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Identity and Nostalgia among the Campbellites

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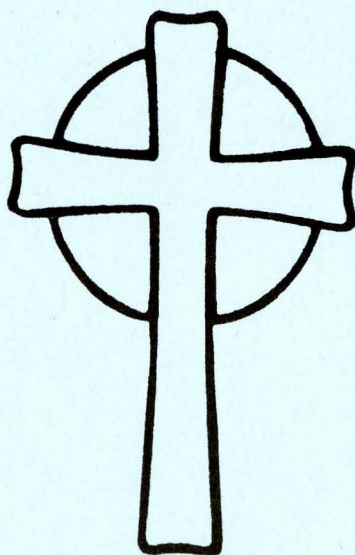
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IDENTITY AND NOSTALGIA AMONG THE CAMPBELLITES

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Introduction

What did it mean to be a Campbellite in the early nineteenth century? As derisive as the title may have been to Alexander Campbell and his Disciples of Christ movement, it came with a lot of “stuff” attached to it over which nineteenth-century restoration Christians had no control. In many ways, it is similar to the way Latter Day Saints endured the taunt “Mormons.” It thus seems appropriate to use the term now as non-pejorative to define the early Stone-Campbell movement’s diverse population and the social and political determinants that made them what they collectively were. In other words, the Campbellites were a group of Americans with preconceived ideas about culture that determined many of their responses to Campbell’s call for a restored first-century church. They could not have otherwise functioned. With that said, I will tell a couple of stories about the Campbellites.

Campbellite Identities

The first story begins in 1832 with the merger of these two large Christian movements, both led by rogue Presbyterians who had split from their Scottish church roots to revive a purer form of Christianity in the United States. One leader was Barton Stone, one of the original preachers in the Second Great Awakening in the 1790s. The other was the famous preacher, debater, and theologian Alexander Campbell, who would become the leader of the merged movement known as the Disciples of Christ. By 1849 the movement had grown considerably so that about a hundred of its congregations met to form a missionary society. Despite the internal conflict over the role of such societies, there was a general feeling that something was needed to help them reach out to the rest of the world. The movement had been spreading west steadily and had already spread naturally to both Australia and England. Still, something was missing. Campbellites had a desire to reach out to “heathen” nations, and this seemed to be the main purpose for wanting to form the missionary society.

There was a distinction between mission work along the western frontier, Australia, and England as fundamentally different from mission work among "heathen" nations. No missionary society had been seen as necessary up to now. The movement had spread naturally across new western territory, especially after the land grabs following the Mexican-American war. By 1855 there was a Campbellite church in the California gold rush town of Stockton.¹ The movement also spread naturally to Australia and England via a shared European cultural tradition. Even American Indians were not "distant" enough to warrant special missionary arrangements, although the efforts here were by comparison small. Only when dealing with what were seen as foreign cultures was a missionary society thought to be appropriate.

Campbell was the president of what came to be known as the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS), and his first choice for a foreign mission field was Jerusalem. Campbell said that Jerusalem's "future rise and glory occupy a large space in the visions of the future."² The choice of Jerusalem was probably sentimental, based on the biblical precedence that it was where the gospel was first preached. Dr. James T. Barclay, a wealthy physician and slave owner from the South, offered his services regarding a mission to Jerusalem, and he and his family spent three years there, 1850–53, finally returning rather beaten and defensive after having had no success. Barclay commented on the venture: "They sell themselves to the highest bidder in the ecclesiastical market."³ This seems odd to say after spending three years preaching in the ancient holy land of Christianity, now under Ottoman control and dominated by Islamic influence. Why would Barclay aim his complaints at an "ecclesiastical market," which implies a crowded mission field, wrung dry of new opportunities? It makes sense only after we look at the facts of the situation. The Campbellites were not the only group of American Christians interested in Jerusalem. Others had gone before them, and the ecclesiastical market was indeed very crowded.

The nineteenth-century Ottoman empire made a serious attempt to modernize at mid-century. Part of that had to do with an interest in promoting religious freedom; in edicts passed in 1836 and 1856, all subjects of the empire were treated as equal, regardless of their religious affiliations.⁴ Barclay actually belonged to a second generation of American missionaries who came to the Levant at mid-century, partly as a result of the loosening of restrictions by the Ottoman empire. However, although this may have been the reason Campbellites and other Protestant groups went to the holy lands, their own reasons for going

¹ Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1948), 241.

² Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (Nashville: Harbinger Book Club, 1861), 525–26.

³ Garrett, 289.

⁴ Moshe Maoz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840–1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (London: Clarendon, 1968).

had more to do with their religious identity. In the case of the Campbellites, they were not just dedicated Christians; they were also dedicated Americans. Barclay probably found Jerusalem quite crowded with American missionaries like himself, all trying to take back the holy city.

Ussama Makdisi has commented on this mid-nineteenth-century trend by pointing out that these American missionaries, although seeing themselves as part of a benevolent universal cause, were really in the middle of a clash between evangelism and secular imperialism at a time when European dominance was starting to increase around the world.⁵ In other words, they were caught in a global battle for economic and political control that not only dwarfed their well-meaning evangelical aims but made them inadvertent players in the game of imperialism. This was partly due to world politics at the time and partly due to the European-based culture of the missionaries, who took for granted the superiority of Western civilization and mixed that inexorably with their Christian message. Barclay's dour comments about the ecclesiastical market were the response of a Southern gentleman dismayed by the nakedly aggressive nature of missionary efforts in Jerusalem. No doubt he had gone there with a biblical picture of Jerusalem in his mind that would not have fit well with the reality of Ottoman-ruled Palestine. His longing for a biblical homeland got in the way of the realities of nineteenth-century Palestine.

Makdisi also writes of this Ottoman attempt at modernization as an "Ottoman Orientalism" that embraced the West as "the home of progress" while the East was seen as a "theater of backwardness."⁶ In this sense, American missionaries such as the Campbellites were entering into a familiar situation of unquestioned Western dominance. Yet they could not be at home in this situation, for Ottoman motives for embracing the West were far different from their own. Although Ottomans and American missionaries were both trying to "improve" Palestine, they each had very different understandings of improvement and very different power structures under which they worked. The American missionaries were crushed between all the opposing political forces with which they understood themselves to be in alliance. The universalist foundation of their message left them naive to the particularist political motives in Ottoman-ruled Palestine. In other words, they were not politically motivated themselves, but their politics were buried in their Christian message. All the other influences—the British, the French, the Ottomans—kept their politics front and center, as was their understanding of nineteenth-century imperial ideology. The Americans had the unfortunate disadvantage of playing by imperial rules without any clear understanding of their own imperialism embedded in their Christian message.

⁵ Ussama Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity," *AHR* 102.3 (June 1997): 681.

⁶ Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *AHR* 107.3 (March 1998): 2.

How could a non-political group such as the Campbellites get caught in such a politically charged situation? How could their purely Christian message get so entwined with issues of political dominance and imperialism? A possible answer lies in the Western thinking of the times. John Stuart Mill, in his famous essay *On Liberty*, states his principle of exclusion upon which Western ideas about “backward” societies are founded: “Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage.”⁷ By “nonage” he means they lack a history of development and therefore are like children and are to be excluded from considerations of liberty. In other words, they are to be taken care of or enslaved for their own good. Barclay, a slave owner venturing into Palestine to spread the gospel, surely would have understood Mill’s principle of exclusion. It would have been enmeshed in his understanding of the Christian message he had gone to Jerusalem to convey. Although he certainly had no plan to enslave people for their own good, an understanding of *difference* that was racial as well as national and ethnic would have shaped all his perceptions of Jerusalem. Barclay saw the Palestinians as children in a candy store, unable to make sound decisions when faced with so many appealing choices. The “heathens” of Palestine needed the pure gospel, unadorned by the ministrations of men. They did not deserve the freedom to decide for themselves what flavor best suited them.

This understanding of Barclay and his mission to Jerusalem reveals something about Christianity in general. Centuries of European dominance in Christianity had given it a completely white European worldview despite its origins as a Jewish sectarian movement that, through the inspired efforts of apostles Peter and Paul, had become a universal worldview. As Maurice Halbwachs points out, “Christianity, mainly through the preaching of the apostles and of the early Christians, early on took the form of a universalistic religion.”⁸ Halbwachs goes on to show how important holy sites such as Jerusalem were to the development of that universality. Nineteenth-century missionaries from America were in a hopelessly complicated situation where their universal message, derived from apostles Peter and Paul and imagined through images of a holy site, was tainted by global imperialistic politics and their own sense of national and racial destiny. As we shall see with our Campbellite example, the complications did not end with the failed Jerusalem effort.

We have only to look at the name American Christian Missionary Society to understand the issue. The ACMS was an American society, not only geographically but also ideologically. Their message was not just a Christian message but

⁷ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government* (ed. Geraint Williams; London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 69.

⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels* (trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter; New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 203.

an American Christian message. The distinction was not apparent to the Campbellites because an American particularism had entered their universal message without their knowledge. In just two of many antebellum studies, Daniel Feller and Harry Watson point to a distinct American nationalist message that runs through every aspect of antebellum America, often without any apparent awareness to the participants.⁹ Feller in particular tries to show how religion was an integral part of the nineteenth-century march-of-human-progress via Western culture. Ideas of progress, science, Americanism, Enlightenment rationality, and Christianity were so intertwined that the message of Christian universality was hopelessly diluted or completely lost in the mix.

This occurred despite the fact that groups such as the Campbellites were particularly attuned to biblical principles of universality. Theologically, they were a diverse group that practiced a very flexible attitude of forbearance in matters of opinion, thus allowing a wide range of personal choice to exist within a broadly structured Christian system, outlined in Campbell's writing.¹⁰ Yet they allowed that message to be partially reconfigured toward a blatant Americanism and then tossed into the mix of British and French imperialistic aims in the Levant.

Another factor in Barclay's obvious frustration over the ecclesiastical market in Jerusalem is what Johannes Fabian calls the Enlightenment's "shift" in our understanding of space and time. He distinguishes between "religious time" and "secular time," with each focusing on different starting points.¹¹ Religious time starts in some periphery and moves toward centers of religion (i.e., Jerusalem, the holy city). Secular time starts in some center of learning or power (i.e., the metropole) and moves toward peripheries (i.e., the colony). American missionaries such as Barclay were operating in religious time, moving toward some perceived center of religion. Yet the Ottoman Empire in its shift toward modernization was operating in secular time, moving away from centers of power toward places such as Palestine where that power could be applied in modern ways. Barclay and others were operating in a sort of time warp. They were experiencing a cultural-political form of jet lag whereby their minds operated on a different clock from that of the outside world.

In Ussama Makdisi's work we see yet another factor involved in the plight of nineteenth-century American missionaries: the problem of "nominal Christians" who, although not a part of Western Christianity, had always been in Palestine and had Christian traditions older than those of the American

⁹ Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America 1815-1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), and Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990).

¹⁰ Garrett, 192-94.

¹¹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1983), 6.

missionaries,¹² most notably the Maronites, who were descended from a fifth-century Eastern Christian sect. Due to Ottoman modernization policies, the Maronites were thriving in Palestine at this time. Yet due to the growing dominance of Europe in the region, the situation was highly politicized. The Maronites tended to patronize the Catholic-oriented French in the region while other groups such as the Druzes aligned with Protestant Britain. How did American missionaries deal with this political spiderweb of intriguing alliances? How did they deal with the idea that there were Christian traditions older than their own in a place they saw as their tradition's birthplace? Mill's principle of exclusion would necessarily place these ancient Christian groups in their nonage as undeveloped children to be taken care of by European and American missionaries. Campbellites would have taken this view for granted, whether they were slave owners like Barclay or anti-slavery proponents as many Campbellites were. American particularism guided both views toward Mill's principle of exclusion applied as a form of American exceptionalism.

Barclay's sense of resignation and defeat upon returning to the United States must have been at least partly the result of seeing how complicated and illogical these applications of exclusion in Palestine were, and possibly they even made him uneasy about his own situation as slave master back in Virginia. Certainly, the Americanized Christian message with which he went to Jerusalem did not fare well in the political, cultural, and religious climate of Ottoman-ruled Palestine.

Alexander Campbell believed that the Jerusalem mission was part of a glorious future for the restoration of true Christianity.¹³ This points to another factor in the blending of Americanism and Christianity as a universal-particularist message: millennialism. So perfectly did millennialist views fit into the antebellum march of progress that almost every Christian thinker had them in some form or another. The Campbellites had writers who expressed both premillennial and postmillennial views. A premillennial view taught that the "last days" talked about in the book of Revelation have not come yet, but are coming soon. Most postmillennial views taught that we are living in those "last days" and are coming close to the end of time, or Christ's second coming. It became much more complicated as many groups during this time began to develop along millennial lines, such as the Millerites. For our purposes, however, those basic distinctions will do. Campbell was a postmillennialist, and in much of his later writing this is played out. He clearly saw his movement back to primitive Christianity as an indication that we are in the "last days." For instance, in his speech to the ACMS in 1863 (just before Barclay's ignoble return from Jerusalem), he said, "This missionary enterprise is, by universal concession, as well as by the oracles of God the grand work of the age—the grand duty,

¹² Makdisi, 684.

¹³ Campbell, *Popular Lectures*, 525–26.

privilege and honor of the church of the nineteenth century."¹⁴ There is no doubt that Campbell was talking about a distinctly American enterprise, a mixture of the biblical message of universality and the very specific American "grand duty" to spread Christianity, but they were so intertwined with Enlightenment modernity that even highly intelligent men such as Campbell could not see to what such entanglements between universality and nationality might lead.

In another writing from the *Millennial Harbinger*, Campbell applies his millennial thinking to the Jews, showing a firm belief (much like what Martin Luther had espoused) that the Jews as a people would be brought back into the fold in these final times before the end of the world. "All who receive the word of God hold that Israel will be brought back to him from whom they have revolted."¹⁵ Clearly Campbell is not interpreting the apostle Paul as having engulfed all *nationalisms* in a universal message. The Jews still exist as a whole people estranged from their God. Are they to be brought back in as a whole people? Campbell does not answer this. He leaves hanging a whole set of questions about the nature of Christianity. Does it transcend national boundaries or leave them somewhat intact? Clearly a theology of universality was severely compromised by the Americanism within which Campbell and his group operated. He could not possibly have provided an answer to this dilemma without stepping out of his time and space in history to view it from a safe distance. Just as Halbwachs suggests that the apostle Peter's denial of Christ was a form of distancing himself from all the "pain and indignation" in order to later be a responsible witness to it, so might Campbell have stepped away from his "Americanness" in order to witness to its intrusion on Christian aims. Yet he did not. The American message was too strong.

In Peter van der Veer's study of religion and modernity in British India, he brings up the nineteenth-century science of phrenology as a way of discussing "nature versus nurture" among Western missionaries. This is applicable to a study of the Campbellites if for no other reason than Campbell himself had a casual interest in phrenology.¹⁶ As van der Veer points out, "It (phrenology) also expressed a somewhat more Calvinistic notion of the limitations of one's own action, as given by the structure of one's brain."¹⁷ Phrenology offered to explain the differences between the races by scientifically studying the physical aspects of the brain. Phrenology was taken very seriously in the nineteenth century. It is debatable just how seriously Campbell took it, but even if he accepted it as merely part of the popular culture of the age, that it existed as such would lead missionaries going abroad to read more into the physical differences of other

¹⁴ Campbell, *Popular Lectures*, 522.

¹⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Notices of the Jews, Their Land and Destiny." *Millennial Harbinger*, series 3, vol. 7 (1850): 146.

¹⁶ Garrett, 267.

¹⁷ Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 147.

racism than they might otherwise have. As Reginald Horsman points out, race was so completely enmeshed in American and European thinking at the mid-point of the nineteenth century that it is almost not fair to call it racism as we know it today.¹⁸ It was too entrenched to be anything but common sense in an age in which white Americanism was synonymous with a universal message of progress via a millennial Christian restoration.

How did such entanglements and entrenchments come about? How did the identity called Americanism become synonymous with an identity called Christianity in the minds of nineteenth-century Americans? As mentioned earlier, a common starting point for this is the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Primarily a defensive policy against European encroachment in the Americas after the fall of the Spanish empire, it underwent some extensions in meaning and purpose in the 1840s as the United States fought to expand its borders. Under presidents Tyler and Polk, fears of European and Mexican encroachment on United States territory, real or imagined, led to the use of the Monroe Doctrine for exactly what it was designed to combat.¹⁹ The United States greatly increased its territories in North America using a policy that protected all of the Americas from being taken over by unwanted imperial forces. It is the sort of sublime politics that have come to define much of the political relationships between the United States and Latin America over the past two hundred years. But for American Christian movements in the mid-nineteenth century, it became the reality of Americanism, to be nurtured and spread in the form of Christianity all over the world. Given the climate of expansionism, no matter how bitterly it was fought by anti-expansionist voices within the American political structure, it became endemic to groups such as the Campbellites, who clung to a Jacksonian view of freedom and progress based on grass-roots Americanism against old style European hierarchal structures such as kings, bishops, popes, and denominational centrality.

Campbell especially was an anomaly in this respect in that he sided with the more libertarian Jacksonians against the Whig tendency to support old authoritarian structures. It was an imperialist snake eating its tail, in that Campbellite missionaries were against the old European authoritarianism because they had been freed of it as Americans. But they went to Jerusalem just as that old European authoritarianism was being applied on a global scale. It was easy for them to see their own Americanism, in many respects just as imperialistic, as being the very opposite of what Europe offered the world. In other words, it was easy for them to blend a Christian universal message with a nationalistic American message and not see how the two might be at odds in a foreign culture.

After Dr. Barclay returned from Jerusalem with his tales of woe, the ACMS decided to take an optimistic view of the situation. Accepting at least temporary

¹⁸ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2-6.

¹⁹ Fredrick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism 1843-1849* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

of the few significant powers at this point not to recognize Liberian independence.²⁰ A slave named Alexander Cross, who had converted to the Campbellite cause, was bought from his master and trained for the Liberian venture. Unfortunately, Cross died soon after arriving in Liberia, and what might have happened evangelically or politically was lost. The Liberian mission effort was abandoned. Subsequently, not much was written about it. The ACMS moved on to other things.

What can we make of this seeming reversal? The ACMS fails in the holy land, with a slave-owner as missionary, then turns around and sends a freed slave as missionary to Liberia. One point is the tremendous debate going on among the Campbellites on the slavery issue. Campbell himself was the ultimate fence-sitter, fighting for the rights of anti-slavery causes in his home state of Virginia, yet also fighting for the rights of slave-owning Disciples in the deep South who refused to bend to anti-slavery demands. So conflicted was the movement on the slavery issue that it could contain the likes of Pardee Butler, famous in Campbellite history as the founder of churches in "bloody Kansas." Butler was the John Brown of the Campbellites, fighting the abolitionist cause on one of its most contested grounds.²¹ Yet in the South, where the Disciples of Christ were strongest, we see why Campbell worked so hard to keep the conflicting sides together. Statistics from the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society of 1851 record that Disciples owned 101,000 slaves, making them, per capita, the largest slave-owning religious body.²² Could there be a more conflicted group on the slavery question? It seems fair to say that the about-face on mission work that Liberia represented was due to this inner conflict within the movement.

The next move by the ACMS was similar in nature. In 1858 a staunch abolitionist within the movement was sent to Jamaica. His name was J. O. Beardslee, and he had worked as a missionary in Jamaica earlier with a different group. This time there was some success at first, but it soon dwindled to nothing, and the mission was shut down. Thus ended the only three missionary efforts attempted by the ACMS even though it continued to exist in some form for another fifteen years after the Jamaica effort was ended.²³

What can we conclude about the ACMS and the Campbellites regarding the American urge toward foreign missions? First, it is clear that a dual identity existed among American missionaries in the nineteenth century. Their universal Christian message had been seamlessly blended with a very nationalistic Americanism. These two identities were conflicted enough to effectively cancel one another in a foreign mission field. Secondly, the political and cultural turmoil that

²⁰ Winfred Ernest Garrison, *An American Religious Movement: A Brief History of the Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1945), 111.

²¹ Garrison and DeGroot, 320.

²² Louis Cochran and Bess White Cochran, *Captives of the Word* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 131.

²³ Garrison, 111-12.

Dr. Barclay encountered in Jerusalem was far beyond any Campbellite imagining of the holy city. The reality of Ottoman-ruled Palestine had a bigger effect on Campbellites than they had on it. The malleable identities of, in this case, evangelizer and evangelized, were weighted in favor of the reality of Jerusalem. As a result, the ACMS would make very different missionary choices afterwards and eventually make none at all.

Campbellite Nostalgia

The second story begins with a look at Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*, a book that helps us understand the historical significance of nostalgia. In it she traces the history of nostalgia from its beginnings as a curable disease, contracted by Swiss soldiers who longed for their homeland, and treated by medical doctors, to its current definition as an incurable modern condition.²⁴ Nostalgia to us today means a longing for things as we imagine they were or should be. As Boym shows, what a nineteenth-century Swiss doctor once cured with leeches, opium, and a brisk journey through the Alps is now a study in the effects of human longing for real and imagined ideas and places. Can we apply this current understanding of nostalgia to the Campbellites, who would have known of it only as a malady of troops in the field? A look at their literature opens the door just a crack in that direction.

With the merger of Campbell and Stone's movements in 1832, Campbell made another important change. His old journal, the *Christian Baptist*—named that because of his close association with the Baptists in the 1820s—was shut down. A new journal called the *Millennial Harbinger* was started. Until Campbell's death in 1866, the *Millennial Harbinger* was his mouthpiece as leader of the movement. In the introduction to one of the 1850 volumes, Campbell says: "This is, emphatically, an age of revolutions—an age of progress. The conflict between truth and error—whether theoretic or practical; whether religious, ethical, political or ecclesiastical—has never before been waged with more determination."²⁵ Clearly, he is tapping into the Enlightenment rhetoric of his times. Improvements in religion, ethics, and politics were so completely tied to the West, that no other model could be imagined. Progress was the central tenet of all understanding about the world. Campbell was one of the most astute Christian writers of his time, yet he could no more question this Enlightenment premise of progress than we could question the value of computers in our own age. Campbell was a product of his time, as everyone is to a large extent.

In Boym's book on nostalgia, she shows that it is clearly a product of the idea of progress: "Progress became a new global narrative as a secular

²⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

²⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 3, vol. 7 (1850): 1.

counterpart to the universal aspirations of the Christian eschatology."²⁶ In this way, nostalgia became not some common physical malady like the common cold, but a truly historical emotion that longs for some past that does not fit with the realities of the present. In other words, it is valid to speak of our current understanding of nostalgia applied to the nineteenth-century Campbellites because it was the nineteenth-century idea of progress that created it.

Within that same volume of the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1850, in which Campbell spoke of his age as one of progress, is an article titled "Manner of Conducting Missionary Operations," written by John C. Rankin, a regular contributor to Campbell's journal.²⁷ It is a fascinating article because it is pure fiction. Rankin imagines a Campbellite mission work in India (which did not happen until the 1870s) with all the force of a real mission work. The article stands out in the volume as an example of a Campbellite nostalgia for a primitive Christian tradition they saw themselves as rescuing from the dark ages of Roman Catholic dominance. Rankin is being homesick forward to a time that not only embodies a wished-for future but also clearly indulges in memories of a past that Campbellites imagine through their desire for Christian purity. Rankin is projecting on his time the restoration of primitive Christianity of which the Campbellites saw themselves as a part. A brief deconstruction of the article will allow us to see how the Campbellites saw themselves in relation to those who were different from them, such as the Hindus in India.

Rankin begins by alluding to a previous article he had submitted describing the "religions of India." Then he goes on to make a rather calculating claim that there is a basic formula for furthering the gospel that works in any culture, based on the use of "Preaching, education, and the press." His belief in a "basic formula" belies a universal approach that comes not only from Christianity but from the Enlightenment. But where Christian universality is truly "universal," Enlightenment universality relies on a particularism-turned-universal: European, or Western, culture is the standard by which all things are judged universally. Rankin describes how the use of these fundamentals would lead to the "nucleus of a regular congregation, around which people can assemble."

The next phase is the procuring of a church building, for as Rankin imagines this work, "the people listen with much greater respect and attention than in the public streets." So far, everything he has described has nothing to do with India. He has completely transposed the building of a church in, say, Tennessee, onto the building of a church in India. His subject is India, but he is imagining something more like America. Distinctly American desires have been placed within the context of India, yet India is not even present in Rankin's description of that context. He longs for an American experience in India similar to the

²⁶ Boym, 10.

²⁷ John C. Rankin, "Manner of Conducting Missionary Operations," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 3, vol. 7 (1850), 147-52.

primitivistic longing for a first-century Christian experience in the nineteenth or twentieth century. This is very close to the nostalgia of which Boym speaks, in which one longs for things as they never were and also geographically shifts that longing to spaces in which they do not belong. This sort of nostalgia creates juxtapositions, such as the Swiss soldier who imagines his alpine homeland transposed onto some distant, alien place or Rankin, who imagines a Tennessee church building in Calcutta.

Weather plays a role in this imaginary Christian conquest of India. In the "cold season" the missionary would go to "more distant sections of the country," as this is more conducive to good health. The supplies of travel are "tents, servants, beds, chairs, tables, cooking utensils, provisions and books." The missionary enters a town with his entourage and sets up to preach, at which time the men of the village appear, but not the women. Rankin takes this opportunity to chastise Hindu culture in regard to the missionary's preaching:

Muzzled and chained by iron-hearted custom, they (the women) are beyond his reach. Should any have occasion to pass near his stand, the step is quickened, and the veil, used as a screen from the ordinary public gaze, is drawn still lower. With bleeding heart, he addresses those present, opens the fountain of Scripture truth, exhibits its pure, simple, but sublime account of the Divine Being of creation. . . . Astonished and delighted, they often say as he proceeds, (*such bat.*) "true word," (*bahut achkee bat.*) "most excellent word," or other words of similar import.²⁸

This passage appears to be some combination of wishful thinking and chastisement of Hindu treatment of women. Unlike in the West, women are not allowed to show themselves in public or have conversation with men. It is also not clear as to whether Rankin is making any distinctions between Hinduism and Islam since the veil issue is a Muslim concern, but nowhere in the entire article is there a reference to Islamic practices. It seems as though when he says things such as "The Hindoos are not so ingenious or systematic in their arguments, though reasoning on many points with great plausibility," he is lumping Hinduism and Islam together, as if their differences and distinctions have no bearing. Tied to this is his understanding of "Hindoo" as a belief system easily integrated into others, which is true. Hindus have no problem accepting Christ as another god to add to their collection of gods, which number in the thousands. But this is used by Rankin to suggest that Hinduism is a non-system, anarchic in its embrace of other systems outside itself. More recent studies of Sanskrit culture do indicate that the ancient Hindu "system" was less dogmatic than it was later portrayed after Western intrusion,²⁹ but not in an anarchic or self-menacing way. Ancient Hinduism did have structure as a universal world-view, in some ways similar to later Christianity: all-embracing yet non-systemic.

²⁸ Rankin, 148.

²⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-307.

Christian missionaries, according to Rankin are accused of murder for killing animals, which Hindus say are sacred beings. The Brahmins are described as having taken to the use of the West's microscopes to identify "fellow-creatures" in the water and strain them out accordingly to "avoid their injury." Although he admits that this practice is rare, the comment can be seen as an example of just how universal ancient Hinduism attempted to be in its embrace of all life, carrying the concept to a drastic extreme. This tendency toward extreme universalism contrasts with nineteenth-century Christianity's habit of neutralizing its universal message with American and European particularism.

Despite all this cultural criticism of India in order to show the Christian missionary's ways as being not only superior but part and parcel to the universal Christian message, Rankin understands some fundamental flaw in this nostalgic remembrance of a fictional scenario. In a shocking reversal, which casts the whole article in a new light, he says, "The greatest difficulties in this department of labor are, first, that the *conscience* of the people is not with us." It is as if he has stopped in the midst of all this nostalgia for things that are not and realized that Hindus do not hear them the way they wish to be heard. Even as Rankin lives within the confines of his time, as its synthesis of nationalistic Americanism and universalist Christianity advise his every thought and action, he realizes in a fundamental way the futility of changing culture through the Enlightenment's false-universalism.

Alas, however, it is a mere moment within the article, for Rankin then moves onto the other duties of the Christian missionary in India: education and nothing less than the complete transformation of Indian society. This is the particularist-universalist message of the Enlightenment at work. His imagining of a Campbellite mission work in exotic India, for just a brief moment, comes very close to the truth of the situation, which is that if Christianity is to have any success in a place such as India, it must go there and be given to people as their own, without any Western foundation. It must become their conscience. In a post-structuralist scenario worthy of Foucault, Rankin's nostalgic dreaming holds more truth than he could possibly have known, simply with the off-handed admission that the conscience of India was not with them as they traveled here and there with their tents and tables and servants and books. Rankin the individual breaks through the structural veneer of his age, for just a moment.

Rankin's nostalgia for an imaginary mission in India points to the same merger of identities—one universal and the other national—that made missionary efforts for Americans abroad so problematic in the nineteenth century. Ideas of commonality and otherness merged when they went to places of religious significance such as Jerusalem. Their own strangeness in comparison to the reality of the "city where the gospel was first preached" caused them to long for a primitivistic image of Christianity that had no real bearing on their true biblical and universal mission. They overcompensated for this by going in wildly different directions (Liberia and Jamaica) in order to balance what must have felt wrong about their primitivistic urges abroad. Campbellite missions under the

auspices of the ACMS were more than an example of the diversity within the group itself. They were also an indication that the group collectively saw some fundamental flaw in their own blending of universalism and particularism. They innately understood the dilemma of "otherness" that was so prevalent in their world. As Boym aptly points out, nostalgia is always a blending of universality and particularism.³⁰ It never occurs for people who stay put. It is created by going abroad, away from home, and coming face to face with a strangeness with which they expected to have something in common.

Perhaps this lesson was taken to heart by Christian missionary efforts that came later in the twentieth century, which took a more anthropologically correct approach of attempting to plant a generalized Christian view into non-western cultures. Certainly Catholicism's "liberation theology" in South America is a good example, as well as many Protestant efforts throughout the world, including those carried out by "modern-day Campbellites." But for nineteenth-century American missionaries such as the original Campbellites, this was not possible.

³⁰ Boym, 12-13.