rigorous than precepts such as "because of the ways of peace" [*mipnei darkei shalom*].

A. Introduction

Political Science scholars today tend to express a need for a review of conventional approaches to world security.[2] Concurrently, we are witness to initiatives to create dialogs between religious persons and to break past taboos on such ventures.[3] What I will present below, I believe, joins these trends yet is different in that the attempt being made here is toward forging a link at the level of believers, in the hope of finding support and encouraging change among the representatives of religions. From this aspect, there is a "privatization" of the interfaith dialog, not only at the level of understanding but as the appropriation of a shared basis for taking action. Second, in view of narratives by important Secularists (such as Habermas) that are able to part with anti-religious fervor, the intention here is to hold such dialog in a way that will reinforce current initiatives for collaboration with Secularists. In this sense, the idea of a *ba'al dat* presents itself as a natural and promising candidate.[4]

The concept of *ba'al dat* that, as a rule, indicates how one who is not an idolater is perceived by Jewish tradition, acquires new meaning with the emergence of every new religion on the living fabric of humanity. I do not intend to analyze the multiple meanings of this concept or to seek out any one of its definitive meanings. The potential of this concept's contribution to discourse lies in its positioning. While concepts that refer to the Other such as "heretic," "idolater," "non-believer," or "a desecrator of the Sabbath in public" vilify the Other, this concept, by its very nature, defines difference while seeking a lenient approach, expressing a certain readiness for relating to the Other, in spite of separateness. This term has an additional advantage, in that it avoids the patronization associated with terms such as *tinok shenishba*—"a child who has been held captive" and who is not to be held responsible for his decisions.

Dealing with the term *ba'al dat*, in a deep sense, leads us inward into Judaism. The evolution and logic of the concept of the Other affects religion from within. The appearance of Christianity and Islam opened a new chapter in the history of Judaism. The distinction to be made—despite the ambivalence that arose around the complexities of the Trinity in the case of Christianity and that increased following the appearance of Islam—was no longer between those uniquely believing in one God and idol worshippers; the state of affairs has been that a belief in the One, transcendent God no longer fully determines the believer's identity. For once having defined that an individual's faith is in the one God who created the world by an act of will, the fact of whether the individual is a Jew or a Muslim or a Christian remains to be established, as does the kind of Jew or Muslim. This means that although monotheism demands absolute faithfulness to the belief and worship of God, it does not nullify the context in which the belief in one God developed.

One can say, in general, that Judaism underwent a historic change in its attitude toward the Other, concurrently to an evolution of its clarifications of the very idea of God's unity. Biblical violence against idol worshippers is handled by the facilitation of the halakha (Jewish law), in all its complexity, which gradually begins to involve pragmatic and theological considerations. This is where we encounter terms such as "because of the ways of peace" and "because of [their] hatred," as well as the talmudic phrase "Gentiles outside the Land [of Israel] are not idol worshippers; they continue their fathers' customs." Applications of these terms and their subsequent elimination, just as the sources on which they are based, are the subjects of discussions and differences that shift and change[5]. The concept of *ba'al dat* in the Jewish world—"a possessor of religion"—and certainly in the case of a possessor of a monotheistic religion, is an expression of the relationship between Jewish monotheists and other monotheists, and the search for its history supplies us with a first criterion of its suppleness. Today we can understand that a renewed definition of idolatry is in order, one sufficiently relevant to bear actual political meanings.

Halbertal[6] continues and deepens the research tradition of seeking out the meaning of *ba'al dat*, and the twelfth-century context of Rabbi Menachem Hameiri's writings provides him with the opportunity to study the affinity between this term and the Maimonidean world view. Life among Christians had its effects, and it generated important halakhic changes in reference to Gentiles. Hameiri's discussion is as methodical and loyal as it is daring: The understanding that the world's nations among whom the Jews dwell are not idolaters, and the concept of "nations secured by the ways of religion" [*umot haGedurot baDat*], serve to reduce prejudice between Jews and non-Jews, ensuring, all the while, their separateness.

Scholarly and pragmatic changes thus generated sensitivities that were inconceivable during biblical times, not to mention the effects of significant historic changes – such as the rise of Christianity and Islam—that were entirely absent from the biblical world's horizons. Similarly, the challenges unique to the present may present a need for change, and the merger of religious fanaticism and modern-day global threats—such as non-conventional weapons and new technologies—beg for an examination of avenues for collaboration between monotheists of different traditions, and present theological questions as to the conditions such collaborations must meet so as to be soundly based and evoke the mutual trust required. The emphasis on trustworthiness is clear: one can make the leap with the help of humanistic commitments by blurring differences between

religions, yet it is doubtful that such blurring would be welcome or useful. Hermann Cohen's attempt to "transfer" the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday so as to build a bridge to the German Protestants will forever remain a tragic-comic exercise.

In today's globalized setting, the challenge of maintaining security is no longer limited to the traditional foreign-policy and military tools of the nation-state, and security and insecurity are no longer considered as dependent exclusively upon geopolitics and military strength, but rather are seen to depend also upon social, economic, environmental and ethical models of analysis and tools for taking action. For purposes of the proposition to be raised here, I will open with a preliminary description of some of the transmutations through which the *ba'al dat* concept has evolved and continue, in the following section, with the rich potential it holds in facing the modern day challenge here described.

B. The Theological-Halakhic Context

The biblical vision of "all [beings] uniting in a singular alliance to do Thy will," or "And the Lord will be King of all the earth on that day will God be one and His name one," or "My house will be called the house of prayer for all peoples" informs the cumulative connotations of the concept *ba'al dat,* and is also associated with our father Abraham's world mission. It is worth noting, furthermore, that the grand vision seemingly ignores differences, as might follow from terms such as "a singular alliance" or "King of all the earth." No one in biblical times, however, had yet considered that the nations who would wish to bow before the Lord's sovereignty would not only be nations from distant places but such that they all linked themselves to Abraham.

B.1 The One Does Not Abolish Difference

The basic insight is that the commitment to God, for all that it is total, does not negate difference. Despite the fact that the notion of *ba'al dat* came of age during the Middle Ages, we should note the biblical source relating to the particular situation in which being a monotheist does not determine an individual's identity. The concept of *ba'al* dat is not utopic, and some of its applications were a result of constraints endured by Jews in their exile. But there was, in fact, no need to await the development of the other religions to reach this conclusion. The bible tells of Egyptians who will worship the one God, as well as of the Assyrians, where Israel is one of the three nations that worship God:

19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. **20** And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a savior, and a defender, who will deliver them. **21** And the LORD shall make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day; yea, they shall worship with sacrifice and offering, and shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and shall perform it. **22** And the LORD will smite Egypt, smiting and healing; and they shall return unto the LORD, and He will be entreated of them, and will heal them. **23** In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians. **24** In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; **25** for that the LORD of hosts hath blessed him, saying: 'Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance (Isaiah, 19).

In this vision, the differences between nations are maintained *despite* their sharing in the worship of God, and Israel is but one of three nations that worship Him. A deeper inquiry shows that this pronouncement differs from the one declaring that all nations will join in worship at the temple in Jerusalem. The particularity of the

Egyptian and of Assyrian traditions is maintained, despite the fact that they sacrifice to the Lord.

B.2 Peering into the Middle Ages

Jewish philosophical awareness during the Middle Ages was familiar with friendship and closeness between "possessors of religion." Before we attempt to understand this, however, it important that we recall an observation of Rabbi Yehuda Halevy's that has not, to date, or to the best of my knowledge, been accorded its due significance. According to Halevy, the fact that battles between religions exist rules out the philosophical view that what is essential is to worship God and that the manner of worship is insignificant. Were this to be the case, human behavior would be meaningless, because the battles would be superfluous:

Said to him the Khazari: Thy words are convincing, yet they do not correspond to what I wish to find. I know already that my soul is pure and that my actions are calculated to gain the favour of God. To all this I received the answer that this way of action does not find favour, though the intention does. There must no doubt be a way of acting, pleasing by its very nature, but not through the medium of intentions. If this be not so, why then do Christian and Moslem, who divide the inhabited world between them, fight with one another, each of them serving his God with pure intention, living as either monks or hermits, fasting and praying? For all that they vie with each other in committing murders, believing that this is a most pious work and brings them nearer to God. They fight in the belief that paradise and eternal bliss will be their reward. It is, however, impossible to agree with both.[7]

This position of Halevy's clarifies that he does not attempt to leap into a vision of messianic or utopian peace before first having established the steadfastness of his loyalty and having "contained" the zealous warrior. History is the history of divine intention, and Halevi's words that follow are therefore particularly reliable, even in the eyes of the zealous believer who will not reduce his faith to humanism.

Subsequently, however, we hear from Halevy that the *ba'al dat* is closer to the believer than is the philosopher, even though he errs:

> 12) Said to him the Khazari: But the followers of other religions [*ba'alei dat*] approach you more nearly than the philosophers?
> 13) Said to him the Rabbi: They are as far removed from us as the followers of a religion from a philosopher. The former seek God not only for the sake of knowing Him, but also for other great benefits which they derive therefrom. The philosopher, however, only seeks Him that he may be able to describe Him accurately in detail….[8]

Although he does not explicitly say so, the context of the exchange includes as "possessors of religion" those who set their intentions toward God. What is in fact written is, those who "seek the God"—and not the idol or any similar expression. And, in truth, Halevi takes this much further, and his vision, as made familiar in the

Khuzari, is that world history, including the Jewish history of exile, is not incidental to the divine will; indeed, the philosopher is generally indifferent to particularistic notions such as “exile” or “Israel.” This vision is the pinnacle of the affinity between the religions, and it refers to the End of Days not as the triumph of Judaism alone and not as the elimination of all other religions; it is illustrated in the form of a tree with sprouting branches:

> In the same manner the Law of Moses transforms each one who honestly follows it, though it may externally repel him. The nations merely serve to introduce and pave the way for the expected Messiah, who is the fruition, and they will all become His fruit. Then, if they acknowledge Him, they will again become one tree. Then they will revere the origin which they formerly dispersed, as we have observed concerning the words: "Behold My servant prospers."[9]

This sort of position could not have appeared in the Talmud, which was unfamiliar with the unique challenges facing the Jews as presented by Christianity and Islam or by philosophy. Traces of this position can, of course, be found in clues scattered in the Talmud and Scripture, but the messianic hope for harmony between the “possessors of religion” appeared in its full and rich meaning only with subsequent historical developments.
A similar change can be found in Maimonides’ position concerning Torah study. The Talmud is unequivocal in that Torah is not to be taught to a foreigner or idolater, while Maimonides considers the dissemination of Torah and its promotion to Christians to be an authentic Jewish objective. On the question in Tractate *Sanhedrin* (59, 71) concerning whether the halakha follows Rabbi Yohanan in that “a foreigner [or idolater] who deals in Torah deserves death,” Maimonides replies: “This is indubitably the halakha. So that when Israel has the upper hand, he [the non-Jew] is prevented from Torah study until he converts.” A tempering step follows, however, similar to the one we observed by Halevi when he says that it is permissible to teach the Bible to Christians. [10] The messianic vision according to Maimonides, in which the truth shall be made known to all humanity and to all possessors of religion, can be found in his Laws Concerning Kings in the *Mishne Torah*. My reading of this vision is of victory of the Truth and as the insight that it is indeed to be found in the nation of Israel’s custody.

Rabbi Joseph Albo of the fifteenth century took things a step further and established the shared principles of all followers of divine law: the existence of God, revelation, and reward and punishment. [11] In listing the principles of faith, one should note that Rabbi Albo accepts the different monotheistic religions as an open possibility and enumerates the principles for *all* religions. According to Rabbi Albo, Judaism ultimately is vindicated, but in his inquiry he nevertheless suspends judgment and remain open to the theoretical possibility of numerous other Godly religions.

The scholarly definition of *ba’al dat*, albeit from a single religion’s representatives’ point of view, is also echoed in the definitions of the idea of all religion in Islam and Christianity; the New Testament includes an awareness of the Old Testament, and Islam refers to the People of the Book. Subsequent changes in the perception of the Other by Christianity were indeed to inform the attitude toward Judaism so that, for example, Rabbi Riskin’s update of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s position[12] could be supported by those made by Pope John Paul in 1965.[13]

B.4 The Appearance of Secularization

The relationships between the monotheistic traditions and the phenomenon of secularism leave much to be clarified and established. A large gap exists between the discussion on secularism in academic spheres and its discussion among believers. It is important for us to relate to this issue to the extent that it bears upon interfaith partnership, if only to consider the possibility of an analogy between the appearance of the idea of secularism and the appearance of the Christian and Muslim religions. We must first say that one cannot consider secularism to be a neutral position; it carries a world of challenging and competing values. Secondly, just as in the ideas of Judaism and of Islam, there is not one sole concept of secularism; there are multiple possibilities and manifestations of secular identity. Marxism and capitalism, one division amongst several within domains that are likely to be considered secular, maintain interesting affinities to the monotheistic traditions. For this reason, it would be simplistic to reject secular people from the *ba'al dat* category, just as it would be imprudent to include secularism in the category of "possessors of religion." We therefore note secularism as a question (even if we leave it unanswered) in order to explain that in its case the concept of *ba'al dat* changes entirely. It would be as simplistic to consider secularism idol worship if only because the concept of idol worship itself has undergone transmutations. Secularism, as a domain, holds the promise of facilitating religion and interfaith collaboration.

To the extent that it concerns Judaism, the expression "nations secured by the ways of religion" makes the distinction between nations that "possess a religion" and those that do not. Halbertal expanded on this concept and relates to it as referring to nations possessing a civilization, as opposed to those that have none; between nations governed by state laws, and nations that are not. It is interesting to read this interpretation against the background of Rabbi Albo's words, in which he proposes several basic distinctions:

There are three kinds of law (*dat*): natural, positive or conventional (*nimusit*), and Divine. Natural law is the same among all peoples, at all times and in all places. Positive or conventional is a law ordered by a wise man or men to suit the place and the time, and the nature of the persons who are to be controlled by it, like the laws and the statutes enacted in certain countries among the ancients idolaters, or those who worship God as human reason dictates without any divine revelation. Divine law is one that is ordered by God through a prophet, like Adam or Noah, or like the custom or laws which Abraham taught men, instructing them to worship God and circumcising them by the command of God, or one that is ordered by God through a messenger whom He sends and through whom He gives a law, like the law of Moses. (Volume 1, Chapter 7).

The intent of natural religion is to do away with injustice and bring veracity closer, so that people may refrain from robbery, theft, and murder, in such a manner that human society may continue and exist, and every one protected from the hand of injustice and wickedness. The intent of the conventional religion is to do away with indecency and bring closer that which is proper, so that people will distance themselves from what is reprehensible, as is widely known. And in this it is to be preferred to the natural one, for the conventional also corrects people's behavior respects the concept of family and organizes the governance of their affairs. The Jewish world faced the challenges of Christianity and Islam, in part, with the concept *ba'al dat*, and Albo's distinctions bear an interesting contribution. It is particularly enlightening to compare the distinction between "nations secured by religion" and nations that are not thus secured attributed to Hameiri and Rabbi Joseph Albo's list of principles.

Yet although these approaches may have the potential of proposing interesting ways of relating to the question of law in secular states, they appear to lack the capacity to decisively determine these fateful issues. The course implied by Barth and Levinas' position is to extend the concept of idolatry. We note here only the great potential this course indicates and outline our context for the issue we face. Idol worshipping has historically been identified with paganism, as worship of the celestial spheres, trees, or mountains. With time, this concept has been extended to include the self-anointed and the "god of money," and even materialism has been suspected as idolatry. Indeed, the political-spiritual challenge is less likely to be found in a remote tribe throwing flower petals to a river goddess than in bullying regimes. The proposition that arises naturally is to view tyrannical regimes and personality cults, the likes of which we have encountered during the twentieth century, as idolatry. Stalin and Mao's regimes each merit the crown of idolatry, not for having been materialistic or worshipped money, nor for having been atheistic, but rather because they sought to take on the role of gods for their respective peoples. Non-democratic regimes are the prime suspects likely to fall under the category of the updated concept of idolatry. In lieu of Hameiri's position that linked the lack of faith to lawless behavior [14] we may set political tyranny as today's relevant challenge to faith and consider it as dangerous idolatry.

C. An Age of Great Dangers

Just as the appearance of additional religions and the changes they undergo affect the attitudes of other religions, the appearance of secularism challenges the different religions to a similar extent, in ways that have yet to be resolved. Nevertheless, the development of ideas is not alone in imposing change; events and cultural changes do so as well. Important historic developments have changed relationships between the religions, and the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel generated promising changes in Christianity’s attitude to Judaism. There is, nevertheless, no *a priori* mechanism that can ensure that these great changes will be followed by the desired change in its system of norms. One should note the enormity of the oversight, of the failed opportunity for change, in the helplessness exhibited by the trustees of the religions by their not apprehending the situation and failing to save the world from the great tragedy of the twentieth century. Emmanuel Levinas and Karl Barth were able, from the start, to identify the rise of Nazism led by Hitler as idolatry. Their reading was clear and, in the case of Levinas and Levinas’ nation, fateful. The huge deficiency of Judaism and Christianity was in finding neither the tools nor the language, or perhaps not the strength, to face these developments. The context is secularism, communism and fascism, and the forces of faith lacked the required armies. It was actually Hitler and the fascist countries that were quick to harness religious tendencies to the great madness that transpired over humanity.

Today we would add an instructive value to every change, beyond the norm of “because of the ways of peace,” although it, too, is linked to this idea. I refer to a concern for the world’s continued existence and to humanity's progress, and to the prevention of global disasters. The concept of war has undergone a dramatic change, no serious politician can assure us that war is "the continuation of policy by other means" as promised by Carl von Clausewitz. Furthermore, one should add here that it is impossible to leave the responsibility to “secular” atheistic positions, seeing as in this case it is the rise of religion and religious fanaticism that have created this harsh situation. The combination of religious fanaticism and weapons of mass destruction creates a threat to human life. Levinas and Barthes’ “missed opportunity” led to the greatest destruction of the twentieth century. What is at stake in the current situation is different: It is more dangerous, and religious believers play a significant role in the threats that face our societies.

C. 1 Three Possible Avenues

What possibilities lie before us in facing these existential threats? The first is to blur the differences between the religions to which we each respectively belong and to accept that blind loyalty is too high a price to pay. The beauty and truth in this alternative are difficult to resist. It aligns us to what is paramount: love, compassion, and a peace served by us all, yet this avenue is problematic precisely from a most essential aspect. It cannot include the zealot's perception of truth, namely, that God's claims transcend the claims of humanity. For the zealot, faithfulness entails an unequivocal loyalty to faith, even when that leads to harming others.

To be willing to destroy humanity cannot be the goal of human redemption! Neither is it clear how differences between the faiths may be both bridged and yet glossed over. A Jew observes the Torah as ones' only doctrine, at least in terms of worship, while another Jew may end up rejecting these teachings; or one claims that the Torah was forged by Ezra the Scribe while another recognizes the validity of prophecy or does not feel at all bound by the Messiah of other religions. How can differences in basic principles between the faiths be blurred? There are those who have opted for martyrdom when asked to agree to some such violations of their beliefs—are they now expected to convert their loyalties, those of their fathers and their forefathers?

A second approach to bridging the gap between the faiths is to maintain our hold on our loyalty as it has been interpreted to date. This second approach will appeal to those just people who do not seek excuses for themselves or for their nation. This, I believe, is a valid, worthy and laudable way. Divine mercy is promised to those who do not alter their faith and remain on their path—even when it seems to lead to the most terrifying conclusions imaginable.

Believers have thus far been torn by these two options, while many Secularists who were, in any case, uncomfortable with religion, generally preferred to denounce religious fanaticism rather than take responsibility for the situation, and few chose to take any decisive steps (see the quotation from Habermas below).

There remains a basis for yet an additional position. As Rabbi Yehuda Halevi established, wars are not random events. It may be naïve to say, "Why be at war?" when we share the same Father, but this position is disrespectful to warriors and to the memory of their devotion. In the *Mahabharata* of India the warrior who excels is he who fulfills his duty. At the end of the day, it is possible that God will embrace all those who fought for Him, even if they fought against each other, and it is likely that the naïve person will appear to be disingenuous, and as one who did not follow his conscience. It is indeed superfluous to tell a *shahid* or martyr that he is unaware that we share the same Father. Humanism, on its own, will not suffice to show us the path, particularly when the fanatic has developed positions resistant to humanism, pluralism, and the like. Nevertheless, we may follow this logic, namely, that war is not a random occurrence, and consider the war against wars as divine will.

C. 2 The Third Possibility

Loyalty to our tradition does not prevent us from observing the deep transformations that took place in this same tradition and that were put into effect by the greatest of believers; this is the issue that now confronts us. The idea of “because of the ways of peace” generated important innovations, yet there are no guarantees that it can meet contemporary challenges. It is in this context that I wish to propose a reading of the known adage, “Therefore love ye truth and peace.” Simply understood, this text states that these two demands lie in contrast to each other; the pursuit of peace can be at the expense of truth (for example, Aaron lied in order to bring peace); we may propose a second reading stating that pursuing truth will not bring peace. The following reading is, however, also conceivable: Sustainable peace cannot be based on a lie, and a truth pursued that does not result in peace cannot be true.

Motivation for collaboration between the monotheistic traditions is likely to be of several sorts: democracy and faith, technological questions that cause discomfiture to faith, loss of the value of humanity, the defection of many from religious life. We may add to these Rabbi Riskin’s laudable initiative, coming from the Orthodox camp, which sought to rethink Jewish-Christian dialog so as to make a stand in face of Islamic fanaticism and terror, and to deal with the world’s relative apathy.[15] There is much to learn from Rabbi Riskin’s position, yet what is here proposed is different. First, we include all those who consider themselves party to these principles, including Muslims, Christians, and Secularists who believe in the existence of God and take responsibility for the value of Man. A Muslim who considers the proposed cooperation to be essential and important is as welcome as is a Christian or Jew. There is, in any case, significant room for those values to be found in the diverse Secularist camps— even for those who do not believe in God[16] may win a religionist’s favor. The issue we face, on the one hand, is the understanding that the merger between fanaticism and weapons of mass destruction threatens the planet’s existence, just as—in a thought-provoking way—the combination between idolatry and atomic weaponry, which may be discerned in North Korea, for example, create a similar menace. On the other hand, we understand that the liberal camp cannot be left on its own. What about the sons and daughters of the traditions who consider such “combinations” to be a distortion of their very tradition? This threat, in conjunction with the awareness that the powers on hand are desperately in need of help, lie at the basis of our proposal.

In his discussion, Rabbi Riskin raises the idea of *tikkun olam*, “rescuing the world” as a concept that can be understood at the same level as the category indicated by “because of the ways of peace.” It can be termed “the peace of the world,” and this would hardly be an overstatement. This category is intended to instruct us—the faithful, in our dealing with the impending dangers of our time, dangers that were unimaginable in previous generations. I will attempt below to develop what lies behind this idea in a certain direction, without entering the world of Jewish Law, in the hope that the latter will find the way to make beneficent use in the creation of a halakhic category of the type I recommend here.

Loyalty to tradition is a good thing in itself but for the fact that, in a non-relativistic world, a structural aspect of belonging to a tradition is its limiting of the validity of the Other’s tradition. My friend Omar Salem claimed that one of the values to which he is committed is the protection of the right to adhere to one’s tradition. This idea is a lofty one, and yet peace lovers cannot afford such lofty ideas, for my loyalty to my tradition imposes your criticism upon me. Does this mean the end of partnership? There remains, however, a meaningful set of shared values to be proposed to every monotheistic position and that has instructional potential on the matter at hand. Thus, even if we are in a bitter disagreement that, in itself, is the divine will, and there is nevertheless a meaningful set of values to which we are all committed, which, for purposes of this discussion, I will call "Enlightened Monotheism." This can be defined through tenets shared by most, if not all, monotheistic traditions. I am not aiming here at a rigorous definition; rather, I hope that the following remarks will help us

place the concept within the domain of ideas.

a. The world has a foundation-Creator-Source; Nature is the result of the will of God.

b. Moral laws and the domain of values in general are objective; they are not accidental results of natural processes.

c. God and the domain of values intimately related.

The metaphysical dimension of Enlightened Monotheism can be reduced to one sentence: The source of reality is related to the Good.

d. Men and women derive their absolute value from their relation to the domain of norms that surpasses nature.

e. Moral action brings humanity close to God.

f. Since God is one, and there is no other god who might surpass Him, observing the imperative to follow God is the highest achievement.

g. Humans can always aspire to a closer relationship with God. As long they are alive they can strengthen this relationship.

h. An individual's freedom of choice is a condition for a life of faith.

And a most important principle that must be emphasized in contemporary conflicts:

i. *Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain.*

What concerns us are our meaningful shared values; I did not attempt to enumerate all the shared values and symbols. One could easily add the value of study, the fact that God hears the prayers of every one of us, the Old Testament, the significance of Jerusalem, values of modesty and family values – which are not reducible to moral values, identifying with those who suffer and so on. Faced with these, one might think that the similarities are so numerous that they threaten differences. Nevertheless, in order to clarify that which I here propose, it is worthwhile making the comparison to other shared systems, if only in one or two sentences. The seven Noahide commandments to which, according to Judaism, all human beings, whatever their origins, are obligated. They do not include belief in God yet they do include the prohibition of idolatry. Most of the principles I outlined above do not apply to them. Of Rabbi Albo's principles only the first is included here, while I do not mention the other two—reward and punishment, and the origin of Torah as Divine revelation—despite the fact that some of the principles I enumerated above (a – i) are to be found in the Jewish tradition. The differences between monotheistic religions cannot conceal the huge expanse of their common ground.

C. 2.1 Expansion

Karl Barth made the attempt to create a platform from which to withstand the ill winds he identified that were raging in his country at the time, and as a good Christian, he tried to take action to abolish the idolatry that arose within the rise of Nazism. Our parallel proposal is that the alliance between those working to promote the broad expanse of common ground shared by all monotheistic camps must be constructed in face of the dangerous developments *within* monotheism. This movement of activists from the world over will go beyond interfaith dialog and not be limited to clerics from all creeds, despite the fact that it may well receive their support; it will advance toward establishing a shared political and social agenda. *This will not be an encounter for the making of mutual acquaintance, nor even for a clarification of principles of faith, but will deal with taking action whose central justification will be – without exaggeration – the prevention of great disasters or, put in a positive way, the rescue of world peace.*

Thus, along with the great ideologies that traverse traditions, such as Liberalism, Marxism or Feminism, this will be a broad ideology that will include members of different traditions who are, on the one hand, committed to their own traditions yet perceive the obligation of acting together with members of other traditions for the benefit of shared values, on the other.

Several questions naturally present themselves that deserve immediate comment. See the relationship to democracy (the interview between Habermas and the previous Pope). It seems to me that the answer here is rather simple. Tyranny is the modern day idolatry and the battle with every tyrannical regime is certainly an important task for the partnership under discussion. From the point of view of Judaism, it is not surprising that tyranny, as an expression of idolatry, and a disregard for the value of human life go hand in hand. A deeper question concerns the tendency to control that is found in certain interpretations of some traditions—the ideal that Islam, Judaism or the Catholic Church will rule over everything. Here too, it seems that democracy is the condition for the integration of interfaith joint forces. The suspicion that adherents to freedom harbor toward clerics who claim to be His representatives on earth is well-founded in human history. Our expectation is that here, too, the principles of the separation of powers, freedom of religion etc. are most likely to be well secured in a democratic regime. What is important here is that these activists acting from their traditions know how to differentiate between the secular regimes that secure freedom of religion and those that do not.

We know in advance that in the struggle between religions over truth God is the sole victor. And yet we must examine how it is possible to maintain the demands of a particular tradition for this or that hegemony. Here we require scholarly investigation of the principles of faith. In the Jewish camp, the most important page on the position concerning messianic days is to be found in Maimonides' writings. According to him, the End of Days is not to be a battle between nations that will determine who is right but a debate between faiths on Truth. An important objective follows for this same covenant: to allow exploration of the truth, perpetual study. Thus, rather than pursuing heretics, we will strive for to establish the conditions required for profound study and for clarification of the truth, whatever it may be. We say to the zealot, "Promote peace and prayer." Even if God commanded us to battle, He may yet be merciful when He sees that we seek His victory and not our own, and be content with our love and with our will to know the truth itself. Never did He seek our love so that we should be at war with each other, and when he demanded that we enter battle – it was to ensure that we love and worship Him.

Summary

The differences between “possessors of religion” in no way diminish the deep affinity between them. Monotheism, despite its absolute demands from its believers, affords them with sufficient leeway for major differences. This forms the basis of the term *ba’al dat*. Life between “possessors of religion” gave rise to concepts such as “because of the ways of peace,” which also underwent transformations over time. The challenges we face in the 21st century were unconceivable by our forefathers and present us with issues of partnership that preclude blurring differences or endangering loyalties to the basic principles of *ba’alei dat*. My position on imminent and massive disasters outlined here proposes an expansion of the norms that inform us. The merger between weapons of mass destruction and fanaticism – which is not only hypothetical – is one such challenge, but there are others. What I present above, while not an entirely consolidated position, is intended principally to facilitate this important—and possibly fateful – discussion, and may be summed up in the five statements:

1. While the concepts *ba'al dat* or "nations secured by religion" were intended to enable Jewish life among Christians, the concept of Enlightened Monotheism here proposed as an update of *ba'al dat* is intended to define the domain of a system of norms to enable the common battle shared by all those who consider themselves faithful to the monotheistic tradition.

2. While trends in Jewish Law sought to limit manifestations of idolatry and found support in expressions such as "nations secured by the ways of religion,” what is suggested here is to extend the concept of idolatry to include political tyranny.

3. The expression "because of the ways of peace" falls short of the task at hand and should be replaced by the expression *shlom 'olam*—"world peace.” I do not necessarily refer to utopia but rather propose a positive term for the idea of preventing mass disasters.

4. When placing the emphasis on the common ground between the diverse traditions one should also point out relevant components found in the monotheistic religions, the most important being "Thou shalt not take the Lord's Name in vain,” which we tend to forget in times of conflict.

5. The schema proposed does not avoid the deep identification one maintains with one's own tradition and, while embracing openness to other traditions , considers it a vitally important condition to avoid blurring differences.

[1] The Hebrew word *"dat"* can be translated either to "religion" or to "law.” We decided on "religion,” each decision having its merits, and we can only ask the reader to remain sensitive to these meanings when reading the article. Thus, e.g., when we shall ask to what extent we can treat the law of a secular state as a *dat*, we should not consider this a sheer tautology (the law of a state is law).

[2] Based on a concise description of Burgess J.P., *The Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies*, Routledge, 2012. This book provides a comprehensive theoretical and empirical overview of Critical Security Studies through the evaluation of fundamental shifts in four key areas: new security concepts; new security subjects; new security objects and new security practices.
[3] A collection of recently written papers on the matter by scholars such as Goshen-Gottstein, Alon and Eugene Korn: *Jewish Theology and World Religions*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012.

[4] Seminal bibliography sources reflect the evolving multidisciplinary aspect of schools and approaches to Security Studies such as Walzer M., 2006, *Just And Unjust Wars*, Publisher: Basic Books; 4th edition; Huntington S. P., 2011, The *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster; 3rd edition; Collin, A., (editor) *2012 Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford : Oxford University Press. Pinker, S., *The Better Angles of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Viking Books.

[5] See, for example, the position expressed by Rabbi Haim David Halevi concerning the question of whether one is to apply the *Hazal* principle of "because of the ways of peace" to non-Jews or to secular individuals.
[6] Halbertal, Moshe, 2000, *Between Torah and Wisdom*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem.

[7] From HaLevy's *El Khuzari*, from chapters 1 & 2, translation by Hartwig Hirschfeld, 1905.
[8] *Ibid.*, from chapters 4, 12, & 13.
[9] *Ibid.*, from chapters 4 & 23.
[10] See, e.g., the third chapter of David Novak, 1989, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Justification*, Oxford.
[11] The Hebrew terms are "*Ikarei haDatot*" and "*Ikarei haDat haElohit*," which are translated as "principles of laws" and "divine law." See Page 3 in Albo, Joseph, 1929, *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim* [Book of Principles], trans. and ed. I. Husik, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. We shall here follow this translation only partly, and in certain contexts read "*dat*" as "religion."

[12] Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (1964). "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6(2), pp. 5–29.
[13] Rabbi Shlomo Riskin: "Christianity Has Changed Drastically In the 20th Century," *The Jewish Week*, Wed., Sept. 5, 2012.

[14] Halbertal (2000), p. 87.
[15] http://musaf-shabbat.com/2012/05/17/,
[16] Habermas, in this most influential quote, is one example: "For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk." Richard Wolin, "Jürgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 23, 2005), B16.