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Gorman's "Among the early evangelicals: The transatlantic origins of the Stone-Campbell movement" (book review)

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Book Review



Gorman, J. L. (2017). *Among the early evangelicals: The transatlantic origins of the Stone-Campbell movement*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press. 240 pp. \$22.99
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Scholars writing about the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the nineteenth century have typically focused on factors such as American democracy and the American frontier and their impact on this movement, or the influence of Scottish Enlightenment Philosophy on Thomas and Alexander Campbell as two of the Restoration Movement's founders. Furthermore, scholars writing about the history of missions in the Stone-Campbell Movement have typically begun with the anti-missionary society rhetoric Alexander Campbell expressed in his periodical *The Christian Baptist*, seemingly ignoring an earlier phase of Campbell's career when he was favorably disposed to missionary societies and the interdenominational unity efforts they inspired.

James Gorman, a professor of history at Johnson University and himself a Stone-Campbell Movement historian, argues in *Among the Early Evangelicals* that a new approach is needed for studying the Restoration Movement's origins, one that takes into account the impact of the Protestant transatlantic evangelical missionary movement of the eighteenth century. Reaching its apex in the 1790's, this missionary movement – with roots in Britain and America – emphasized an imperative for fulfilling Christ's commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to take the gospel to all nations. According to the leaders of these evangelical mission efforts, this goal could be accomplished by Christians from different denominations cooperating with one another to evangelize "the heathen," united together on the foundation of a "primitive gospel" found in Scripture itself rather than creeds or "human doctrines." Moreover, these leaders maintained that an earnest commitment to missions, motivated by prayer and revival, would bring about the millennium promised in the New Testament. This missionary movement provided a theological framework that Gorman argues profoundly influenced the Campbells themselves and motivated their own efforts to unite Christians by restoring New Testament Christianity. Indeed, Gorman aptly demonstrates that many of the central tenants of the Campbells' restorationist teachings can be found in the publications of the missionary leaders and societies they encountered.

A revision of the author's dissertation at Baylor University, this book is clearly written and well-researched. Abundant footnotes along with an extensive (22-page)

bibliography of primary and secondary sources demonstrate the great care Gorman has taken in supporting his thesis regarding the profound influence of eighteenth-century transatlantic evangelical missions on both Thomas and Alexander Campbell. In the process of writing this book, not only has Gorman provided fresh new insights on the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement, he has also provided a remarkably thorough yet succinct overview of the history of early Protestant missions, with a focus on the rise and development of missionary societies that transcended denominational boundaries and inspired a zeal for global missions.

This book is highly recommended for both upper-level undergraduates and graduate students who have some basic familiarity with Protestant Reformation history. Given its ground-breaking nature, it should be essential reading for anyone studying the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Furthermore, the author's excellent overview of the history of eighteenth-century evangelical missions makes this book a great resource for someone studying the history of early Protestant missions.

Reviewer

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