Called to be church blends the experience of two authors—a scholar and a pastor—from different Christian traditions. Robert W. Wall is a biblical scholar and professor at Seattle Pacific University. He is an evangelical whose theology has been influenced largely by Methodism (ideals of a sanctified life). He has published several books including a commentary on the book of Acts (“The Acts of the Apostles”; Vol. 10 of the New Interpreters Bible, 2002). Anthony B. Robinson is a minister and has been a senior pastor of the Congregational/United Church of Christ. He is also a teacher of church renewal and leadership for Christian congregations and their leaders.

The book Called to be church is divided into 15 chapters, each containing about 20 pages. The reader is fully engaged in the reading of each chapter, first as “Interpreting Acts as Scripture” (first half of each chapter) then “Engaging Acts for Today’s Church” (second half of each chapter). An outstanding feature of the book is having both the interpretation and engagement/application of the text side by side. This interplay of methods entices the reader to continue reading in order to see what both authors are saying and what comes next. The reader is kept interested and curious to see what kind of interpretation or biblical exegesis Wall is doing with the text, but at the same time looks forward to seeing Robinson’s application of Acts to the contemporary Christian church. Certainly there is a continuous dialogue between the reader and the text of the book!

Chapter 1 (“Why Acts? Why Now?”) sets the context for the entire book. It keeps “interpreting” and “engaging” from paragraph to paragraph—a kind of synopsis of the whole book’s main ideas. While this chapter explores the message of Acts as a whole, at the same time it demonstrates that Acts is a timely and relevant book for a postmodern church. Like Acts, Called to be Church is indeed a book to be experienced!

The book is based on the Scripture’s assumption that the intention of God is to form a people, a community, and a vis-
ible body. This assumption challenges the postmodern culture which emphasizes individualism and personal spirituality. Acts is thus a timely book because it shows that the church’s greatest need is koinonia—to love one another, to offer our lives for the sake of the world, to be the body of Christ (3-4).

One of the strengths of the book is that it engages Western Christianity, especially the North American church. Both the interpretation of the biblical text and the application or “engaging Acts for today’s church” are done by American authors for the American Christian church context. But this is also one of its weaknesses, precisely as one wishes it to be more applicable to a much wider audience. Nevertheless a large portion of the book can certainly be used outside of North America, as many of the book’s interpretations and applications of Acts will fit the world church.

Chapter 2 introduces Acts to the readers. In it the authors orient the reader on ways the book of Acts must be interpreted and applied. The aim is to answer the following questions: (1) What circumstances occasioned the writing of Acts? (2) How did the narrator compose the story? (3) What does Acts teach us about God? (4) What role does Acts continue to perform within the New Testament?

The main part of the book (chapters 3 to 14) focuses on the interpretation and application of several portions of the book of Acts. For reasons of practical purpose and brevity the authors have selected only certain texts of Acts (Acts 1:1-14; 2:1-40; 4:32-5:11; 6:1-15; 8:4-40; 9:1-31; 10; 15:1-29; 16:11-40; 17:16-34; 20:17-38; and 25:1-12). The book deals with important subjects for the church then and now, such as: leadership transition and change, the church’s mission, preaching, baptism, community, conflict resolution and decision making, the Holy Spirit, conversion and experience of Paul, the gospel in a multicultural world, social issues, suffering, spirituality, church and state relations, and so on.

It is interesting to note that on several occasions while the authors engage Acts for today’s church they also seem to interpret the text (see 124; 141-143). The language used in the book is easy to understand and rich in content. This is an outstanding book in terms of style, language, and content.

Some stories and practical examples are provided, but I wish there would be more illustrations given throughout the book. On pages 187 and 188 the authors refer to the subject of “homosexuality and the church” as related to Acts 15. It surprised me that the analogies presented there were quite confusing and in my view Scripture was trumped by the arguments and questions of the author in this particular case. A couple of misleading questions were asked, with vague and shallow or no explanations provided. In my opinion, it must be main-
tained that Scripture trumps or confirms experience, not the other way around as suggested in this part of the book (187).

One of the good features of the book is that it also provides study questions at the end of each chapter. This helps the reader to situate his/her particular context with that of the book. It also helps the reader to reflect on what was just presented and/or read.

Overall, Called to be church is a unique and timely book in its category. It brings together biblical theology (exegetical studies) and fresh practical pastoral applications from the book of Acts which are so vital for the life and mission of God’s church in today’s world. Robinson and Wall have provided a much needed and balanced combination of biblical scholarship with contemporary pastoral insights.

Called to be church in my view is mostly for pastors and theology students, but it can also be used by church lay leaders as it will help to orient them to current trends of contemporary Christianity. The book allows the reader to grasp both the meaning of Acts and its application in a wider context. Such knowledge in turn becomes a bridge between past and present facilitating the application of this understanding of Scripture into the life and mission of the church.

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Change across cultures is Bruce Bradshaw’s call for a biblical view of the kosmos. He argues that every culture has its narratives or deeper traditions and stories that work as a background to everything visible in a culture. These narratives are stories that explain the world and shape the concepts, perspectives, actions, reactions, and behavior of every social group. The narratives take command of the daily life of people because they carry the values and beliefs of the society. Real changes in society will happen only when the narratives are altered. Bradshaw’s emphasis is not just on social change, but he also suggests that these narratives influence the way people interpret Scripture. Producing social change through the use of narratives is more than changing behavior; it is changing the ways people relate to Scripture and the way they do theology.

Bradshaw proposes several biblical elements needed to change narratives. He uses different case studies to exemplify frustrated, as well as successful attempts at introducingchange