



## The Jewish-Christian Ethical Commitment

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by Hans Ucko

*An Address to the*

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For as long as people have been living together in communities, a moral regulation of behaviour has been necessary to the community's well being. We call it ethics, which can have several meanings. It could be a discipline which deals with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. It could be a set of moral principles or values, or a theory or system of moral values. Depending on the social setting, the authority invoked for good conduct could be the will of a deity, the pattern of nature or the rule of reason. When the will of a deity is the authority, obedience to the divine commandments, e.g. in scriptural texts, would be the accepted standard of conduct. Needless to say, it is here that Jews and Christians would belong. But others find other sources of authority in relation to ethics. If the pattern of nature is the authority, conformity to the qualities attributed to human nature is the standard. When reason rules, moral behaviour is expected to result from rational thought. It is important to have these different dimensions in mind as we go about reflecting on the theme "The Jewish-Christian Ethical Commitment".

Contemporary philosophical discussion of ethics has been dealing with the growing complexity of social life and the answer is not automatically given. Many scholars in the field of "ethics" search, independently of particular religious or ethnic traditions, for principles which can help us deal with the hard questions that arise for human beings irrespective of their communal loyalties or backgrounds. This is a necessary enterprise for human well-being. Most of us live in situations where a plurality of religious and other traditions makes it impossible to build public policy on the moral reasoning offered by one religion. Even a supposed "overlapping consensus" representing many religions is easier said than done. Yet urgent issues arise which need for practical purposes to be resolved.

Euthanasia, genetic manipulation and cloning are only some of the issues requiring ethical consideration. The typical work of a hospital "ethics committee" is a case in point: e.g., shall life

support for this patient be terminated or not? Shall this patient receive a heart transplant ahead of that one?<sup>1</sup> It is not easy to define a set of ethics for all times. There is not an autonomous and timeless and coherent set of rules and there are no ready-made answers. Changes in relation to society, community, production, political organisation and ideology continue to raise a number of questions for which any traditional theological and ethical repertoire may be insufficient. One should also remember that both religion and philosophy fostering ethical considerations have an inbuilt inclination to congeal in perspectives of former times, which may not be useful for the issues we are confronted with today. As religious people, we should be particularly careful that we do not reduce God to be only the God of our fathers and mothers. The God of our fathers and mothers, the God of our traditions is to be *our* God today, which is not an affirmation of relativism, but of *aggiornamento*.

What is our responsibility as Jews and Christians in light of today's pressing personal and social ethical questions? How can we work more effectively together in facing difficult ethical issues? What are the limits of responsible Jewish and Christian ethical witness? What is distinctive about our ethical engagement? How can we work more effectively with those outside our communities who nevertheless share many of our values and goals? These are some of the questions which need to be addressed together and could be the agenda of the ICCJ for some years to come.

Is there then a Jewish-Christian ethic which we can offer as a contribution to the discussion? And what is a Jewish-Christian ethic? I think that we first need to qualify what we mean. The Western world is replete with references to the notion "Judeo-Christian" or "Jewish-Christian", Jewish-Christian ethics being a case in point. One could also refer to Judeo-Christian civilisation, morale, culture, etc. However, a lot that goes under the name of Judeo-Christian or Jewish-Christian has been a definition of what Christian theology considered to be Jewish or Judeo-. Much of what is presented as Judeo-Christian or Jewish-Christian is maybe rather a Christian co-opting of the Jewish tradition than a Jewish self-definition.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the Jewish-Christian dialogue we should however today be able to spell out on an egalitarian basis what we would like to define as Jewish-Christian ethics. Such an enterprise is long overdue. The Jewish-Christian dialogue has been with us for more than forty years. There are possibilities to reflect together on what could be called Jewish-Christian ethics.

One thing is clear. Ethics of Jews and Christians is based on the Bible and Jewish and Christian ethics are therefore inalienably religious ethics. Reflections on ethical issues are therefore always qualified by religious conviction and commitments. Jewish and Christian ethics is biblical and covenanted ethics and is not solely based on the precepts of law or the regularities of experience. There is law in ethics and ethics is law but law does not exhaust it. The ethics is covenanted in the sense that Jewish and Christian ethics refer to a particular event or self-understanding. Jews refer to the exodus and Sinai events: "And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the people of Israel" (Ex. 19, 6), and Christians' self-understanding as moral agents is determined by their incorporation in Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2, 20).

The self-understanding of Jews and Christians needs to be carefully interpreted lest it sound arrogant and presumptuous. Neither "the kingdom of priests" nor "Christ living in me" should be understood as privileges but as additional obligations. We should also see our self-understanding as a specific and distinctive contribution to the whole community. The Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as interreligious dialogue has taught us the importance of space for the integrity and identity of those involved. One of the "commandments" of interreligious dialogue has been the insistence that everyone has the right to define him/herself, but to do so in the midst of a world of religious and cultural plurality. We are best heard and best perceived when expressing our identity in dialogue. Any self-understanding which insists on monologue should be viewed with suspicion.

When we talk about a Jewish-Christian ethics we must take care not to think that it is Jews and Christians against the rest of the world. There is in other religions as well as in philosophical work and among people of no particular religion or philosophical category an ethical reflection, which can be both enlightening and challenging for Jews and Christians. The recent work of Hans Küng and the Global Ethics manifesto demonstrates the richness of ethical considerations in the religious and spiritual heritage of our world. People of different religious traditions are today experiencing a changed world, where they discover the interconnectedness between religions. This is important in order that people of different religions not be obsessed with themselves in self-sufficiency and self-containment. We need to discover that we, although we can and should live a full life in the realm of our own religious tradition, may be enriched and helped by the other to discover unknown depths in our own religious traditions. Each religion can be a teacher to the other, providing ethical suggestions for common learning and growth, as a prophet challenging the other, as a mystic intriguing the other, shedding new light, hinting at new directions, provoking the other to a breaking up of that which has become congealed and hardened.

What is specific in a Jewish-Christian ethics? One could say that we share the major part of the Bible, but the truth is that we read it with very different glasses. Jews read the Hebrew Bible through the tradition of the Talmud. Christians have to come to terms with a Hebrew Bible which for so long they have called the Old Testament and which is read through the New Testament. Christians focus on the prophets, Jews on Leviticus.<sup>3</sup> Leo Baeck once characterised Judaism as "ethical monotheism". Could this be said also about Christianity? What could be a good way of describing a Jewish-Christian ethical commitment? I would like to propose one aspect, which I think common for Jews and Christian ethics without being the sole prerogative of Jews and Christians. It seems that one particular dimension of ethics in the Bible is forgiveness.

It is the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, who in her classical study *The Human Condition* makes a plea for forgiveness in social ethics.<sup>4</sup> She does not regard society as a construction of autonomous individuals, but as a network of relations, in which people participate in one another's life-story. Relations between people cannot be described in terms of means and ends. Neither can they be controlled. They have their own status and exist only in the milieu of acts (praxis) and language. The trust of society consists of this vulnerable web of the intersubjective "in-between" of action and language. However, it is characteristic of this action that in its factuality it is irreversible in principle and unpredictable in its consequences. The past cannot be revoked, the future is uncertain. The knife as an instrument could serve as an illustration. A knife is neither good nor bad in itself. It is an instrument to be used for good or bad. It can be used as a weapon to kill but it can also be used as a scalpel by the surgeon as a means to safe life. But even when put in the hands of a surgeon with the intention to safe life, it can all of a sudden turn out to become the instrument which ends life. This makes living together a hazardous business.

There are, says Arendt, two remedies for the irreversibility and unpredictability of human action: forgiving and making promises. Arendt regards them as human possibilities, which are born out of the necessity to live together. Without forgiveness, the deeds from the past would remain hanging over the head of each new generation as Damocles' sword, and we would remain victims of the past. Without making promises we would not be able to start durable relationships with one another. There is a mutual dependence: we cannot forgive ourselves; neither does a promise we make only to ourselves mean anything. We are essentially dependent on other people.

According to Arendt, we owe the insight of forgiveness as a necessity in a community of people that want to live together durably to Jesus of Nazareth and to his influence on Western culture. He is the "discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs".<sup>5</sup> But forgiveness is not a Christian invention. Jesus is a Jew and brings his finding out of his own background, heritage and life. The Hebrew Bible as well as the New Testament speaks compelling about forgiveness. God is the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin (Ex. 34,6f., cf. Joel 2,13;

Jonah 4,2). Why, then, is Jesus put forward as the "discoverer" of forgiveness? Arendt says that Jesus expressly lets forgiveness play a role "in the realm of human affairs". He makes forgiveness more than a religious category; to him, forgiveness becomes a demand of political ethics. Arendt places all the emphasis on Jesus' brilliant insight into the structure of durable human togetherness. Jesus takes forgiveness out of heaven and declares it to be a human necessity *and* possibility. The Promethean revolution is that Jesus fetched the divine fire of forgiveness out of heaven and that he has shown that it is enclosed in our own action as a possibility and a necessity. In this way he introduces forgiveness into "the realm of human affairs".

Ethical considerations must underline this interrelationship. "No man is an island". A vis-à-vis is required for our being what we are. Buber taught us through his philosophy of dialogue an existentialism which is centred on this direct, mutual relationship, the "I-Thou", in which each person confirms the other as of unique value. The I is accomplished in relationship with the Thou. Life is in itself an encounter. The importance of interrelationships is the truly effective tool for our journey through life. It creates a mutual responsibility between I and Thou. I am responsible for Thou in reciprocity, where I will be Thou and Thou will be I. There is an ethical interrelationship, where someone having the possibility of confronting the transgression of the other and for various reasons neglects to do so, will be held responsible in his or her place. There is a mutual dependence: we cannot forgive ourselves.

The concept of forgiveness puts us in a relational atmosphere, where we cannot look at or reflect on ethics without the perspective of the other. The words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are significant. "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5,23-24). Reconciliation is more important than sacrifice, as Hosea witnesses, "For I desired loyal love, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6,6). Although there is to my knowledge no direct rabbinic parallels to the words of Jesus, the following is in the same genre: "For transgressions that are between man and God the Day of Atonement affects atonement, but for those transgressions that are between man and his fellow man the Day of Atonement affects only if he has appeased his fellow man".<sup>6</sup> There is in the Jewish and Christian tradition no way around it, says the Psalm: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24,3-4).

This perspective is necessary to avoid any cheap appropriation of forgiveness. "If you steal my pen and say 'I'm sorry' without returning the pen, your apology means nothing", Archbishop Desmond Tutu said in his position as chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> This aspect is important to avoid forgiveness as cheap grace, or forgiveness as a theological principle. The German Protestant theologian Bonhoeffer denounced cheap grace in the thirties, when the Nazi regime was preparing its crimes and the church kept preaching God's forgiveness from the pulpit, Sunday after Sunday. It is no wonder that after the war the world does not want to know about this message of forgiveness any longer. A church that forgives so cheaply one had better abandon en masse. It preaches forgiveness, but it should seek it first. Forgiveness costs something. There must be repentance for a restoration of broken relationships.

Given such a paradigmatic constituent, where are we as Jews and Christians in relation to our world and society? What could Jewish-Christian ethics add in their response to the challenges presented by the complexity of the world? What does our faith add to that which is already available in human thought? What is it, if anything, that we as Jews and Christians together could do to motivate our environment? Do we have any specific insights to offer? I want to believe that a Jewish-Christian ethical commitment could and should nourish a counter-vision of our world and society. "We shall fund, feed, nurture, nourish a counter-imagination of the world" says Walter Brueggemann.<sup>8</sup> What kind of society should we envisage from the perspective of a Jewish-Christian ethic?

It is at the same time both easy and impossible to begin sketching the concerns of a Jewish-Christian ethics. We easily end up in slogans, saying that which doesn't commit us. The mere title of a major study process of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC should be a reminder for us. Faith and Order has in the 90's seen its ethical commitment under the heading of "Costly Unity", "Costly Commitment" and "Costly Obedience". An ethical commitment is costly. We know from the Hebrew language that a pursuit of peace and an ethical commitment for peace requires us to internalize that the word shalom has roots in the word to "pay", *shalem*. It is not enough to love peace. Pursuing peace is costly. There is a sacrifice involved. It is one thing to be willing to act and it is another thing to act, to implement the willingness. There is sometimes a temptation towards thriving on moral indignation, making oneself an expert in painting in detail and with a reasonably good analysis and accuracy many political events, appalling situations of crisis and conflicts, dire poverty, repression of human rights and human dignity. It is probably not without reason that a very important part of Christian worship is the sermon. And we are sometimes very good at it. Had we only been half as good at implementing our own declared willingness to change. Had we only been willing to go beyond moral indignation. Had we only been willing to realize that a theology of indignation or ethic of indignation is seldom very constructive. You can work yourself up, but it is not often well-used energy.

If we want to be taken seriously by people who in many ways have given up on religion, we need to go beyond well-meaning declarations, lest we just fall back into "simply being integrated in the world market as its religious legitimation and accompanying music" (Jose Miguez Bonino), working on an ethic for individuals alone and useful mainly within the walls of our parish or a self-chosen ghetto. But there is no protected space or sphere for religion and religious ethics alone. Ethics today must involve society and the world. The contribution of a Jewish-Christian ethical commitment must realise the interconnectedness of the global threats to justice, to peace and the environment. There can be no peace without justice, no justice without peace, no peace or justice without vastly altered attitudes towards nature. I think it is useful to refer to the WCC in its focus on what is called a life-centred ethics. Life-centred ethics as an instrument of the churches cannot halt at the gates of their own confines. There is a commitment to the oikoumene, but the horizon must include the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth. And it must go beyond words. There must be an imaginative vision strengthening alternative ways "towards visible unity in diversity, towards an oikoumene of faith and solidarity". We need a picture of society, a diacritical instrument to shape the way we want to go in and with our ethical commitment.

Ethics is or rather should be the first aim of a valid philosophy or theology. If we allowed ethics to precede ontology, we would live subject to justice in all the moments of our lives and not be distracted and misled by the claim to "truth" of philosophy or theology. If I were to take ethical behaviour as my first obligation as a thinking person, my main concern would be the quality of my relations to other people, my responsibility for each of them. In *The Brothers Karamasov*, Alyosha says: "We are all responsible for everyone else, but I am more responsible than all the others"; or from the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Israel Salanter says: "The material needs of my neighbour are my spiritual needs". This is now our point of departure.

In the light of the paradigm of forgiveness in its fullness, in the light of the many commonalities in the Jewish and Christian traditions and heritages and in view of the impact of these on our world and society, I would like to point to three areas requiring a common Jewish-Christian ethical commitment. Our dialogue offers new possibilities for Jews and Christians to mutually challenge each other as well as to find common avenues in addressing ethical concerns, and the latter is here our primary concern.

## The Environment

There is no need for me to elaborate on the reality of the crisis in our environment. We are all

aware of its various manifestations. Let me just take one example, quoting from the work of the WCC on climate change. The latest scientific evidence about the reality of climate change and the role played by human societies in precipitating it has become firmer. The increasing incidence of tropical storms and changing rainfall patterns with torrential rainfalls and floods on the one hand, and terrible drought on the other, have become a death-and-life issue, especially for poor people. Small island states are most vulnerable to the consequences of global warming, a process that has its roots in the over-consumption and energy-intensive lifestyles of affluent people and societies, whose CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are largely responsible for the so-called "greenhouse effect".

The biblical reference par excellence to creation and our relationship to creation is told in Genesis 1. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen.1, 26-28, 31).<sup>9</sup> Or to use an official Jewish version of the crucial verse, Gen. 1,28: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth".<sup>10</sup> The verse about domination over creation is every now and then referred to as the culprit for the crisis of our environment. Domination has become exploitation and rape of creation. It is often said that our world would have been different, if we had only had a theology of creation more close to the Asian traditions. Here harmony with nature is the keyword and humans are not different from the rest of creation. A Jewish or Christian ecology, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that we are different from other living creatures. Judeo-Christian ecology begins with the opposite idea: We have a special responsibility precisely because we are different. We may as Jews and Christian object to what we perceive to be a caricature of a Jewish-Christian theology of creation, but we must here as well as everywhere reckon with the saying: It is not what you say that matters, it is what you are heard saying. A new theological reflection in relation to creation is called for. The theology of creation needs in the face of the world today to be re-examined, deepened and enhanced. Our views of creation need to be changed, if creation in the hands of humankind is in agony. Then we may not have understood properly the significance of creation itself or our role as stewards or co-creators of that creation.

Is domination over creation a good reading of the first chapter of Genesis when seeing the risk that creation faces today in the hands of humankind? Where have we gone with our creation? Have we subdued and dominated it too much? Have we exploited creation for our own means? Or are there other ways to understand the biblical understanding of humankind's relation to creation? Is the traditional understanding of our role as stewards and caretakers of creation a role that fails to give humankind an authentic and real responsibility? We humans are only a step below God, says the psalmist, and the image of God that is reflected in us includes the capacity to create. Indeed, all life has the reproductive capacity, but humans have been endowed with the ability to change themselves as well as the environment. How can we balance domination and responsibility, difference from creation and harmony with creation? Within the paradigm of seeking forgiveness, I see a task for a Jewish-Christian ethical commitment in relation to our environment.

## Poverty

The ethical agenda of Jews and Christians has to include an understanding of the economic mechanisms of poverty. It was an important development when the ecumenical movement, particularly the ecumenical council on Life and Work, began to institutionalise social ethical reflection as reflection of churches with a responsibility to each other and to the world. This effort

helped many Christians to overcome earlier habits of believing in which a certain distance between faith (as the "real" life of the community) and moral life was maintained, or in which the only connection was found in the observance of a certain personal lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> This reflection should also be taken seriously by Jews and Christians in trying to formulate an ethical commitment against the uneven distribution of wealth. The greatest challenge of wealth is to understand that there is such a thing as "enough". Without the ability to separate between wants and needs or to accept that there need to be limits to economic development, both at the micro- and macro-economic levels, there can be no moral, spiritual or legal defence against the greed, oppression and injustice that accompany the search for wealth. Beyond the satisfaction of the needs and wants of the owner, there must be a commitment to participate in meeting society's obligations to the poor, the weak and the inefficient. There cannot be any form of ecological balance without the idea of "enough" that will recognise the legitimate claims of future generations or the moral use of the natural resources God has given to humanity.

The changing economic system requires an ethical evaluation of the practice of charity and the meaning of solidarity in support of developing countries, a sharing of resources paving the way for equality and self-reliance in the human community. The human community is today, as maybe never before, confronted with the consequences of an increasing poverty that may have a bearing on the future of life and creation itself. Our relationship to the presence of poverty puts us in front of an important choice. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live . . ." (Deut. 30,19). It seems to us as if these words bear a particular meaning in our time and above all so in the face of poverty. The economic and ecological realities of our world, with such realities as the exploitation of creation and widespread poverty, contradict the message of the reign of God. The Faith & Order document *Costly Commitment* expresses experiences which we can reflect on also as Jews and Christians. The document points to the ethical accountability of the universal church, in relation both to the local church and to the global concerns for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Understood in this way, the notion of *oikos* (household) mediates between the micro and macro levels of human life and activity.<sup>12</sup>

How do our societies relate to poverty? A lot has certainly been done in calling for debt cancellation in the context of the Jubilee campaign. In many ways some progress was made and the question of poverty can no longer be avoided in the various expressions of global governance. But more voices could be added. Jews and Christians should together look for new models, using new imagination to say that profit alone, the accumulation of wealth cannot be the sole values. There is a way of relating to poverty in both our traditions, which could be mutually challenging. There is in both traditions the concept of charity. But "alms to the poor" cannot any more be our only understanding of charity. Maimonides is certainly right in saying that the poor need more than a gift or a sum of money. He ranks charity in several degrees and says: "Anticipate charity by preventing poverty . . . . The highest degree, exceeded by none and the summit of charity's golden ladder, is that of the person assisting the reduced fellow man, either by a considerable gift, or a sum of money, or by teaching him a trade, or by putting him in the way of business, entering into a partnership with him, or helping him find work; in a word, by putting him where he can dispense with other people's aid and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity". A vision of development that takes justice and human dignity as its starting point necessarily perceives the economy differently from a view that only has economic growth as its goal. A Jewish-Christian ethical commitment should seek to develop a theological analysis of economic globalisation and provide a theological base for a search for alternatives. Could such a commitment lead to alternatives in relation to the debt relief? The main thing is that we do not end up in rhetoric. New ideas are needed.

## The role of women

The role of women needs full commitment in any ethical reflection of Jews and Christians. In spite of the steps forward that women have made in many parts of the world in the last century on almost every level in society, we know as Jews and Christians that the road to full emancipation and equality is not yet achieved and we know too that our traditions have reasons to reflect on the responsibility for having participated in the marginalisation of women socially, culturally, religiously and theologically. There is in both Judaism and Christianity a dominant patriarchal perspective, which has been reluctant in providing space for the integrity of women as the full and equal partner of men. If war and conflict, economic injustice, barriers to participation, racism, religious fundamentalism, ethnic genocide, harassment, HIV/AIDS and violence are obvious realities in human suffering, they are twice experienced by women. The elimination of violence in various forms (sexual, religious, psychological, structural, physical, spiritual, military), and the whole culture of violence, especially as they affect the life and dignity of women, must be foremost on the agenda today in our communities, in society and in global governance. Jews and Christians are already participating but could do more to address the history of marginalisation of women in their own religious tradition and history.

The Bible takes for granted a patriarchal authoritarian model for society. Eve moulded from Adam's rib and yielding to temptation shows the loss of the ideal of male and female as equal creations of God (Gen.1, 27) and justifies the placing of Eve under Adam's authority. It is true that there are instances in both the Jewish and Christian tradition and history that have tried to enhance women's rights and their status but the fruits of the patriarchal traditions in both Judaism and Christianity have been and continue to be bitter for women and not only in the household of each religion. However much we may insist that there have been strong women in the Bible, that Jesus lifted up women, that the first witnesses to the resurrection were women, the fact remains that alone the constant and consistent use of masculine language for God reinforces the concept of male superiority and male dominance in society.<sup>13</sup> We don't remedy this situation only through the use of so-called inclusive language. It takes more to rethink the way a Jewish-Christian ethical commitment could repair thousands of years of marginalisation of women.

Not only the question of balance and justice would be redressed through such an ethical commitment. Religious and spiritual life would benefit from a greater and real influence of women. Women are closer to the cycle of life itself and do not minimize the earth-centred, immanent and immediate dimensions of life. We see it hinted at in the creation story. "The nature of humanity changes drastically after the creation of Eve. In response to the serpent's revelation that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge would make her more godlike, she eats, and by doing so she acquires the knowledge of things – cultural knowledge. In this way, Eve wrests knowledge from the realm of the divine, takes the first step towards culture, and transforms human existence".<sup>14</sup> The implications of Eve's acts are enormous. She takes cultural knowledge from the sacred realm and brings it to humankind. This is something different from the traditional reading of the story, concentrating on the sin of disobeying God and blaming Eve for doing so. I am, in reading the story in this light, recalling Hannah Arendt's words about Jesus taking forgiveness out of heaven, declaring it to be a human necessity *and* possibility.

The crisis of our environment, escalating poverty and solidarity with women are in my opinion three important issues each calling for a new and concerted effort and commitment and could therefore be the agenda for tomorrow of Jews and Christians together. I see these issues in the light of the paradigm of forgiveness, where there is an obligation for Jews and Christians towards reparation and a new beginning.

### Notes

1. *Costly Obedience*, Faith & Order, World Council of Churches, Johannesburg, 1996, no.12
2. The WCC "[Ecumenical Considerations for Jewish-Christian Dialogue](#)" (1983) says the



same in other words: "Bible-reading and worshipping Christians often believe that they 'know Judaism' since they have the Old Testament, the records of Jesus' debates with Jewish teachers and the early Christian reflections on the Judaism of their times. Furthermore, no other religious tradition has been so thoroughly defined by preachers and teachers in the Church as has Judaism. This attitude is often enforced by lack of knowledge about the history of Jewish life and thought through the 1,900 years since the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity." (1.6).

3. "[Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue](#)": "For Judaism the Talmud is central and authoritative. Judaism is more than the religion of the Scriptures of Israel. What Christians call the Old Testament has received in the Talmud and later writings interpretations that for Jewish tradition share in the authority of Moses. For Christians the Bible with the two Testaments is also followed by traditions of interpretation from the Church Fathers to the present time. Both Jews and Christians live in the continuity of their Scripture and Tradition. (2, 8-9).
4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago /London 1957.
5. *Ibid.*, 238.
6. M. Yoma 8.9 in S.T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*, Ktav Publ., Hoboken, N.J. 1987, p.93.
7. Donald W. Shriver, Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, Oxford 1995, p. 224.
8. Walter Brueggeman, *Texts Under Negotiation*, p.20.
9. *New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.
10. *The Tanach*, English translation by Yechezkel Schatz, Judaic Classics Library CD-ROM.
11. Costly Unity, Faith & Order, WCC, Rönne, 1993, II:17.
12. Costly Commitment, Faith & Order, WCC, Tantur, 1994, V: 65.
13. Norman Solomon, *Historical Dictionary of Judaism*, London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998, pp.141-145.
14. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical*