

**Eighteenth North American LCJE Meeting
Los Angeles, 12-14 March 2001**

**Readings in Jewish books about Jesus
Kai Kjær-Hansen**

Introduction

When I submitted the working title for my paper I called it: Jesus, the Jewish Jesus and JESUS, and my intentions were to say something about “die Heimholung Jesu”, that is the Jewish “bringing home” or reclamation of Jesus, as it has been expressed in recent academic works but also in more popular works by Jews. I had wanted to reflect on the importance of this as we engage ourselves in Jewish evangelism. It would be interesting to see to what extent the renewed *Jewish* interest in Jesus is being used by *Christians* as an argument *against* Jewish evangelism. It is my impression that some Christians are so amazed when Jews talk about Jesus that they forget to ask “which Jesus?”.

However, time did not permit me to follow through on my good intentions, but let me use the opportunity to refer you to the last issue of *Mishkan* (issue 33/200) where you will find several articles well worth reading on this issue. In stead I shall now invite you to reflect with me on a book written by a Jewish, Israeli author. He differs from most of the non-believing Jews who write about Jesus in that he in some way or another *has met* Jesus. In Amazon’s description of him it says, among other things: “The perfect turnabout in his life which occurred in the first week of 1969 has been reflected ever since in his creation.”

He therefore talks as one who can be a witness and he writes in a language of revelation. Several of his books are dated not with a single date but two - an indication that they have been written under some kind of inspiration which has happened in the period between the two dates.

A Poem from “The Day Is Coming”

Let me start with a poem which can be found half way into one of his books (pp. 72-73); The title of the book is *The Day Is Coming* from 1997. It is translated from Hebrew where the title is *Ve’Hineh Hu Bah* - also from 1997. The poem is the second of two in the book. The first is about Zacchaeus. The introduction to the second poem is as follows:

“In Jericho He met that blind beggar (Luke, XVIII, 35-43) who entreated Him earnestly to open his eyes” (p. 72). It should be noted that the main character of whom the poem talks is written with capital letters: He and Him. This is the case all through the book but only here do we realize who the person is behind the He and Him. It is Jesus.

Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.

Blind men there surrounded Him,
In a mighty, heaving throng,

And among them there was one,
Who to see did dearly long.
“Son of David” he cried,
“Have mercy on me!
I can no longer bear the darkness,
Open my eyes, that I may see!”
Jesus the Anointed,
Before the man did stand,
And on the beggar’s sightless eyes,
He laid His healing hand.

Like a sudden flash of lightning,
That pierces the sky,
The blind man looked, and lo, behold -
Beheld the face of the Most High.

“Son of David!” cried the beggar,
As his voice with awe did quake,
“All my life I have dreamed only,
Now at last I am awake!”

Jesus the Anointed,
Then on His way did go,
As a gentle, balmy evening,
Came down on Jericho.

In the crows about the city walls,
Some were glad with mirth and glee,
But of those who in their hearts were blind,
Not one desired to see.

Not bad at all. I is moving and beautiful. Not difficult to imagine that someone could compose a nice Messianic tune to it and we could use it during our worship time at an LCJE conference like this one. It could even be a blessing to us. And the message - seen in isolation without its context - is: Jesus is the Anointed, He can help restore our sight and open our eyes to the spiritual reality - but unfortunately so many do not desire to see!

I got the book as a Christmas present from Bodil Skjøtt. I had asked her to look for interesting new books - written by Jews - about Jesus when she was in Jerusalem. The book caught my interest as I quickly looked through it over the Holidays and I asked Bodil to order a few other books for me from D.A.T Publications next time she was in Israel. D.A.T. Publications is the name of the publisher who publishes this Jewish author’s books - and - as you will know - DAT in Hebrew simply means “religion.”

She received a couple of other books also translated into English, one of them with the title: Mount of Happiness, Matthew 5,6,7. At the last page it says:

“D.A.T. publications publishes all the writings of Shlomo Kalo, including the exceptional title: ‘The Day Is Coming’ which deals directly with Jesus Christ, is highly esteemed around the world and has been translated into many languages. The above also applies to: ‘The King Whose Name Is Love’, ‘Moments Of Truth’ and more” (p. [96]).

So here you have a Jew, who not only writes about Jesus, but about Jesus *Christ* - and I - or we - didn’t know about him!

Together with the books there was a very friendly letter (And by the way, it is not right - or at least it is problematic - to publish private letters. Nevertheless here it is - and at the same time it is a good example of what we just talked about with regard to internet and LCJE papers on the net. Not all papers should automatically be put on the net. Also, I have no permission from this author to publish his poem, which I quoted above).

The letter dated 8 February 2001 reads:

Dear Ms. Skjott,

As you requested, enclosed find the two books and an invoice.

When we talked I forgot to offer you ... [title in Hebrew] (Amazing Grace), an audio CD, containing beautiful, powerful and uplifting performance of songs written by Shlomo Kalo. The Singer is Rivka Zohar-Kalo, the best Israeli lady singer ever. the first song is the famous “Amazing Grace” translated into Hebrew by Kalo. The others are original. All of them were performed on national radio or TV. Clients who do not speak Hebrew and bought this CD were very, very deeply moved. I recommend it to you wholeheartedly.

I would be very grateful to you if you could contact me either by phone or by email as written hereunder. I hope through speaking with you to learn of potential readers of Kalo’s titles among Christians who live in Israel and Christian institutes here, as well as Christian publishers in your country.

I trust that as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books emerging from within the Jewish people and hope that you would like them to be distributed successfully.

Thank you in advance.

With God’s Blessing
Yigal Miller,
Co-Publisher

The letter is well written. Very similar to something we who are involved in Jewish evangelism would write if someone approached us about our material: We have more to offer. And please note: the importance of these books is linked to the fact that they are *emerging from within the Jewish people*. Therefore, Ms. Skjott: *I trust as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books ...*

In other words: Here is a Jew who has written about Jesus not out of historical or academic interest but because he has experienced something he wants to share with others - or should we say, preach to others.

More on the book “The Day Is Coming”

Let me first give a few examples of what Kalo writes in order to have him present his message first. After that we can raise some critical remarks.

The book begins with the statement “God is love” (p. 9) and with reference to First Corinthians 13. About this God it is said: “God became man and descended among us as one of us, and our eyes beheld Him and many, many knew Him not, and turned their backs on Him.” (p. 10). Under the chapter heading “*Salvation is from the Jews*” (John IV,22) it says by way of introduction: “He was born among them. He was one of them. He adhered to their Scriptures, and everything that these ancient Scriptures commanded, which to this very day they aspire to uphold, was done to Him ...” (p. 13) After this His circumcision and “Bar-Mitzva” are mentioned with reference to where the New Testament talks about this.

“God-who-is-love’, who was clad in flesh and became as one of us, God, devoid of name and of form, who for our sake put on a form and called Himself by a name and descended among us - addressed and spoke to His people in their own language ...” (p. 15).

Then more is said about Jesus with reference to the Gospels. It is done without mentioning his name but with constant reference to the Gospels, and the main character is called God.. Again a few examples : “And God goes down to an ancient valley, known as the “Valley of Jordan” and stands before John the Baptist. And he, seeing Him from afar, cries out to the host of his followers in a great voice: ‘This is the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world’ (John, I,29).” After having mentioned how John refused to baptize Jesus, it says:

“But God repeats His request with greater vigour and demands of the man kneeling at his feet to rise and do as he is bidden. For this is the essence of His mission: that men shall see God as one of themselves, and He shall not raise himself above them but on the contrary, abase himself before them, so they shall draw near to Him and believe in him, and be saved. And John the Baptist, his lean body wrapped in camel’s hair, stands and obeys the explicit command of his God. His trembling hand is laid on the illumined head, and he blesses, and baptises. From this movement onward, all partition is removed from between God and mankind, between creator and created, and unity of the spirit become real and whole: man being an inseparable part of God, God being love” (pp. 24-25).

With this “explanation” of what salvation is one begins to realize what the author is driving at. He not only says that “God is love”. He can turn the sentence around and say, “Love, which is God.” (p. 52).

But one has to read it very carefully in order to realize this - because of the Biblical “wrapping” given to words. A good example of this is: “God clothed Himself in flesh and descended among those clothed in flesh, and He bore their suffering, and knew their affliction and the bitterness of their pain, as theirs so was His ...” (p. 74).

In the explanation to the second prayer in Our Lord’s Prayer - May your kingdom come - it says “... His “kingdom” shall light up your heart and you shall awaken, by His grace, to see and to know yourself as an inseparable part of Him, while you are still here, in the flesh.” (108). This also explains why so much importance is attached to the Jesus-word: “The Kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke, XVII,21), from all time and to eternity, Amen” (p. 110).

And then from the conclusion, the crucifixion of Jesus:

“He did not balance the heavy cross on His little finger. He remained steadfast in His mission. God-man. God of love. In godlike fashion He bore all the shame of mankind, the full weight of human pain and oppression and bitter misery. He did not spare Himself” (p. 138).

In the last chapter with the heading “My God, My God ...” it says: “The question may be asked - what makes the crucifixion of God so unique? The answer to this question is simple and unequivocal: His isolation. Total isolation, from all angles and perspectives. Absolute isolation ...” (p. 151).

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ With these words from the Holy Scriptures, God takes leave of the flesh, to become again what He was, is and ever shall be: Love, Freedom, the Infinite - as Reality. From whom all emanates, in whose hands is all. All is His and all is in Him” (p. 155).

The book ends in the following way:

“Salvation is from the Jews” (John, IV,22) is the statement of God Himself, in person. ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ - until the day when the children return to their land, until the day when those who reject God will return to Him with joy and with love in their hearts.

And that day is coming, is coming soon.

27.08.96 - 23.9.96

Zürich, Switzerland”

What is it all about?

It is all about Jesus. Even a Jewish Jesus who is called God. Clad in flesh and the message is clad in Biblical and New Testament language. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to call it a modern Jewish version of the Gospel of Thomas. This is to a certain extent confirmed by the fact that Kalo is responsible for the Hebrew translation of an *Unknown Gospel - the Gospel of Thomas*. The Gospel of Thomas found in Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945 - probably from the fourth century - made up of a collection of independent Jesus-words - all together 113 of 114. This is not the place to discuss the Gospel of Thomas but - if you will excuse my second *Mishkan* commercial - in an upcoming issue of *Mishkan* the Danish scholar Aage Pilgaard will deal with the question of how to understand the Gospel of Thomas. He emphasizes the Gnostic character of the gospel. This so-called gospel reveals that one’s real being is of divine art. When this revelation is received one can overcome what is mortal and only passing. The death of Jesus and the *bodily* resurrection have no significance - as it had for the apostle Paul. In the Gospel of Thomas the role of Jesus is basically different from the one we know from the writings of the New Testament. According to the Gospel of Thomas and, as far as I can see, also to Kalo the role of Jesus is to lead people to a recognition of their true being through his words: The self of the light which does not have to yield to death.

It is true that Kalo can write a continued story about Jesus - contrary to the Gospel of Thomas. But this does not change the message of Kalo, which is: Know yourself.

Above, I have mentioned that Kalo’s writings are published by D.A.T. Publications. And that D.A:T. simply means religion. But in the letterhead of the publisher the initials are explained: **Da’ Atzmecha Tamid**. And this means: Know yourself always. Which again means: You have the divine within you! Christ gives you this secret saving knowledge. He came into the world. However, it does not seem that it is the divine Christ who dies, rather he leaves the body before the crucifixion - something which can be found in Christian Gnosticism from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. There is nothing about the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus - nor is there anything about our future *bodily* resurrection. Furthermore: Kalo seems to be related to the Gnostics from the

2nd and 3rd centuries who also legitimize themselves as people who have the full knowledge of faith, something they can claim because of direct divine revelation and because of a secretly kept tradition.

How different is the message preached by the Jew Paul. A reference to First Corinthians chapter 15 should suffice here.

Reflections

The examples from Kalo can be used to reflect on several issues:

1) Is this - so to say - an “internal” issue for messianic Jews in Israel, which I/we should stay out of? I have noticed that some are aware of it already, for example Boaz Fastman (“Shlomo Kalo - Wolf or Lamb?” in *Kivun* vol. 5, 1997, pp. 2+4) and Gershon Nerel (“The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. LXXIII, no. 4, 2000, p. 19). But I am also aware that some Messianic Jews in Israel regard Kalo as a true believer. And as a spin-off of this question: One thing is to attack him and distance oneself from him. Another thing is the challenge to engage in a discussion with him on a personal level.

2) The reading of Kalo’s book raises the question for any preacher of finding the focal point in the gospel: Should that be found in what happened *outside* of us, that is *in* Jesus, his life, his death and resurrection, or should it be found in what happened *in* us? Let’s not deny that something happens in us when we receive the gospel, but if the *emphasis* is here then the balance is changed compared to the New Testament. Personal happiness is second in relation to the salvation which is given because of what Jesus has done. I wonder if we always keep this balance.

3) Kalo’s books shows that just because the author is Jewish and talks about Jesus we cannot draw the conclusion that he gives a true picture of the Jew Jesus. This seems like a trivial observation. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to underline.

4) Perhaps Kalo’s book is more dangerous than academic Jewish books about Jesus. His books are so close to the gospel and at the same time very far away from the Jesus of the gospels.

I my report I mentioned Rabinowitz’ parable on the wheel from 1884. It might be appropriate to refer to him again. Between Rabinowitz and Kalo there is a world of difference, and so there is between Paul the Jew and Kalo the Jew.

And by the way ...

I am convinced that we who are involved in Jewish evangelism have not been sufficiently aware of the influence which this new Gnosticism dressed in both New Testament and New Age garment and vocabulary and - Eastern religions - have on Jews today. Perhaps other Christians and their evangelism could be of help to us here. That is, if we who are involved in Jewish evangelism will let them.

Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.

Or is it to Goa, he comes?