


1-1-2009

The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements: the tensions of the Spirit by Peter Hocken a Book Review

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The definitive version was published in *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Volume 30 Issue 3, December 2009. The published issue of this journal can be accessed via this link <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13617670903371613> or via <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13617670903371613>

Recommended Citation

Kay, W.K. (2009) 'The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements: the tensions of the Spirit'. Book review. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 30(3), 323-327

The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements: the tensions of the Spirit

Peter Hocken

Ashgate, 2009, ISBN 978 0 7546 6746 9, pp 156, £50

Peter Hocken was for many years the secretary of the largest network of scholars on Pentecostalism, the Society for Pentecostal Studies. His writings are always informed and based on a mastery of a wide range of sources. This, his latest book, reflects his more recent involvement with Jewish or Messianic Christians, most of whom are caught up in the 20th century wave of the Spirit.

Hocken's wide sympathies enable him to put the three movements – Pentecostal, Charismatic and Jewish – side by side and to interrelate them by reference to an eschatological perspective which sees the church as a whole impacted by a fulfilment of the Pauline vision of the olive tree: those branches that were broken off can be grafted in again. The Gentile church, which in the first century of the common era divided from Judaism, may once again welcome its lost cousins. The obstacles in the face of this reconciliation are formidable and not the least of them is the 'replacement theology' which sees the church as the people of God as being an exact replacement of the Jewish people in the divine plans. However one factor which will facilitate the coming together of Gentiles and Jews is that much Christian liturgy has affinities and echoes with Jewish worship and practice. Liturgical features are, it may be said, 'incarnational' and reflect the pattern of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus either in the movements of the church calendar or in typical Sunday services.

The book begins with an overview of the Pentecostal movement and identifies the main challenges of those who study it as being to interconnect anthropological and sociological approaches with historical and theological ones. The shifting balance between these various approaches changes one's understanding of what exactly Pentecostalism is. Another chapter looks at the new charismatic churches which share many features of Pentecostalism while tending to be formed into networks rather than denominations. This difference may be interpreted theologically as giving precedence to the ministry of neo-apostles or culturally by reference to post-modernity. Incorporated within the charismatic movement as a whole are Roman Catholics who collectively bring pressure for change to bear on the Catholic monolith. A 'convergence movement', with wider parameters, seeks to integrate evangelical and sacramental elements within all this. Messianic Judaism is responsive to the totality of these factors and draws upon multiple Christian configurations to find its own identity. Hocken pins hope on Towards Jerusalem Council II (TJCII), the vision of a new ecumenical Christian declaration in favour of the importance of the witness of the Jewish people to Jesus that would be accompanied by representative acts of Christian repentance for previous sins against Jews.

This is a fresh and exhilaratingly challenging book crowning the work of a mature scholar. It opens up new vistas of study while being firmly rooted in today's events. It demonstrates a reading of contemporary Christianity that rises above sectional interest.

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