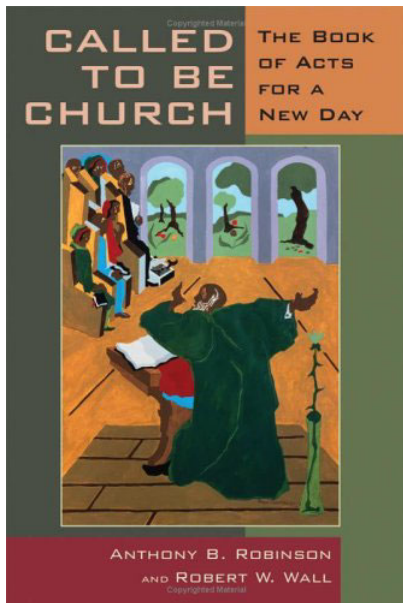


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**Robinson, Anthony B., and Robert W. Wall**

*Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. Pp. xi + 286. Paper.  
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Robinson and Wall's book is not intended to be a complete exegesis of the book of Acts. Nor does it claim to be a thorough commentary on this biblical text. *Called to Be Church* is, however, an excellent overview of Acts for those in ministry or seminary. Robinson and Wall continue to explain sections of the book of Acts in light of ministry and preaching. They provide us with a type of theological commentary that bridges the gap between text and pastoral ministry to congregations working in the postmodern world.

*Called to Be Church* is also a text where Robinson and Wall attempt to call the church to engage communities and culture that seeks Jesus but has lost faith in the church. In the first chapter of this text, Robinson and Wall illustrate that there has been an search for Jesus but also a neglect of the congregation and community of faith. They suggest that instead of our culture pulling away from Jesus, we have seen an increased interest in the Christ. However, there has not been this same zeal for reviving the church.

Such interest, study, and debate has been strong—even astonishing—when we consider that not too many years ago our era was confidently foreseen by experts and scholars as one that would be decidedly and thoroughly secular. According to the twentieth-century theorists of secularization, religious faith should by now be

relegated to museums. But, on the contrary, spirituality is everywhere and Jesus is big. Inevitably, of course, this embrace of Jesus has been uneven; still, Christians cannot but rejoice in the focus of so much thought and interest, curiosity and debate, concerning Jesus of Nazareth. ... But we have been so focused on that danger of reinstituting “the law” (“Judaizing”) that we have not seen another, equal danger: that the church would not embody its faith in a visible and public life of discipleship. (1, 7)

This book, therefore, attempts to encourage the reader and ministry leaders to imitate the response of the early church as seen in Acts.

Robinson and Wall seem to focus on four themes in the book of Acts. First, they suggest that the author of Acts wishes to compare the church and Jesus by the “power of the spirit.” For Robinson and Wall, the power of the spirit is seen not in the miraculous gifts or powers but in the actions of the church. The church’s response to the gospel of Jesus is manifested by actions of social justice, community, and benevolence. The early Christian emphasis on “having all things in common,” caring for the poor and widows, and strong community is, for *Called to Be Church*, a sign of the power of the spirit.

Second, this book suggests that the preaching of the early church was one that motivated the hearers to seek Jesus and to repent of a life of sin. Robinson and Wall also moved me to apply Acts to the mission of the gospel: world and local outreach and evangelism. The authors take the time to examine the preachers in Acts (apostles and other characters) and to engage their lives. According to *Called to Be Church*, the stories in Acts move the community to repentance, transformation, and proclamation. The emphasis on the growth of the church would suggest that mission is a major focus of Acts.

Third, *Called to Be Church* emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus and witness of preaching. For Robinson and Wall, Acts challenges the reader to leave the death of Christ and focus on the resurrection in its preaching and witness to the world. While we have become a movement dominated by the cross and death of Jesus, this text reminds us that the center of preaching in Acts is the resurrected and vindicated Jesus.

Finally, the authors suggest that scripture and the spirit work together to develop and transform the community of faith. Acts places tremendous emphasis on the interpretation of scripture and application to the hearer. Faith, as Robinson and Wall remind us, comes by hearing the word of God and message of Christ through preaching. *Called to Be Church* reminds ministers that our job is more than speaking or Bible study. Our responsibility is to *apply the scripture* to a modern audience and to deliver a message by the power and conviction of the spirit.

The book consists of fifteen chapters in which chapters 3–15 begin with a discussion of texts in the book of Acts. Each of these chapters gives an overview of a section of the book in light of the themes mentioned above. Robinson and Wall keep the reader focused on the themes and explain the texts in light of these themes. They do not overemphasize minute language and text-critical details but keep the reader moving to the second part of the chapter. This second part then applies the text and themes to the minister, reader, or student. It is in this section that Robinson and Wall show their vast knowledge of theology, ministry, and current culture. It is in this section where *Called to Be Church* challenges the reader to reexamine his or her work in ministry.

Robinson and Wall remind us that faith communities exist in a world that is “post-Christian.” They challenge the church to interpret the gospel of Jesus “afresh” in a changing culture. We exist in a world with faith communities that can no longer be affected by “Constantinian Christianity.” The church must change and become a sending/missional community rather than a branch of Christendom. *Called to Be Church* suggests that the book of Acts can be a tool in the hands of Christians to present the gospel of Jesus to people in a world similar to the ancient Roman Empire. The church can again become a powerful force and experience true mission by examining and imitating Acts.

I found this book very helpful. While it may not be advisable for undergraduate study, I do believe that this is a great resource for seminary, graduate, or upper-class studies in the book of Acts, ministry, or missions. The balance between biblical study, theology, and application challenges readers to see the biblical text in their own context. Robinson and Wall do an excellent job of fulfilling their mission to help those in ministry understand and apply the book of Acts in a new way. I feel that this book should also be a part of any minister’s library. It avoids many of the controversial issues that would cause conservative or liberal scholars to pass judgment on a commentary. Yet it gets at the heart of what all scholars and ministers must address in their classes, congregations, and personal lives. Robinson and Wall challenge us to embrace and live “mission” to its fullest in our walk with God.