

## AN OPEN DOOR

### A FEW RAMBLING THOUGHTS ON THE ENTRANCE TO THE DIVINE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

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A meditation by  
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#### PREFACE

Some time ago Pastor Brent Christianson invited me to be part of this celebration. He asked me to meditate on the verse in **Rev. 3:8** and on the theme “An Open Door,” - at least, this is how I understood my task.

The verse in **Rev. 3:8** reads,

“Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.”

The other biblical verse which, immediately, comes to mind is the one in **John 10:9** where Jesus is quoted to have said,

“I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved,  
and will go in and out and find pasture.”

During my rambling thoughts I will come back to these biblical verses, I hope, and comment also on a few others.

First, I want to say, that I gladly accepted the invitation because of my deep appreciation that I was allowed to serve as campus pastor here in Madison from Sept. 1962 to June 1966.

From the Fall of 1966 to June 1970 I was a graduate student at the Hebrew Semitic Studies Department at the university earning a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitic Studies. My specialty became Biblical Hebrew with an emphasis on Northwest Semitic studies, which includes Ugaritic a language and text which were discovered in 1929 and have considerable consequences on how to read the ancient biblical Hebrew texts. My dissertation gathered together and discussed all of the relevant new insights from Northwest Semitic studies for the Book of Job. You may, of course, find my dissertation and my first book on Job in the library.

When Pastor Brent mentioned the phrase “An Open Door” a first impression of the structure of my presentation flashed, immediately, through my brain. I knew I needed and wanted to speak about

- (1) the Hebrew and Semitic word for “door;”
- (2) a severe selection of biblical texts in which the word “door” is very important and, of course, including the phrase where Jesus is quoted as having said, “I am the Door;”
- (3) then I would like to turn to a most serious topic, namely to the Christian Teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism from the time of the New Testament until today. Christians decided to close the door to the divine, especially to Jews.

Today, we will not have time to say much about this subject. Just a few comments now. For many years I have been calling for the cessation of the Christian teaching of super-cession, i.e. that Christianity has annulled the legitimacy of Judaism and that access to God is only possible through Jesus. This teaching led to the most horrible crimes committed by Christians against the Jewish people, throughout the ages, and prepared the climate in which the Shoah / the Holocaust became possible. The Nazis attempted the “Endlösung,” the “Final Solution” of the Jewish problem, namely the extermination - not just murder - of Jews . Jews were viewed by many people and groups - and not only by the Nazis - as vermin. The Nazis saw themselves as the saviors of the world ridding it of the poison, the Jews.

Even the Nazi idea of race has Christian origins in the teaching of the doctrine of “purity of blood,” a concept which originated with the Inquisition in the 15th century in Spain. The Jews, Christians thought, have bad/evil blood and even conversion can not really wash away the stain of bad blood.

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If you really want your eyes opened about the Inquisition you might want to read Netanyahu, B., *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*. New York: Random House, 1995.

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I have come to know that without the Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism the Shoah / Holocaust would not have been possible. Think about that. Study the issue and, I think, you will come to the same conclusion.

So, my /our meditation, today, does not only include a meditation on the open door, but also a meditation on the closed door, i.e., when a religious institution decides who has access to God, to the divine, and who does not.

Christians believe (especially since the fourth century when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman empire), that only Christians have access to God and that Christianity has super-ceded Judaism and all other forms of religion. Then, since the seventh century, Islam taught that it had super-ceded Christianity and Judaism and all other forms of religion and that all those who do not join Islam are infidels.

It is my conviction - after a life-time of study and meditation - that the teaching of super-cession is a most serious and deadly poison in Christianity and in Islam. I am convinced that any ideology, so-called religious or secular, which claims to super-cede all others, is not worthy of the allegiance of even one human being. If we Christians, for example, continue to teach contempt for Jews and Judaism, then Christians are worse than the worse Nazis.

- (4) As a conclusion I would like to turn to the most beautiful book in the Bible, Song of Songs, or in Latin, Canticles, i.e., a most charming collection of Love Lyrics from the ancient Near East. Lovers,

everywhere and throughout the ages have claimed and continue to claim that their love, their love-making, their desire, their urge and aching , for one another, leads them to the Door, to the Entrance of the Divine, ... yes, leads them to the heart of God where they can share the heartbeat of God.

Well, this subject too I will not be able to discuss fully today. I will make just a few comments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Now to a quick introduction. I want to begin with the quote which the campus ministry, here in Madison, has on its brochure:

“Campus Ministry has always been an open door  
to grace on the university campus,  
to friendships that last a lifetime,  
to faith and futures that make a difference  
to food for body and spirit.”

During my time as campus pastor we lived and worked in the spirit of this quote. I wish, though, that we would have thought of it and printed it on our literature in the sixties.

There is no doubt in my mind that all of us are invited to live in and out of this spirit. It is an excellent way of expressing part of, if not actually the essence of the Messianic, the Christ spirit: namely, to be an open door to grace, love, joy, forgiveness, discipline, justice, ... in a word, to the possibility of the divine world entering our lives. No one is excluded. Every one can accept this spirit, Jew, Christian, Moslem, Hindu, religious and non-religious people.

I have always thought and taught that that is the spirit which Jesus radiated. He invited his disciples to become transparent of this spirit in their lives and actions. Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples, i.e., followers, of this spirit Jesus never told his disciples to go and make people join some form of Judaism. Christianity was invented after the death of Jesus. We all know that Jesus was not a Christian. He was a Jew and wanted his fellow Jews to actually live the spirit and the intention, which God has, for all humans to live a beautiful and wonderful life.

## A BRIEF WORD ABOUT “GRACE.”

The Hebrew word is *hen*. The root is *hānan* and can mean in English “to be gracious, be compassionate, show empathy.” So, the noun *hen* means “grace, empathy,” etc. The names “Ann, Anna, Hanna,” are, of course, based on this Hebrew root.

The Campus Ministry wants to radiate empathy and wants to invite students and professors to be transparent of grace, compassion and empathy in the daily life of university business. In other words the Campus Ministry wants to tap into the heart, intention and mind of God. Not bad.

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Now to

### (1) THE HEBREW / SEMITIC WORD FOR “DOOR.”

The Semitic / Hebrew word for “door” is *bab*. We all know this word from the word *Bab-y/il-on*. So *bab* means “door” and *y/il* means “god,” or “divine.” And *-on* is simply an ending. So what does “Babylon” mean? *Bab*, “door,” *y/il*, “god, divine.” Aha, the word “Babylon” means, “The Door to God, the Gods, the Entrance to the Divine World.”

Some Hebrew poets became very annoyed with the idea that Babylonians, actually, did believe and experience the entrance to the divine world in Babylon. The story of this is recorded in **Gen 11:1-9**.

The Hebrew poets made fun of the word “Babylon” and said that it reminded them of *balal*, which in Hebrew means “confusion.” So, Babylon is not the entrance to the divine, but, serious “confusion.” They claimed that the only entrance to the divine is their version of religion. Other Hebrews and then also other Jews, had other views.

But, this exclusivistic view of the entrance to the divine remains and continues to work as a horrible poison, especially in the monotheistic religions.

The viciousness of exclusiveness and hatred of Babylon in the Bible is especially highlighted in the New Testament in the Book of Revelation.

In **Rev 17:5** we read about Babylon:

on her forehead was written a name of mystery:

“Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations.”

And in **Rev 18:21**

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more.”

The word *bab* does not only mean “door.” It can also mean “teacher.” Aha, a teacher is like a “door,” i.e., the entrance to knowledge, wisdom, skill. A good and serious student knows how to appreciate a “teacher.” (Bad and stupid students are unable to recognize a good or a bad teacher.) Believe it or not, I, as a student, constantly experienced the fact that even a bad teacher, a bad book, can be an excellent door to knowledge and insight. I can give you hundreds of examples. I really do not fully understand fellow students who become so terribly angry about bad teachers or a bad book. When this happens to me I try to calm down, sit back and try to learn from the situation. But, I, of course, agree that the experience of encountering a bad, unprepared, intellectually limited professor can be a very unnerving experience.

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## (2) A SELECTION OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

The very first time the word “door” (not *bab*, but *petak*) is used in the Bible is in **Gen 4:7**, in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain is in deep trouble, confusion, chaos. He has been wronged by God. God treated him as second best and favored his brother. Hot anger grips Cain and rightly so. And now God comes and tells Cain, “you know what, I tell you that you have a choice and you can do the right thing, you do not have to mess up like your parents.” I translate the Hebrew as follows:

If you do well, will you not be accepted?

And if you do not do well,

sin is like a croucher / *robeš* at the door

(a *robeš* is the most vicious Akkadian demon who may spring a surprise attack at any moment. “at the door” refers to going in and out, i.e., your daily life)

its desire is for you, (yes, the world is out to get you)

but you may master it

( i.e., you are invited, you have the choice, to master it.)

Wow, what an absolutely fantastic message. So, the open door, the entrance to the divine, is available to anyone mastering the choice between what is beneficial and what is not. According to this text there is

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no such thing as “original sin.” Even in the worst situation the biblical view of humans is that they may, that they are invited, that they can choose to do the right thing whatever the right thing is in the circumstances.

A little story. When my son was about four years old he became extremely furious. It was bedtime and it was my duty to put the children to bed. So, I talked with my son. I asked him, “Who is in charge of Mr. Anger?” The answer of my son surprised me. He acknowledged that he, as a human being, is stronger than Mr. Anger, but then he went a step further and said, “yes, but sometimes Mr. Anger is stronger.” Do I need to tell you that I was very proud of my son?

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By the way, if you would like to inform yourself about the first chapters in Genesis, Genesis 1-11, you may want to turn to the following books. There is absolutely no reason for interested persons to remain uninformed or misinformed about these first stories in the Hebrew Bible. I suggest that you begin with the commentaries by Westermann, Wenham, Cassuto, Sarna ... from the following list:

- Brueggemann, W., *Genesis. Interpretation--A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. John Knox, 1982. - important because of the references to the NT.
- Cassuto, U., *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961-1964 (2 vols.). - written by a famous conservative Jewish scholar; explains all the Hebrew phrases in plain English; the Hebrew words are transliterated. I learned not to speak about any of the stories in Gen 1-11 without the information provided by Cassuto.
- Davidson, R., *Genesis 1-11*. The Cambridge Bible Commentary, NRB. Cambridge: At the University, 1969. - a very good, basic introduction.
- Gunkel, Herman, *Genesis*. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Foreword by Ernest W. Nicholson. Mercer Library of Biblical Studies. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997 (1901). Translated, by arrangement with the original publisher, from the ninth printing (=third edition) of *Genesis*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977). A classic treasure!
- Sarna, Nahum M., *Understanding Genesis*. New York: Schocken, 1970 (1966). - for educated and interested adults, excellent as a basic introduction.
- Sarna, Nahum M., *Genesis*. The Traditional Hebrew Text with the *NewJPS* Translation. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 5749/1989. - excellent, but some of the information available in his 1970 (1966) book is not repeated. So, both books need to be read.
- Wenham, G. J., *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987. - excellent, this book *must* be read together with the books by Westermann, Cassuto, Sarna, etc.
- Westermann, C., *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (transl. by J. J. Scullion, S.J.). Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984 (1974).
- Zlotowitz, M. and Scherman, N., *Bereishis/Genesis: A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*. Vol. I (Genesis 1-11) Brooklyn, N. Y.: Mesorah, 1980 (1977). - this is a Jewish orthodox way of looking at Gen 1-11. What a treasure and joy. None (practically none) of the concerns in historical-critical commentaries muddle (ha!) this commentary. Christians usually deprive themselves of the vast and important insights on biblical texts by Jewish scholars of the past and present. Why?
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There is a wonderful, but, also quite painful story about the ten women / girls who were waiting for the men / boys to return from their party and begin the wedding banquet.

### **Matt 25:1-13**

- 25:1 The kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.
- 25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
- 25:3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;
- 25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
- 25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.
- 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry,  
‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’
- 25:7 Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.
- 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise,  
‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’
- 25:9 But the wise replied,  
‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you;  
go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’
- 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came,  
and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast;  
and the door was shut.
- 25:11 Afterward the other maidens came also, saying,  
‘Lord, lord, open to us.’
- 25:12 But he replied,  
‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’
- 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Even as a little boy (and I was very religious, pious) I was shocked that God could say to me, “I do not know you.” What? I go to church, know the catechism, know many hymns by heart, obey my parents, I am a good boy. No way God can say to me, “I do not know you.”

One important point here is that it is not possible for us to predict when the door to the divine opens. Every second, every situation, provides a possibility for the divine to break into our lives.

What will we do? Do what Cain did? Or might we behave like the foolish women or like the wise women?

What will we do? Do what Cain did and take out our frustration with God and kill a brother? Or might we behave like the foolish women or like the wise women? In the Wisdom literature in the Bible “foolish” is used as another word for “sin,” and “wise” is used for doing the right thing, of being righteous, of implementing the attitude and will of God.

According to Jesus there definitely is a time when the door to the divine is closed. The door was closed when Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, caught without oil, allowed and even participated in the extermination of the Jews during the Nazi time in Germany. This closed door is built into the basis of Christianity.

We experience the closed door when we are not ready, when we are not prepared to accept the possibility to live according to the vision God has for us. It does not matter to God if we have done all the right rituals, e.g., if we are baptized or participate in communion every hour on the hour, or give 10 cents or billions of dollars to some religious institution. What matters to God, according to this story, is that we have oil when it counts, that we dry a tear when we can do it, that we provide justice when necessary and

possible, that we forgive when we are asked, that we choose love over hate ... etc., any one of us can add to this list *ad infinitum*. Jesus calls this attitude the “narrow door.”

The passage where “narrow door” occurs is in **Luke 13:24**, where Jesus is reported to have said,  
“Strive to enter by the narrow door;  
for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

Why not? Because so many religious people think that the door to the divine are rituals, dogmas, cathedrals, going to worship services, participating in communion, etc.

And then there are the passages where Jesus compared himself to a “door,” a “teacher.”

**John 10:7,**

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.”

**John 10:9,**

I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved,  
and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jesus is saying, “I am like a door, like a teacher. I am showing you, like a teacher, an entrance to the divine. Imitate my attitude, imitate my spirit, which is the Holy Spirit, which is the will and intention of God for all people. Everyone of you can accept this spirit, this attitude and live the way God intended all people to live: forgive when asked; give a cup of cold water when needed; call the police when you see a horror in progress; remove thieves, rapists, murderers, crooks of any kind from your society; make your community safe for children; keep the commandments; ... it is not really as hard as you think, it is an easy yoke. Yoked to this spirit you can be a light in this world.”

Jesus did not say, “worship me, the beautiful door.” Jesus did not say, “stop at the door and admire it and worship it/me.” Jesus invited his hearers to walk through the door right into the heart of God, sharing the same spirit and attitude which God has. This is what he meant when he said, as recorded in **Matt 28:19**, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

There is an extremely moving story about Jesus and a Samaritan woman recorded in **John 4:7-26**.

Please, study this text carefully, one day. It is full of surprises. For my purposes I only want to point out that the woman gets into a heated argument with Jesus over where the proper worship of God should take place. She says that her priests tell her that the proper place is on the mountain here in Samaria, but, the Jews say that the proper place of worship is in Jerusalem.

Jesus tells her, quite frankly, that this is a stupid argument and replaces the demand for proper place, location, liturgy, dogma, etc., with, “the true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth ... God is spirit and those who worship God will worship God in spirit and truth.”

Fantastic! So wherever truth happens, wherever one lives out of the spirit, the will, the intention of God, there God is worshiped and not in temples, on mountains, with liturgies, worship services, organ music, ...

And then there are the passages in Revelation.

**Rev 3:8,**

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.

**Rev 3:20,**

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door,  
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

**Rev 4:1,**

After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door!

Of course, these passages deserve a proper study, but, for my purposes it seems clear that as far as the biblical God is concerned, there is an open door to God, an open invitation to enter and share the mind and spirit of God in daily life. No one is able to shut it ... except ridiculous stupidity, religious idolatry, inattention, carelessness, and the willful and stubborn refusal to love, to make love, to dry a tear, to bring about justice, ...

There is a particularly moving story in **Luke 7:36-50**. Please, read it carefully one day.

A woman, a sinner, brought an alabaster jar of ointment to the house where Jesus was attending a party, given in his honor. Weeping she began to bathe his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. The host was very angry and Jesus asks him, the guests at the party, and us, "Who will be more grateful the one who is forgiven a little debt or the one who is forgiven a big debt?" The answer is, of course, obvious. So Jesus said:

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven,  
for she loved much;  
but he who is forgiven little, loves little." (v. 47)

In **Luke 18:9-14** we read a parable. In this parable Jesus has a sinner quote an excerpt from **Psalms 51** at the entrance to the temple.

Jesus is very angry with his co-religionists for closing the door to the temple, the House of God, the access to God, to sinners, even repentant sinners. He tells the moving story of a repentant sinner who, at the door, at the entrance to the temple, prays portions of Psalm 51.

**Luke 18:9-14.**

- 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves  
that they were righteous and despised others:  
18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray,  
one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.  
18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,  
'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men,  
extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.  
18:12 I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'  
18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven,  
but beat his breast, saying,  
'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'  
18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;  
for every one who exalts himself will be humbled,  
but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus is angry, very angry. "Have you forgotten Psalm 51, have you forgotten what our faith says about God and God's willingness and eagerness to accept repentant sinners?"

This fierce, stupid, destructive, murderous attitude of exclusiveness is present also today. How many examples would you like to mention?

I really mean this, go ahead mention a few ....

I would like to ask you to pay attention to the treatment Rev. David H. Benke received from his own church because he participated in the interfaith prayer service at Yankee Stadium 12 days after Sept. 11th. (Read Wakin, Daniel J., "Taking On His Own Church," New York Report, Wednesday, July 10, 2002, in *The New York Times*, YNE A19.)

I was particularly shocked (although I know about these acts in other circumstances) by the murder of a young Kurdish daughter by her own father in Sweden because she had a Swedish boyfriend. (Read Lyall, Sarah, "Lost in Sweden; A Kurdish Daughter Is Sacrificed," INTERNATIONAL. *The New York Times*, Tuesday, July 23, 2002, YNE A3.)

The examples of religious, nationalistic, and other hate speech and stupidities have no end.

Please, read Kristof, Nicholas D., "Bigotry in Islam---And Here," in *The New York Times*, OP-ED, Tuesday, July 9, 2002, YNE A23.

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We have all heard of the Golden Rule. Do you have any idea why people shy away from implementing the so-called Golden Rule?

When Jesus is asked to summarize the whole Torah from God in a brief statement, Jesus quotes from **Deut 6** and from **Lev 19**. (By the way *torah* should have never been translated as "Law," but as "Teaching," "Instruction," "Revelation.")

37 "You shall *love* the Lord your God

(*love* here means to show covenant fidelity ...

it obviously does not mean having sex with God)

with all your heart, (= not feelings, but, intelligence, decision making process)

and with all your being,

and with all your mind.

38 This is the great and *first* commandment.

39 And a *second* is like it,

You shall *love* your neighbor as yourself.

40 On these two commandments depend all of the Teaching (from God) and the prophets." (**Matt 22:37-40**)

We have come to know this commandment, by Jesus, as the "Golden Rule." Jesus learned this "Golden Rule" from his teachers who were followers of Rabbi Hillel, the Elder, who died about the time Jesus was born.

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By the way, the quickest way to find information about Hillel is to turn to the article "Hillel," in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Volume 8. He-Ir. (Jerusalem: Keter: 1972) 482-485. The paragraph, which includes the report on Hillel's summary of the Teaching from God, i.e., the Torah, reads as follows:

“Hillel is described as a man of great humility, who in his pursuit of peace was even prepared to depart from the truth (Bez 20a). He set before himself the principle of bringing men closer to the Torah. To this end he scrupulously avoided anger and pedantry and was prepared to reply to all questions, even those obviously calculated to vex him.

In opposition to Shammai, Hillel consented to the admission of proselytes, even when they laid down unreasonable conditions as a condition of admission (Shab. 31a; ARN 16, 61).

To a heathen who came to him to be converted on condition that he teach him the entire Torah ‘while standing on one foot,’ Hillel replied:

*‘What is hateful to you, do not unto your neighbor;  
this is the entire Torah, all the rest is commentary,’*  
i.e., ‘*Go and study it.*’ (italics added)

This negative formulation of the golden rule is interpreted adversely by Christians and favorably by Jews; however it seems in his answer to the stranger Hillel employed a conventional phrase that was current among the people and which, at any rate, is already quoted in the Book of Tobit (4:15, cf. *The Book of Tobit*, ed. F. Zimmerman, 70, 159f.)”

This statement was well known and appears already in The Book of Tobit. The Book of Tobit is one of the many books which was not included as part of our Protestant Bible the Bible. The date of the book is very roughly about 200 years before Jesus. The passage in Tobit 4:14-15 reads as follows:

- (14) “... Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do,  
and discipline yourself in all your conduct.  
(15) And what you hate, do not do to anyone. ...”
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And now I would like to turn to a most painful subject, and for me, the most painful subject, namely,

### (3) THE CHRISTIAN TEACHING OF CONTEMPT FOR JEWS AND JUDAISM

We will need to leave a deeper discussion of this topic for another time. I need to say, though, that Christians, from the very beginning, even to this day, even after 1945, and after the horrors of the Shoah / Holocaust became known, claim that the door to the divine is closed to Jews. Jews must convert to Christianity. Imagine, the door to the divine is closed to Jesus, to his mother, to all of the disciples, etc.

I want to expose you to a quote from

Greenberg, Irving, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust,” p. 11f., published in Fleischner, Eva, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*. Papers given at the International Symposium on the Holocaust held at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York City, June 3 to 6, 1974. New York: KTAV Publishing House / The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith: 1974.

“In 1942, the Nietra Rebbe went to Archbishop Kametko of Nietra to plead for Catholic intervention against the deportation of the Slovakian Jews. ... Since the rebbe did not yet know of the gas chambers, he stressed the dangers of hunger and disease ... The archbishop replied:

‘It is not just a matter of deportation. You will not die there of hunger and disease. They will slaughter all of you there, old and young alike, women and children, at once--it is the punishment that you deserve for the death of our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ--you have only one solution. Come over to our religion and I will work to annul this decree.’”  
(n. 7 on p.441f.)

In Note 7 on p. 441f. he quotes Michael Dov Weissmandl, *Min Hamatzar* [1960; reprint ed. Jerusalem, n.d.] and his report of his conversation with the papal nuncio in 1944. He quotes the nuncio as saying:

“There is no innocent blood of Jewish Children in the world. All Jewish blood is guilty. You have to die. This is the punishment that has been awaiting you because of that sin [deicide].”)

Christians have not changed their teaching about Jews. Not even after 1945 and after the horrors of the Shoah / Holocaust became known. How can one remain a part of the Christian community with this kind of teaching in force?

Now to some definitions:

### ANTIJUDAISM

Antijudaism is, at first, non-Christian (beginning with some Greeks in the second century before Jesus) and then mainly Christian *religious* hatred of Jews (especially since the fourth century when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, i.e. when Christianity and national power and force became one).

So, the hatred of Jews and their religion reaches back before Christian times to the second century BCE. It was then accentuated by Christian literature and then gentile (at first, mainly Roman and Greek) Christian teaching of religious super-cession made life miserable and deadly for Jews wherever Christians had power. The cross became a symbol of horror for Jews.

### ANTISEMITISM

The term antisemitism is usually reserved for *racial* hatred of Jews, but it is also used for *religious* hatred. This kind of hatred is a more recent development, but it has its roots in religious hatred.

### HOLOCAUST

#### 1. “Holocaust,” עלה, *ōlāh*, “whole burnt offering.”

The term “Holocaust” is generally accepted as an expression referring to the destruction and extermination of about six million Jews (including over one million children) during World War II by the National Socialist German Workers Party on the basis of legal, racial, national policy. The Nazi hope was the total extermination of all Jews.

The term “Holocaust” is very problematic, though. It is a translation of the Hebrew term עלה, *ōlāh*, which means, “whole burnt offering.” It is quite clear that the Nazis had no wish to offer a whole burnt offering to God.

#### 2. “Endlösung,” the “Final Solution”

The Nazi term for “Holocaust” was the attempted “Endlösung,” the “Final Solution” to the Jewish problem. For the Nazis the mere existence of Jews was a problem which could only be solved by the extermination of all Jews and with them their religion and their teaching of equality and dignity of all humans. Such a teaching was totally unacceptable to the Nazis.

#### 3. Shoah (שואה, *šō āh*), “trouble,” “mistreatment.”

Many Jewish people, and lately also Christians, use the Hebrew term Shoah (שואה, *šō āh*) which can be translated as “trouble,” “mistreatment.”

4. Hurban (הרבן, *hūrbān*), “destruction, annihilation.”

A few Jewish thinkers and scholars are also using the Hebrew term Hurban (הרבן, *hūrbān*), which means “destruction, annihilation.”

Should the topic of antisemitism have escaped your attention then I hope, very much, that you will read, at least, the following books as soon as possible. This exercise will change your stance as a Christian in your relationship to Christianity, to the Jewish people and to Judaism even after reading only a few pages in any one of the following books--unless, of course, you have already dealt with this topic in your life and have come to a decision about your response.

Flannery, Edward. H., *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Anti-Semitism*. Revised and Updated. A Stimulus Book. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985 (Preface by John M. Oesterreicher. Quest Books. New York and London: Collier and MacMillan, 1965).

I heard Father Flannery right after the publication of his book in 1965 in Madison, Wisconsin, where I served as a Campus Pastor for the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (National Lutheran Council) from 1962-1966.

I read his book. *I turned pale*. I began to read literature on the topic. I have never been the same.

I am sorry that Flannery left out of the revised edition the first paragraph of his “Introduction” in the first edition. This important paragraph reads as follows:

“This book received its first impetus from a personal experience. One evening several years ago, I walked north on Park Avenue in New York City in the company of a young Jewish couple. Behind us shone the huge illuminated cross the Grand Central Building displays each year at Christmas time. Glancing over her shoulder, the young lady--ordinarily well disposed toward Christians--declared: ‘*That cross makes me shudder. It is like an evil presence.*’ (my emphasis)

This disturbing comment evoked many questions in me, not least of which was: How did the cross, the supreme symbol of universal love, become a sign of fear, of evil for this young Jewess? It soon became clear that her fearful reaction to it was the fruit of a knowledge which she, but not I, had--a knowledge of the immense suffering undergone by her people at the hands of Christians for many centuries. It was my first introduction to the problem of anti-Semitism.

Later discussions of the incident with both Christian and Jewish friends led me to a further discovery. Jews generally are acutely aware of the history of anti-Semitism, simply because it comprises so large a portion of Jewish history. Christians, on the contrary, even highly educated ones, are all but totally ignorant of it--except for contemporary developments. They are ignorant of it for the simple reason that anti-Semitism does not appear in their history books. Histories of the Middle Ages--even of the Crusades--can be found in which the word ‘Jew’ does not appear, and there are Catholic dictionaries and encyclopedias in which the term ‘anti-Semitism’ is not listed. There seems to be only one conclusion: The pages Jews have memorized have been torn from our histories of the Christian era. In a sense, this book is a contribution toward the reinsertion of those pages.” (1965, p. xi)

The following book is must reading for all Christians:

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*. New York: Seabury, 1974.

If you want to take time to read only one book on this topic then I suggest that you read:  
Nicholls, William, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*. Northvale, New Jersey/London: Jason Aronson, 1993.

I finished reading this book during the last week of May of 1993. It summarizes for me four decades of reading and study in the area of the Tanach / Hebrew Scriptures / "Old" Testament, the apostolic writings / "New" Testament and of Judaism and Christianity.

If you would like to continue a life as an *honest* Christian I recommend that you read this book as soon as possible. But, do not read this book (or any of the others) if you are not prepared to make significant changes in your religious life.

A most important contribution to the discussion is

Isaac, J., *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*. Translated by Helen Weaver. New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Isaac refutes the three main doctrines of the teaching of contempt: (1) Jewish religion was degenerate at the time of Jesus; (2) Jews killed "God;" (3) Jewish dispersion, persecution, torture and extermination are God's punishment for the killing of Jesus.

If you want to read only about some of the basic facts of the Shoah / Holocaust, then read the following:

Hilberg, Raul, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1961. It lists, e.g., the Christian (Canon Law) and Nazi laws in parallel columns. I bet you will turn pale.

A basic textbook is, e.g.,

Talmage, F. E., ed.,

*Disputation and Dialogue: Reading in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*. New York: KTAV and Anti-Defamation League of B'nei B'rith, 1975.

The book includes some of Martin Luther's writings on the Jews:

1523 "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew," pp. 33-34.

1543 "Concerning the Jews and their Lies," pp. 34-36

... a most horrible diatribe ... it was used by the Nazis to justify their actions

See, of course, also

Luther, Martin, "On the Jews and Their Lies," in *Luther's Works*. Volume 47 (The Christian in Society IV. Edited by Franklin Sherman. General Editor Helmut T. Lehman. American Edition. General Editors: Jaroslav Pelikan [for vols. 1-30] and Helmut T. Lehmann [for vols. 31-55]. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1962) 123-306.

A vitriolic outburst written in his last year of life, 1543. It even surpassed medieval anti-Jewish horror. What a legacy!

For those of you who read German, please, do not deprive yourself of reading the following books:

Gerlach, Wolfgang, *Als die Zeugen Schwiegen: Bekennende Kirche und die Juden*. 2., bearbeitete und ergänzte Auflage. Studien zu Kirche und Israel; Band 10. Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1993. Zugl.: Hamburg, Univ., Diss., 1970. ISBN 3-923095-69-4

A real shock!

Krapf, Martin, *KEIN STEIN BLEIBT AUF DEM ANDEREN: Zur Herkunft des Antisemitismus aus frühkirchlicher Theologie*. Manuskript, 1997. Martin Krapf. Bergstr. 74. 88690.

Uhldingen-Mühlhofen. Tel 07556/242. He is the father of my friend Thomas Krapf.

The manuscript arrived 4-23-97. I completed reading the book 5-25-97. Absolutely devastating. To my mind one of the very best accounts available.

Finally, the most wonderful, pleasant and delightful subject concerning the open door to the divine: love.

(4) SONG OF SONGS or in Latin, CANTICLES

There is a most wonderful statement about love in **Song of Songs 8:6c-f**. And every lover knows that this statement is true. I translate the text as follows:

<i>kî ‘azzāh kammāwet ’ahābāh</i>	For LOVE is strong as MOT = Sir Death, a servant of God
<i>qāšā kiš’ôl qin’āh</i>	PASSION is as fierce as SHEOL = the underworld, the world of the dead
<i>rěšāpêhā rišpê ’ēš</i>	Its darts are darts of FIRE = Fire // Flames are servants of God
<i>šalhebet-yāh</i>	FLAMES from YAH = God (or FIERCEST FLAMES if taking YAH as a superlative)

If you are interested in studying Song of Songs I suggest that you begin by turning to the following books:

Pope, Marvin H., *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible 7C. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1977.

Falk, Marcia Lee, *Love Lyrics from the Bible*. Sheffield: Almond, 1982. - a very fine work by a Jewish feminist. This is the ‘scholarly’ edition.

Fox, Michael V., *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. - an excellent commentary by a Jewish scholar. In my opinion it is one of the best commentaries on the Songs (together with Pope’s book).

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## CONCLUSION

There is an open door to the divine which is always open ... and it is love. All lovers - throughout the ages - know that. First, love yourself, appreciate your self and accept - without any restrictions - the love of your lover. Then we can also love one another ... with all the glory of the wide, vast, boundless spectrum of love ... and we can share the heartbeat of God ... no matter who we are, if we are religious or not, in any place, at any time, in any culture, in any language ... nothing else will do the trick. Seriously, nothing else. Try it and let me know if I am telling you a lie.

Oh, by the way, I beg you, please, watch the movie *CHOCOLAT*. You will see an exceptionally good treatment of the closed and the open door to the divine. I would love to be present at your discussions of this film.

Thank you for your attention