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Cover Page Footnote

Olbricht passed away in August 2020. This review is one of his last writing efforts. For James Thompson's tribute that focuses on Olbricht's academic career, see *Restoration Quarterly* 62.4 (Fourth Quarter, 2020) 193, 194.

Douglas A. Foster, *A Life of Alexander Campbell* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), xviii + 350 pp., \$29.99. Paperback.
Reviewed by Thomas H. Olbricht.

Douglas Foster by training and experience is eminently qualified to write this extraordinary biography on the historically prominent Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). Foster received the Ph.D. in American church history from Vanderbilt University and has been professor of church history and Director of the Center for Restoration Studies at Abilene Christian University since 1991. Late in his career he was appointed Scholar-in-Residence. He has been remarkably active in writing and editing major reference works focused on the Stone-Campbell Movement. Here I mention *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004) and *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, eds. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013).

Numerous biographies, special studies and even novels have been published about Alexander Campbell since his death just after the close of the Civil War in 1866. The Campbell family commissioned the earliest major biography in two volumes (1868-70) and it is still in print. Written by Campbell's longtime associate Robert Richardson, the biography is indispensable for personal details. Foster's biography is the first to be located in a series of biographies produced by a major publisher, in this case in Eerdmans's "Library of Religious Biography Series." Histories of the restoration or Stone-Campbell movement appeared earlier in the twentieth century in American Church Histories from the University of Chicago Press, and in the latter half of the century from the Greenwood Press's Denominations in America.

Foster set out in his "Preface" what he aspired to achieve in the book:

This volume is neither a chronicle of Campbell's life nor an amassing of data from previous specialized studies. It humbly claims to be a critical biography that assesses principal parts of Campbell's life and thoughts to discover something of his significance for American Christianity and the worldwide movement that emerged from his work (xiv-xv).

The book is divided into five sections. The first centers on Irish, Scottish, and early American religious perspectives that Campbell experienced and that provided a seedbed for his own commitments. The second highlights the formation of

Campbell's reform or restoration agenda that encompasses baptism, Scripture, and the millennium. The third section incorporates many citations in respect to opposition to Campbell's platform including his battles with his opponents, some of which were imagined by Campbell. Toward the end of his life Campbell on occasion had reservations about whether Anglo-Saxon or more specifically American developments conformed to the ways of God. His ambivalence is the focus of section four. The final or fifth section is a brief assessment of Campbell's legacy. These sections proceed chronologically, but some of the major items are developed topically, for example, Campbell's views on baptism for the remission of sins, pacifism and war, and racial issues. The assessment of these topics all in one space is helpful.

The footnotes are impressive in appropriateness and quantity in regard to Campbell's publications and those of his contemporaries. Foster has scrutinized most of Campbell's own prolific discourses and many items written by his contemporaries. I approve Doug's decision to assign priority to nineteenth century sources thereby giving the biography sharper focus. In some cases, however, I think further comment on specific subjects pursued over the past fifty years would have contributed to an image of Alexander Campbell that showed him to be a much more constructive thinker than principally a controversialist. I have in mind such areas as Biblical studies, education, and hermeneutics. The book ends with an adequately detailed index, but without a bibliography. I can understand why a bibliography would not be that helpful since the citation of interpretive items published since beginning with the twentieth century is minimal. The volume contains an impressive number of informative and historically significant pictures.

The Chapters

The book consists of twenty chapters. The first sets out a concise, yet cogent and comprehensible overview of the religious milieu into which Alexander Campbell was born.

Foster alluded to the Magisterial Reformation of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, then turned quickly to the English and Scottish Reformations, the latter centering around John Knox. The Scottish Reformation, that is, Presbyterianism, incorporated numerous conflicts with English politics and church leadership as well as internal rifts resulting in Seceder, Burgher and Anti-Burgher groupings. Thomas Campbell, the father of Alexander Campbell, served as an ordained minister of the Anti-Burgher Seceder, Old Light Presbyterian Synod of Ulster in North Ireland whose

constituency were predominately those of Scottish descent. Ireland proper remained staunchly Roman Catholic.

In Chapter two Foster took up the formation of Thomas Campbell. Despite conflicting information about his religious background from Alexander's biographer Richardson, Thomas Campbell's father Archibald, according to Foster, converted from Catholicism after he fought in the Battle of Quebec in Canada. Thomas did not please his father with his conversion to Ulster Presbyterians. Foster sets out the political and religious conflicts that occurred in Alexander's younger years in a helpful manner for understanding Thomas's effort to secure peace among the various conflicting groups in County Armagh where they lived, the major residence of the famous Saint Patrick of the late fourth century. The conflicts not only involved the Anti-Burgher Churches, but Catholic against Protestant and Protestant against Protestant. Licensed in the village of Ahorey and a member of the Presbytery at Markethill, Thomas became involved in establishing the Evangelical Society of Ulster patterned after the London Missionary Society. The late Hiram Lester established structural similarities between the founding documents of the London Missionary Societies, the Society of Ulster, and Thomas's later "Declaration and Address." Foster comments little on the specific similarities and differences of the three proposals. The comparisons and differences are more complicated than Lester and others have declared and the word Evangelical in that context did not have the exact same meaning that it has in 2020. The word "evangelistic" better connotes the similarities as a reading of the original London Missionary Society documents reveal. Foster further discusses Thomas Campbell's efforts to ameliorate the Ulster Presbyterian rifts with a focus on Biblical authority, oneness of conviction, and evangelizing, but Thomas ended up disappointed in not receiving adequate support from his fellow church leaders.

In crucial Chapter three Foster takes up the formation of Alexander Campbell's mind. He provides noteworthy insight into the persons with whom Campbell studied in Glasgow after being detained in the city due to the wreck of the ship on which the family set sail. Alexander had already obtained a meticulous education in the classical culture and languages from Thomas and his brothers. He also read some of the major English thinkers of the time, for example, John Locke. Foster pointed out how this impressive background instilled in Alexander a sense of superiority that persisted throughout his life and impacted many of the positions and controversies in which he became involved. Thomas Campbell too encouraged Alexander's spiritual development and Alexander experienced a conventional conversion experience. Since Alexander never provided the details, the experience has eluded special attention. John Calvin likewise never provided a detailed account of his own

conversion. Campbell, because of his father's friendship with Haldanean Scottish Independents in Market Hill, already possessed familiarity with their emphasis on unity, restorationism, and millennialism. Here Foster cites the work of James L. Gorman on the trans-Atlantic origins of the Stone-Campbell movement, one of the few recent studies he cites. Foster sets out the importance of Greville Ewing in Glasgow, a close associate of James Alexander and Robert Haldane of Edinburgh. Alexander Campbell heard the Ewing circle discuss weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, church structure and baptism.

At the University of Glasgow Campbell attended lectures of some of the foremost educators of the time, especially George Jardine who was a student of Thomas Reid, a significant leader in Scottish common sense philosophy. Reid held that true conclusions resulted when propositions were derived from commonly accepted data as opposed to David Hume who questioned the veracity of much so-called knowledge. Foster then introduced Bacon and his *Novum Organum* as significant for Campbell (37, 48). Induction had won the minds of the epoch especially with the Scottish Common Sense empiricists. Locke likewise argued vociferously for the same basic epistemology. Fifty years ago historians of philosophy emphasized a period of Baconianism in the first half of the nineteenth century, but that is not so much any longer the case. When considering the Campbell-Owen debate, one should recognize that Campbell's very concepts and vocabulary derive almost directly from Locke, not from Bacon. Foster ends with details of the Campbell family sea voyage to New York, Philadelphia, then on land across Pennsylvania to Washington in the southwest part of the state. Thomas Campbell, informed of their westward trek, met them on the way with printer proofs of "The Declaration and Address" in his saddlebag.

In Chapter 4 Foster takes up the manner in which Campbell became leader of the new movement to restore the gospel and order of the New Testament church. He astutely refers to the *The Christian System* (1835) and quotes Campbell's dictum intermittingly throughout the biography.

I say, the principles by which these things can be done are now developed, as well as the principles themselves, which together constitute the original gospel and order of things established by the Apostles. (p. 45).

Alexander Campbell, tutored by Thomas, soon preached to the Washington Association and in the surrounding region and acquired a reputation of being the leader in their effort to remove the obstacles that prevented the teachings of the New Testament from serving as the constitution for the church. Foster pointed out that

Alexander developed an Americanized style of plain and confrontational speaking and writing. Often expansive, his style seemed typical for the times. Foster mentions Campbell's criticism of life styles and morals published in the *Washington Reporter* under the pseudonym Clarinda but doesn't relate Alexander's concerns to what standard eighteenth century Puritan writings labeled as "manners." Campbell soon met and married Margaret Brown. Campbell helped his father-in-law on the farm that later became the village of Bethany and the location for Bethany College. With the birth of their first child imminent, Alexander studied the subject of Baptism in the New Testament. He decided baptism meant immersion for the forgiveness of sins. In the wake of this decision, Matthias Luce, a Baptist minister, baptized Alexander and Thomas's family by immersion. For the rest of his life, Campbell's view of baptism for the remission of sin and its consequences involved him in controversy.

In respect to theology, I suggest that the genre of Foster's biography is not a critical one. It is critical in regard to Campbell's contributions to a renewal or restoration of the people of God. In respect to immersion for the remission of sins, Campbell had been forced by Thomas to memorize the creeds, including the Nicene and the Westminster Confession. The Nicene Creed clearly stated, "We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," as does the Confession (Chapter 28). Campbell claimed credit for making such a connection from his study of Scripture, but the concept had already been planted in his mind through the creeds. Campbell, of course, sought to establish all theology by Scripture and he can be acknowledged for his work in the text. Foster does not critique Campbell's claims of discovery regarding his views on baptism.

Foster takes up Campbell's views on millennialism in this chapter. He pointed out the almost universal contemporary significance of millennialism among British church leaders. Many churchmen believed that education, evangelism, and the removal of obstacles would pave the way for the commencement of the millennium as did the Campbells. Alexander in the 1840s identified clear signs that the launching day would not tarry and at one stage predicted 1866 which turned out to be the year of his death. After a thousand years of the glorious new era, Christ would return to reign on earth. Labeled postmillennialism Alexander assigned a high priority to the success of human improvement. He believed that God assigned a special role to America and envisioned his own efforts to propagate the ancient gospel and order as contributing substantially to the impending golden days on earth. As the years wore on, Campbell sometimes expressed doubts about the God-given mission of America, especially when the Civil War broke out. But even in the midst

of doubts, he returned to his most optimistic convictions about the divine goals for his adopted country as Foster documents later in the book.

Foster developed at some length and with judicious insight the significance in chapters five and six of three events—the debates with Walker and Maccalla on conversion and baptism, and the controversial yet formative “Sermon on the Law,” all of which contributed to the creation of the platform that consumed Campbell’s lifetime occupation. Already in the “Declaration and Address” Thomas Campbell declared that the New Testament was the constitution for the New Testament church. Alexander at some length asserted the claim that when the New Testament employed the term, “the law” that the term included all the Old Testament and not just the legal parts. This meant that any proofs regarding the ancient order had to be made from the New Testament, not from the Old. He used this strategy particularly against those informed by Reformed theology, including Presbyterians and Baptists, for whom the moral and judicial law was still authoritative in Christianity. Foster refrained from critiquing Campbell’s view of the Old Testament and the New from the standpoint of Biblical scholarship. Foster presented in detail Campbell’s conclusions on baptism for the remission of sins as found in the debates. He also took up Campbell’s later reflections contained within the often-discussed Lunenburg Letter and the lengthy controversy that ensued. These comments are some of the best topics explored in the book (Chapter 11).

In a chapter on unity (6) Foster argued, and I think correctly, that Campbell went beyond the “Declaration and Address” and added as attributes of the unified church the ancient gospel and apostolic order. For him, therefore, the primary goal was restoration with unity to be the outcome. Not being able to work within a Presbyterian context, the Campbells as immersionists joined the Redstone Baptist Association. Alexander launched *The Christian Baptist* to promote these views of unity. He sometimes described his work as not so much focused on restoring the church, but rather restoring Christians to live by the standards of the New Testament. He rejected efforts to unify denominations. Rather individual Christians first should unite in their love for the Lord. These individuals should arrive from all Christian sects and form a visible body based upon a doctrinal and structural restoration of the ancient church. Believers in this body might hold different opinions but they should refrain from imposing them upon others. Foster concludes by noting the critical opinion based on the later rifts among Campbell’s religious descendants, certain inherent defects pervaded his platform.

Campbell’s central assertion that the Bible serves as the only source for Christian belief and practice led him to exercise limitless effort to provide the most

comprehensible New Testament translation and to model state-of-the-art Biblical studies. Foster explored the translation efforts in considerable detail in Chapter 7. Campbell sought outstanding translations and included in the New Testament, later title, *Living Oracles*, gospels and epistles translated by Scottish scholars Campbell, MacKnight and Doddridge. He himself edited the translations utilizing Griesbach's Greek text, heralded as the best at that time. The most controversial of Campbell's changes was his consistent translating of *baptizo* as "immersion." In this case Foster depended on the detailed work of Cecil K. Thomas (1958). In the ensuing controversy over the *Living Oracles*, Calvinistic Baptists and others excoriated Campbell and widely accused him of being a Unitarian.

Campbell bought the major cutting-edge publications of scholars of his time in order to supply data in his controversies and expert insight into the Biblical texts. For example, he read much in the writings of the American Moses Stuart, the Englishman, Thomas Hartwell Horne, and the German, J. D. Michaelis. I think it is important to include more on Campbell's Biblical scholarship because of his efforts in mastering some of the best contemporary scholarship, and because of the importance of Biblical scholarship to Campbell's spiritual heirs since. Biblical studies have received major focus in the universities of the movement, and their scholars have often been at the forefront of the guild internationally. Furthermore, Campbell is justified in his claim that Bethany College became the first College to give credit for courses in the Bible as I have established in "Campbell as an Educator." Campbell's guidelines for Biblical interpretation, that is hermeneutics, also established Campbell's reputation as a constructive theological and scholarly leader and not just a controversialist fighting it out in the trenches. Foster ends with a discussion of Alexander's translation of Acts, annotated, which Campbell published as one in a series of translations of the American Bible Union, a Baptist organization.

In Chapter 8 Foster admirably presented Campbell's debates with Robert Owen, a Welch anti-Christian social reformer, and John Baptist Purcell, Roman Catholic Bishop of Cincinnati. As a result of both of these debates Campbell, in his early and late forties, became widely known in English-speaking circles as the defender of Protestantism. He himself, however, saw the debates as a principal channel by which to promote his plea for the restoration of the ancient gospel and order. Campbell employed some of his time presenting standard English-Scottish empirical cause-effects apologetics for the existence of God and the veracity of the Christian faith. In the Purcell debate Campbell likewise proceeded inductively and empirically. He argued that a true church existed in all ages from the beginning, but it wasn't the Roman Catholic Church which had apostatized and departed from its New

Testament beginnings. Christ declared (Matt. 16) that the true church would prevail, a claim also of Anabaptists and Baptists. Campbell further increased his role of Protestant champion by an early attack on the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and the Mormon leaders (Chapter 12). Campbell took up this critique because of the conversion of certain leading restorationists in Northeastern Ohio to Mormonism, including Sidney Rigdon and Parley and Timothy Pratt. Foster references a Mormon scholar, RoseAnn Benson, who recently compared the restoration pleas of Smith and Campbell (2015). While Foster heralds this new role for Campbell, he rejects the claim of Richard Hughes that Campbell now turned to a “civic religion” posture.

Also, in the 1840s Campbell, because of his national reputation, found himself in a strategic position to found Bethany College (Chapter (9)). We have already noted the importance of education Campbell claimed for his program of restoring the ancient gospel and order. Various publications have treated Campbell’s approach to education. European emphasis on theory and practice going hand in hand deeply influenced Campbell, along with the Scottish insistence on courses in classical education supplemented by classes that contributed to industry and agriculture, for example: chemistry, surveying and road building, botany and zoology. The Scots had developed these curricula, but the major earlier American universities still focused on the classics. In the same chapter Foster presented information on the formation of the American Christian Missionary Society of which Alexander Campbell accepted the presidency. Foster shows Campbell’s prior encouragements for a larger, more organized way to evangelize.

Section three of the book, titled “Defense and Conflict,” consists of eight chapters and, in my judgment, best demonstrates the significance of Foster’s modus operandi and perspectives. These chapters carefully flesh out Campbell’s plea and the criticism of his opponents. All these materials are based upon detailed examination of the works of Campbell and of his detractors. In the chapter (11) on John Thomas and the Lunenburg letter, Foster discusses Thomas’s insistence on baptizing Baptists and soul sleep, which Campbell designated materialism. Thomas later left the movement and founded the Christadelphians. Campbell continued the controversy with the Presbyterians over infant baptism and sprinkling by debating Nathan Rice in Lexington, Kentucky. He cited far more sources for believer’s immersion in this debate than in any other, indicating that Campbell and his cohort valued proof from early church history. In the 1820s it became clear to Baptists, particularly in Kentucky but also elsewhere, that Campbell downplayed an experiential Holy Spirit conversion as well as other favored Baptist doctrines, and represented a more intellectual orientation than they did. Campbell soon became embroiled with Baptists and carried on polemics especially in the numerous journals. He managed

to meet Baptist detractors with a similar invective of which they were guilty as Foster establishes with much documentation. Campbell clashed with the later Landmark Baptist leaders, J. B. Graves, J. B. Jeter and others. He thought to write a book length response to Jeter, but became so immersed in other activities that he asked his former student, the articulate Moses Lard, to write a reply.

Campbell had clashes with Walter Scott over Scott's claim to have restored the ancient gospel in 1827 when he evangelized for the Mahoning Association (Chapter 15). Scott did not claim to have restored the ancient order. He was quite willing that Campbell be so accredited. Scott actually asserted his role as a "founder" in the movement. Campbell willingly admitted Scott's success in offering, but not creating, the ancient gospel, but he wasn't open to granting Scott a founder's status. Foster shows Campbell to be very protective of his founder's role. Foster sets out in great detail their sometimes rocky relationship.

The troubled friendship of Campbell and Barton Stone had an even longer and more deeply seated history (Chapter 16). The clashes pertained to the fundamental doctrines of the substitutionary atonement, and of the Godhead, the Father, Son and Spirit. Stone objected to the eternal existence of the Word (Campbell declared that the eternal Word became the Son incarnate), and that the Spirit was not a person. Campbell judged that Stone's disclaimers verged on heresy. Foster provided excellent insight into the relationship of these two leaders, utilizing the noteworthy biography of D. Newell Williams for comprehending Stone's theology.

In Chapter 17 Foster discussed the controversy that arose over the work of the eloquent Jesse Ferguson who addressed rapidly increasing crowds in Nashville. Certain Nashville leaders asked Campbell to counter Ferguson's views on the work of the Holy Spirit. Ferguson eventually left the Movement and took up Spiritualist activities. Campbell not only clashed with Ferguson, but also with Tolbert Fanning. Campbell and Fanning published at length on the manner in which the Holy Spirit acts today. Robert Richardson became involved. At one time Richardson and Campbell became estranged, because of Richardson's views on the continuing work of the Spirit. These two reconciled, but Campbell characterized Fanning as an empirical Lockean who left little room for spiritual activity. Foster has helpfully mapped out this controversy but James L. McMillan has examined the theological conflict in much more detail recently.

One of Foster's recent interests is racial relationships. For that reason, he has provided excellent background to Campbell's involvement with people of color, with slavery and the Civil War. Campbell showed an interest in Mexicans and

American Indians by helping them attend Bethany College. His leadership in regard to the slavery or freeing of African American frequently diverged. Campbell owned slaves, but declared that he was preparing them to be freed. Stone owned slaves and moved to Illinois later in life to free them. David Lipscomb's family owned slaves, and they too tried to free them in Illinois but the laws in Indiana made freeing them there preferable. For readers interested in these matters, the insights Foster has brought to bear are worth the price of the book.

After considerable details on the death of Alexander Campbell, Foster offered an assessment as to Campbell's meritorious traits and certain problematic outcomes among his heirs.

Alexander Campbell was a complex, brilliant, indefatigable, arrogant, racist, aggressive, prolific leader who made a lasting impression on the Christian world. He was a man whom God used and whom God chastened. His spiritual descendants have inherited every one of his characteristics...A rationalistic approach to truth resulted in internal divisions within the movement whose name he now shares, ironically with Barton W. Stone.

Despite my observations and suggestions, I recommend without reservation Foster's biography on Alexander Campbell. It has established a niche in the history of the Stone-Campbell movement that is not likely to be improved upon for generations to come.

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