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## Foster's "A life of Alexander Campbell" (book review)

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# Book Reviews

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Foster, D. F. (2020). *A life of Alexander Campbell*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 345 pp. \$29.99 ISBN 9780802876331

While numerous biographies of American religious reformer, Alexander Campbell, have been written, the most recent, *A Life of Alexander Campbell*, is the first critical biography. Campbell is most well-known as one of the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement, also known as the Restoration Movement. The latter name references Campbell's desire to restore the church to what he deemed to be the original New Testament church. This biography provides insight into the impetus that fueled his desire, difficulties Campbell encountered while trying to achieve this desire, whether it was achieved and the obstacles faced in doing so. The biography is divided into four sections which highlight his formation, the creation of his ideals and reputation as a religious reformer, his conflicts with various other religious reformers and groups, and his final years through the Civil War. Beyond Campbell's formative years in Ireland and initial time in America, very little information is included regarding his personal or family life.

Author Dr. Douglas A. Foster, professor of church history and director of the Center for Restoration Studies at Abilene Christian University, has written and co-edited numerous works on the Stone-Campbell Movement. As such, he is very well-acquainted with both the primary sources and research regarding Campbell and other leading figures of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Foster uses these resources skillfully to depict Campbell as a determined and focused individual, who was involved in numerous endeavors in addition to religious reform, and used written and verbal debate to promote his ideals. *A Life of Alexander Campbell* includes numerous quotes from Campbell's own writings as well as the writings of those who interacted with him. References to other research materials abound. While some biographies of religious figures tend toward hagiography, Foster does not succumb to this temptation. Instead Campbell is portrayed as a passionate but deeply flawed man who was an intellectual genius, politically astute, and used words as weapons.

*A Life of Alexander Campbell* is a required purchase for libraries that support research and study in the Stone-Campbell/Restoration Movement. Beyond that specific audience, *A Life of Alexander Campbell* is also highly recommended for collections with a focus on American religious history. Foster does a superb job of placing Campbell in his time period and describing how his upbringing in the midst of

Catholic and Protestant fighting in Ireland impacted his religious and civic views. Foster also portrays the divisiveness between religious reformers, the importance of religious serials during this time period, and the development of various new religious groups. *A Life of Alexander Campbell* is a welcome addition to Stone-Campbell Movement studies.

**Reviewer**

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