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Philippine Missionary and Ecumenist**

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**Charles Henry Brent:
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MICHAEL C. REILLY

Among the many non-Roman Catholic missionaries who came to the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century Bishop Charles Henry Brent (1862-1929) was one of the most outstanding. Bishop Brent was a pastor and a missionary, a lecturer and author, an administrator and organizer, a man of prayer, and, perhaps most important of all, one of the founding figures in the ecumenical movement. Aside from two short biographies, relatively little has been written on the thought of this remarkable bishop.¹ Stephen Neill notes this in his *History of Christian Missions* and calls for a fuller and more scientific account of the work of this great Christian leader.² This essay is a step in that direction.

Brent wrote 20 books. Most of them are devotional and inspirational rather than scholarly. This essay is based upon an analysis of half of his published works and several secondary sources. It focuses on four major themes in his thought: ecclesiology, missiology, ecumenism, and spirituality. Before entering these areas, however, it will be helpful to outline the life of Brent.

Charles Henry Brent was born on 9 April 1862, in Newcastle, Ontario, Canada. His parents were the Reverend Canon Henry Brent and Sophia Frances Brent. After receiving his education at Trinity College School, Port Hope, Ontario, and at Trinity College, University of Toronto, Brent was ordained deacon in 1886 and priest in 1887 by Bishop Sweatman of the Protestant Episcopal Church. His first assignment after ordination was to St. Paul's Church, Buffalo, New York. The stay was short. After a disagreement with his bishop (over candles on the altar — Brent favored

1. Eleanor Slater, *Charles Henry Brent: Everybody's Bishop* (Milwaukee: Morehouse, 1932); Alexander C. Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent, Crusader for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948).

2. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1948), p. 346.

them!) he went to Boston in 1888 to live for nearly three years with the Society of St. John the Evangelist, the Cowley Fathers — an Episcopal religious order. During this time he was in charge of St. Augustine's mission for Blacks. After leaving the Cowley Fathers, Brent served from 1891 to 1901 as associate rector of St. Stephen's Church, an impoverished parish in Boston's South End.

In October 1901, the direction of his life changed dramatically when he was elected first Episcopal missionary bishop of the Philippines, a position he held until 1918. During this period, in addition to caring for his mission and traveling extensively throughout the islands, Brent spent much time trying to remedy the opium problem in East Asia and lectured frequently in the United States, most prominently at *General Theological Seminary*, New York City, in 1904 and at Harvard University in 1907. He also attended the seminal *World Missionary Conference* held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910.

For a short time during the First World War, Brent was senior headquarters chaplain for the American Expeditionary Forces. In 1918 he became Episcopal bishop of Western New York, the position he held until his death in 1929. During this last decade of his life Brent was an international figure. He lectured and preached frequently in Europe and America, was the United States representative on the Advisory Committee on Narcotics of the League of Nations in 1923, was a representative of the United States at the International Opium Conference in Geneva in 1924, a delegate to the Stockholm Conference on Life and Work in 1925, and chairman of the first Faith and Order conference at Lausanne in 1927.

Brent was more a man of action than a man of thought. However, he possessed and shared many of the basic theological insights which have been important in the twentieth century. Furthermore, he was present at and contributed to three important conferences which began movements that eventually coalesced into the World Council of Churches in 1948: the International Missionary Conference of 1910, which led to the formation of the International Missionary Council; the Life and Work Meeting of 1925, which sought to apply Christian teaching to the world's social problems; and the first Faith and Order Conference in 1927, which sought to work for doctrinal and structural unity among the Christian churches.

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Brent was a man of the Church. He had a wealth of experience and service in many contexts: 10 years as a priest in a poor parish in Boston, 16 years as a missionary bishop in the Philippines, a year as army chaplain, and 10 years as bishop of Western New York. In view of this breadth of pastoral experience, it is not surprising that Brent's ecclesiology is dominated by a concern for the whole Church and for repairing the divisions men have caused over the centuries.

He is careful in his writings not to settle too quickly on any one definition of the Church. To do so, he thought, would be to show that our conception of the Church is so small that we can contain it in our own minds. However, if one searches for the definition or description that he uses most often, the key term would be *organism*, or, in more biblical terms, the *Body of Christ*.³ Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it is essentially a visible, social organism and it is one. These qualifications are important in Brent's ecclesiology.

First of all, the Church is a visible organism. Relying on John and Paul, Brent was convinced that the Church was visible as well as invisible. More than once he stressed the truth that the Church was not a formless something. Christians, he thought, should not get carried away by a nebulous philosophy which considers the visible Church of little importance. The Church can be seen here in the world and it is composed of all those who have been admitted into baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁴

Brent distinguished an organism from an organization. As a visible society and the Body of Christ, the Church is an organism, a unitary form. Life is inherent in it and energizes and permeates it fully. An organization, on the other hand, is an assembling and coordination of congenial elements. Every voluntary association is an organization. Organizations are manufactured. The family, the nation, and the Church, however, are organisms.⁵ One might

3. Charles Henry Brent, *The Commonwealth, Its Foundations and Pillars* (New York: Appleton, 1930), p. 89; *The Inspiration of Responsibility and Other Papers* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915), p. 40; Frederick W. Kates, ed., *Things That Matter: The Best Writings of Bishop Brent* (New York: Harper, 1949), pp. 35-36.

Unless otherwise indicated, all references cited in the footnotes were authored by Brent. His name appears as author only with the first citation of the source.

4. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 43, 95-96, 99; *Things That Matter*, pp. 35-36.

5. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 98.

argue here with Brent's sociology and use of terms, especially as to whether or not the Church is a voluntary association, but this would be beside the point. Brent's concern was to stress the unity and visibility of the Church, two basic values at the core of his ecumenical and missionary thought.

The Church is one because it is the Body of Christ. Oneness in form and substance is its distinguishing feature. Its unity is as wonderful as the unity between Christ and God. As is obvious, though, the visible Church is not one. There are numerous splits and denominations. This discrepancy between the ideal of Christ's Body and the *de facto* diversity of the empirical Church will be discussed below in the treatment of Brent's thought on unity. Here, however, it should be noted that Brent was neither satisfied nor patient with denominationalism. He maintained that there is no Presbyterian Church, or Episcopal Church, or Roman Catholic Church. Although men weaken it, they cannot break the Body of Christ. The word "church" revolts against exclusive and sectarian epithets and can bear no adjectival modifiers. Rather, the Church means just one thing — the spotless, glorious Bride of Christ. Because a man belongs to the whole body of Christians, his particular denominational affiliation should be called a communion, a body, or a fellowship, but not a church.⁶ It should be observed, however, that Brent was not always consistent in speaking of the Church in this way.

The same concern for the unity of the Church appears in Brent's ideas on the ministry. Bishops and priests, he held, are not ordained for any specific denomination but for the whole Church.⁷ In an address given at the Advent ordination in Canterbury Cathedral in 1910, Brent developed this thought in more detail. The commission of ordination is through and for the whole Church. The ministry is neither given nor received with the intent to further sectarian thought and organization:

The minister who conceives his own communion to be *the* Church has a pathetic fragment as his propulsive force, nothing more. He who has that large conception, which includes in the Church all Christendom, and who refuses to allow our unhappy divisions to separate him in spirit from his

6. Ibid, pp. 40, 85-87, 95-96.

7. Charles Henry Brent, *The Mind of Christ in the Church of the Living God* (Manila: 1907), pp. 8-9.

fellow Christians, has an uplift and support which cannot be measured in words.⁸

One final theme which Brent often mentions in relation to the Church is the kingdom of God. In his estimation, the Church cannot be identified with the kingdom of God since the kingdom is the climax and totality of all spiritual values. In this world, the Church is the symbol and expression of the kingdom of God; it is the highest symbol and instrument on earth of God's kingdom among men. Just as without the family the home would be an inoperative sentiment, and without the state the nation would be an illusive theory, so without the Church the kingdom of God would be a transcendent thought, ineffective in the world of men.⁹ The Church, then, is symbolic of, instrumental to, and mediational for the kingdom of God in this world. Its nature is to be a means, not an end in itself.

Since the Church is the Body of Christ and is instrumental in achieving the kingdom of God, it is understandable why Brent can say that the aim of the Church is to promote Christlikeness and to bring men into communion with God and with himself.¹⁰ In more than one of his works, Brent refers to this unitive function of the Church. The Church is the divinely ordained means by which man is admitted into and sustained in his fellowship with God.¹¹ The Church is the temple or edifice of human beings in organic relationship with God and with one another.¹² The Church is for the unification of the world and nothing can reach its goal except in and through the kingdom of God of which the Church is the efficient symbol.¹³ Finally, the business of the Church is to establish and maintain living friendship between the individual and God, and between each individual and all other individuals in Christ.¹⁴ As will be seen, this conception of the purpose of the Church fits with and flows from Brent's spirituality of the presence of God.

8. Charles Henry Brent, *Prisoners of Hope and Other Sermons* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915), p. 177-78.

9. *The Commonwealth*, pp. 128-29; *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 39, 43, 96; *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 116; *The Mind of Christ*, p. 25.

10. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 42; *The Commonwealth*, p. 149.

11. Charles Henry Brent, *With God in the World* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), p. 61.

12. *The Commonwealth*, p. 89.

13. *The Mind of Christ*, p. 25.

14. Charles Henry Brent, *Understanding, Being an Interpretation of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, Held in Stockholm, August 15-30, 1925* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925), pp. 41-42.

The Church is the means which makes God present to men by uniting all men organically in the one Body of Christ.

In short, Brent's ecclesiology is ecumenical. The Church transcends all denominational differences and is more than any denomination. Ministers and priests are ordained for this one Church, the whole Body of Christ, not so much for particular denominations. The function of the Church is essentially unitive — man with God, man with man. In many ways Brent's thought on this unitive function of the Church foreshadows Vatican II's description of the Church as the sacrament of unity.

BRENT'S MISSIONARY THOUGHT

For 16 years, Bishop Brent was a missionary in the Philippines. In spite of this he does not seem to have written much on mission theory. One reason may be that his concerns were larger than any one diocese or mission. They were the concerns of the whole Church. Brent saw nothing extraordinary in being a foreign missionary. A man is a missionary because he is a Christian; therefore, priests and bishops are no more missionaries than confirmed laymen.¹⁵ In his first book, published before he left for the Philippines, Brent developed this theme. In his estimation, all Christians are to be Christ's witnesses, for the same faith which enables men to love and serve our Lord equips them to love and serve each other in the most remote parts of the world. The missionary spirit is not something that is over and above the common Christian character; rather it is inherent in it. Missionaries are such because they are Christians and whoever accepts Christ is a missionary. Christians without the desire to be missionaries are Christians in name only. Brent thought that a new definition of missionary was needed. This title is not to be reserved for those who go abroad, but it is the possession of every Christian who strives to bear witness.¹⁶

The following paragraph illustrates well his concern for the oneness of Christian mission and the interrelatedness of home and foreign missions:

Church life may be conceived of as a series of concentric circles, the

15. Charles Henry Brent, *The Revelation of Discovery* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915), p. 99.

16. *With God in the World*, pp. 112-14.

innermost of which representing parochial relations, the next diocesan missions, then domestic, and the outermost circle foreign missions. Power to traverse the large circumference comes from faithfully treading the round of those that lie within, beginning with that next to the center. The only way to have power and serve abroad is to live a deep full life at home and, let it be added, the only way to have large power and to serve at home is to cast the eye far abroad and wind the interests of a whole world around the heart. And the spiritual force of the foreign mission field is no lying index of the spiritual condition of the home Church.¹⁷

Near the end of his stay in the Philippines, Brent was still stressing these same themes. "Romance in missionary work in domestic and foreign fields alike," he wrote, "is in the character of the man who undertakes it, and not in the character of the work undertaken."¹⁸ There is no hardship, he felt, to being a missionary in these civilized times, and therefore it is a pity to continue superficial distinctions between work at home and work abroad. Modern luxuries have robbed the foreign missionary of any claim to self-sacrifice; therefore, it is time to drop that sentimental regard for missionaries and missions which is belittling to the missionary cause. The ordinary is not the extraordinary and the missionary vocation is not the extraordinary.¹⁹ If Brent could write these things in 1915, one wonders what he would have written in 1976.

Although he was convinced that the missionary vocation was the ordinary vocation of Christians, Brent still looked for quality on foreign missions. He thought that the best men were needed and that no one below intellectual par should be sent to the Orient. Furthermore, Brent hoped for missionaries from all walks of life: college students, medical workers, industrial experts, even financial missionaries to help with the bookkeeping. Brent was impressed with the Jesuits, whom he considered learned in every science and skill.

Just as the Church apportioned money for missions, it should also apportion men. It would be a poor parish, he thought, which out of 200 communicants could not send one qualified man to the Church overseas. One can see the influence of Brent's total view of the Church. He believed that missionaries should be called and sent by the Church, and the missionary commission should be left neither to an inner call nor to appointment by a board. It should

17. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

18. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 121.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18, 136.

have behind it the whole Church as represented by the diocese or parish.²⁰ Unfortunately, as Eleanor Slater notes in her biography of Bishop Brent, he was unable to make his missionary experience and ideas effective in the national policy of the American Episcopal Church.²¹

In order to shift from Brent's ideas about the missionary vocation in general to his reflections on his missionary work in the Philippines, his views on the relation between Christianity and culture and the role of the United States in the Philippines must be examined. Brent was elected the first Episcopalian bishop of the Philippines in the fall of 1901. "Callow and unprepared," he set sail next summer in the party of Governor Taft. The companionship of Brent and Taft on this journey is symbolic inasmuch as it shows Brent to be a man of his times. There is no doubt that he stood behind United States policy in the Philippines. In a sermon delivered in Manila he expressed his opinion this way: "It was to the benefit of the race that we brought the direct pressure of our superior civilization to bear upon the decadent nationality prevalent prior to the American occupation and not wholly extinct yet. The moment we cease to believe this we have no more place here."²² These are disappointing sentiments from a man as broad-minded and far-sighted as Brent.

The fact is that he viewed the role of the United States in the Philippines to be as much a missionary effort as his own.²³ In 1910 he wrote that the greatest question for the nations was how to bring a normal relationship between the nationalized half of the world and that more populous half which is at the dawn of nationalization. He viewed the Philippines as a particular case within this general situation. He was convinced that strong nations are charged to use their strength on behalf of the nations of the world that are weak. The Spanish-American War, therefore, was a war to win liberty for others. Brent agreed with President McKinley that the role of the United States in the Philippines was not to exploit but to develop, civilize, educate, and train Filipinos in the science of government. It was an exercise of stewardship, and America's motives were pure. Brent thought that the door of opportunity

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-30.

21. Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, p. 27.

22. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 259.

23. Charles Henry Brent, *Liberty and Other Sermons* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), p. 146.

was open for the American people in the Philippines, that much difficult work was in store for them, and that their best men were needed. He disagreed with those "conservatives" who argued that a republic cannot hold colonies, that independence is essential to liberty, that government without the consent of the governed is the essence of slavery.²⁴

Brent's view of the missionary role of the United States occupation of the Philippines is more understandable in the light of his thought on the relationship of Christianity and civilization and of Christianity and the state. He was convinced that America's task in Asia was to bring civilization. In his mind civilization was dependent on character; and character, in turn, was dependent on Christianity. Therefore, the need for Christianity in the Orient. Brent viewed Christianity as the cornerstone of the state. Christianity, not politics, keeps the state stable. Therefore, Brent thought that Christianity was the one means by which the Oriental could be made strong enough to meet civilization, even in a third-rate manner. Because the Philippines of all the nations of the Orient possessed Christianity, Brent thought it had a natural advantage. Because of their Christianity the Filipinos had a hope of self-realization beyond any people of Asia. Because of their Christianity they would inevitably have constitutional government and democratic principles would prevail among them, for Brent believed that democracy is the principle of Christian brotherhood applied to government. By way of contrast, Brent thought that the permanent nationality of Japan and China rested only in their acceptance of Christianity.²⁵

Brent's patronizing and negative attitudes to the peoples and nations of Asia do not represent the best elements of his thought. Knowing them, however, one can understand why he saw the colonial role of the United States to be intertwined with the mission of the Church in the Philippines. This is not to say that he viewed Christianity as subordinate to the state — he would never admit that the state could claim man's final loyalty, or that the Church should burn incense to the state.²⁶ He was certain, however, that democracy was the logical development of Christianity

24. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 153–55, 172; *Liberty*, pp. 143–49, 183; *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 228, 248–49.

25. *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 230, 237–39; *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 141, 159, 175–76, 182.

26. *Understanding*, p. 31.

and, therefore, Church and State in the Philippines had separate but complementary roles to play.

It is no wonder, then, that Brent placed work with Americans and foreigners in civil and army life in first place when he drew up the goals for the Episcopal Communion in the Philippines. His next concern was for the non-Christians of Central Luzon and the Muslims of the South. He founded mission stations among the Igorots in the Mountain Province and an agricultural school in Jolo. Finally, in third place he put work among the already Christianized Filipinos.²⁷

With regard to this last objective, Brent was sensitive about his relations with the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. When he had gone to the Islands in 1902, he wrote that he had a violent distaste for working in a Roman Catholic country, and when the major Protestant churches got together in 1910 to divide the Philippines among themselves, Brent refused to enter into the discussions because he did not want to proselytize a sister communion.²⁸ He acknowledged the great missionary achievements of the Spanish friars who evangelized the Islands during the three centuries before the Americans arrived. However, he felt that the Roman Church was slipping, and that the new religious liberty in the Philippines invited all the churches of Christendom to assemble if they so chose and thereby warn the venerable Church which claimed the allegiance of most of the natives to heed her morals and mend her ways.²⁹

In Brent's estimation, then, the Protestant churches were to act as a catalyst upon the Roman Church to rouse it to new moral and spiritual vigor. They were to supplement by their vision and efforts and achievements that which had been begun by the religious forces already at work in the archipelago. In his mind, the Protestant communions had introduced a higher type of Christianity into the Philippines which, because of its Puritan severity, had morally toned up the whole situation. Moral regeneration and the unification of the people were the tasks which Brent set before himself. He viewed the Catholic Church as standing aloof in proud isolation, never coming near to the Protestant churches except to

27. *Liberty*, pp. 150-52; Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent*, 51-52.

28. Peter C. Gowing, *Islands Under the Cross: The History of the Church in the Philippines* (Manila: National Council of Churches of the Philippines, 1967), pp. 126-28; Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, 19.

29. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 229; *Liberty*, p. 150.

strike them. In an attempt to be fair, Brent, when writing to his mission district, distinguished between politics and religion, and blamed what he saw as baneful in the Roman Catholic Church – exaggerated ecclesiasticism, tyranny over conscience, arrogant dogmatism – on the Roman Curia.³⁰

These ideas do not represent the best elements of Brent's thought. The following paragraph is a more balanced statement on his part, one which gives the heart of his missionary approach and the elements of his ecumenical theology.

Nor, as I am convinced, is there need of ecclesiastical war where there are various Christian Churches laboring side by side. Not that I advocate toleration as the word is usually understood. I do not believe in toleration with its condescending spirit – except perhaps the toleration which St. Paul commends when he advises us to suffer fools gladly. There is something bigger and finer than toleration. I mean magnanimity, that Christian virtue that does not carp at what it cannot understand or fails to agree with; that avoids controversy except as a last resort, and when it is forced to it conducts it on the highest plane; that deprecates proselytism and scorns to build up its walls with materials torn out of a neighbor's building; that looks for evidences of God's spirit wherever Christ is sincerely preached. At any rate it is with this ideal that our Church has entered into Philippine life.³¹

Before closing this section on Brent's missiology, it would be helpful to examine what he says concerning religion in general and Christianity's relations with the religious traditions of the world. In Brent's estimation all men are essentially religious and have a capacity for fellowship with God. If a man has a pure heart he can see God. God, Brent held, is automatically, unconsciously, or subconsciously present to man. The task of religion is to make the automatic volitional and the unconscious conscious. The heights of religion are reached in Christianity with its notions of God's fatherhood and man's brotherhood. Brent's religious anthropology, however, does not limit religion to the private sphere. The worst of all heresies would be to do this, to say that the teachings of our Lord are not practical except in personal relations. Religion, he felt, is not a department of life but the whole of it.³²

30. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 231; *Liberty*, p. 188; *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 157, 179; *The Mind of Christ*, pp. 31–32.

31. *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 231–32.

32. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 26; *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 35–36; *Understanding*, pp. 41, 48.

Since men are naturally religious, and since all men are subconsciously aware of God's presence, Brent has the philosophical and theological foundations for a positive evaluation of the non-Christian religions. Elements of this exist in his works. In his first book he wrote that the Church of God is poor in that it lacks the contributions which the non-Christian nations alone can give by being evangelized. Before men can see the glory of the Incarnation, representatives of all nations must blend their vision with that which the Church already possesses. Missions are as much for the Church's sake as for the heathens.³³ Nearly 10 years later in 1909, Brent wrote that the old idea of missionary work has passed away. No longer does the missionary go out to break down every religion he meets in order to substitute Christianity. He goes, rather, to turn men's attention to the beauty of native religions in order that he may lift up into the fulfilling religion of Christianity all that is holy in the Oriental cults.³⁴ In his last book the same theme appears: "We are beginning a new epoch of missionary life . . . the day has come when peoples once heathen will have as much to give us in the way of Christian knowledge and experience as we to give them."³⁵

There seems to be a tension and even a contradiction here when one compares these rather liberal ideas on the value of non-Christian religions with what Brent thought about the superiority of Western civilization and religion. Since he never wrote a systematic presentation of his theology the tension remains. In fairness to him, however, it should be noted that his ideas of Western superiority and his linkage of Christianity and democracy with a view toward "civilizing" the nations of the East were common assumptions of nineteenth century missionaries. Poikail John George, in a study of this very issue, lists the following racist assumptions as characteristic of missions in the nineteenth century: (1) Western missionaries were equipped with superior morals and culture and the people to whom they went were deficient in these areas; (2) the major responsibility to educate, enlighten, and uplift the "heathens" belonged to the West and, therefore, non-Westerners were to be made like civilized Western Christians; and (3) since Western civilization has its roots in Christianity, only

33. *With God in the World*, p. 121.

34. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 241.

35. *The Commonwealth*, p. 10.

with Christianity is the "good life" possible both for individuals and society; therefore, Christianity is the foundation for society in the colonies.³⁶ In sharing these assumptions, Brent showed himself to be a man of his times. There is another area of his thought, however, in which he was definitely ahead of his times — his concern for Church unity.

ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

As did nearly every other Protestant missionary at the turn of the century, Bishop Brent saw clearly the inescapable need for a unified Christianity. The problem was how to achieve this. In order to contextualize Brent's ecumenical thought, it may be helpful to sketch the development of the ecumenical movement within Protestantism. It was only in the nineteenth century that the Protestant churches became interested in missionary work on a large scale. William Carey, who is sometimes called the "father of modern missions" by Protestants, worked as a Baptist missionary in India during the early 1800s. As the years went by, Protestant missionaries became more and more aware of the grave scandal that Christian disunity was causing in mission countries. Numerous national and international conferences were held by the churches

36. Poikail John George, "Racist Assumptions of the 19th Century Missionary Movement," *International Review of Mission* 59 (July 1970), 271–84. Poikail George was speaking about the Protestant missions of the nineteenth century, but it could be shown that Catholics shared these same assumptions. For example, while Brent was in the Philippines, the saintly Charles de Foucauld was working to bring French civilization as well as Roman Catholicism to the nomadic people of North Africa. See Jean-François Six, ed., *Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, trans. J. Holland Smith (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1964), pp. 138–39.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Cardinal Newman wrote these words when comparing Western civilization with other world civilizations: "There are indeed great outlying portions of mankind which are not, perhaps never have been, included in this human society; still *they are outlying portions and nothing else, fragmentary, unsociable, solitary, and unmeaning, protesting and revolting against the grand central formation of which I am speaking*, but not uniting with each other into a second whole. I am not denying of course the civilization of the Chinese, for instance, though it be not our civilization. Nor do I deny a civilization to the Hindoos, nor to the ancient Mexicans, nor to the Saracens, nor (in a certain sense) to the Turks; but each of these races has its own civilization, as separate from one another as from ours. I do not see how they can all be brought under one idea. Each stands by itself, as if the other were not; each is local; many of them are temporary; *none of them will bear a comparison with the society and the civilization which I have described as alone having a claim to those names, and on which I am going to dwell.*" (John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* [Garden City: Image, 1959], p. 249; italics supplied).

and missionary-sending societies. One of the most prominent concerns in these gatherings was Christian unity.³⁷

The culminating conference of this series was the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. Bishop Brent was present together with the delegates from 159 Protestant missionary societies. They discussed the Church and missions, non-Christian religions, the preparation of missionaries, the home base of missionaries, and cooperation and the promotion of unity. Historians usually point out that this conference marked the birth of the modern ecumenical movement. One of its achievements was the appointment of a continuation committee to carry out the recommendations of the conference and to work for the formation of a permanent, interchurch council.

Because of the First World War, the International Missionary Council was not officially inaugurated until 1921. Once it had been formed, there were certain fears that this new international organization of churches and mission societies might supplant the local churches. To overcome these fears it was decided that the International Missionary Council would make no decisions concerning ecclesiastical and doctrinal questions about which the churches might disagree among themselves. This principle was later incorporated into the World Council of Churches. The International Missionary Council held conferences approximately every 10 years until it was finally absorbed into the World Council of Churches as the Division of World Mission and Evangelism in 1961.

In the meantime there were three other important movements within Protestantism which eventually coalesced to form the World Council of Churches. The first was the various interdenominational youth movements founded in the nineteenth century. Examples of these were the YMCA and the Student Christian Movement which, it is estimated, sent out about 20,000 youthful missionaries under the motto: "The evangelization of the world in this generation." These youth movements were the nurturing grounds for many of the great Protestant ecumenists and missionaries of the twentieth century. The second was the Life and

37. For the history of the ecumenical movement within Protestantism, see David P. Gaines, *The World Council of Churches: A Study of Its Background and History* (Peterborough, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith, 1966); William R. Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth-Century Background* (New York: Harper, 1952).

Work Movement which, under the leadership of Dr. Nathan Soderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, Sweden, sought to bring the churches together for united action in the application of Christian morality to moral and social problems. Bishop Brent was an active participant in the first Universal Christian Conference of Life and Work which was held in Stockholm in August 1925. The third major force in this trend toward unity was the Faith and Order Movement. Brent was instrumental in the formation of this after the 1910 World Missionary Conference. Its purpose was to use the conference method to try to discuss and bridge the gaps between the churches in matters of doctrine and structure. Brent was chairman of the first Faith and Order Conference in Lausanne in 1927 at which were present 394 delegates representing 108 churches.

During the first decades of this century, many of the same people had been active in these different unifying movements within Protestantism. By the 1930s they saw the desirability of forming a world organization of churches which would include all these concerns within itself. Accordingly a provisional constitution for the World Council of Churches was drawn up in 1938. It was not ratified, however, until after the Second World War in 1948. The World Council of Churches is not a superchurch but a service organization for the various member churches. It describes itself as a "fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Its great task is to continue the movements toward unity begun by the International Missionary Council, the Life and Work and Faith and Order Movements.³⁸

Bishop Brent was a seminal thinker and organizer in this great movement toward cooperation and unity among Christian churches. He seems to have become convinced of the inescapable need for a unified Christian Church as a result of his experience as a missionary bishop in a Catholic country. The fact that missions demand unity, that missions are bound up with unity, and that the main reason for unity is a missionary reason — all these ideas are

38. It should be noted that during the first half of this century, the Roman Catholic Church remained officially aloof if not hostile to those strivings for Church unity outside itself. Since Vatican II (1962–65) this stance has changed and, although it is not a member of the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church participates through observers and representatives in many WCC functions.

familiar themes in his books, sermons, and lectures.³⁹ There was no need to reproduce home quarrels in the missions, Brent thought, for the disunity of the Church is the one cause more than any other which prevents the spread of God's kingdom.⁴⁰

Brent saw the movement toward Christian unity occurring against the background of larger trends in the twentieth century. He sensed a growing consciousness of at-one-ment in the world, a recognition of how close-wrought are the fibers of the human race, how the life of any one man affects the life of his followers.⁴¹ One of his books, *The Mount of Vision*, is subtitled "A study of life in terms of the whole." In his last book, he argued that wholeness forms part of our background and everything we do must be done with reference to that background. Every individual is an integral part of the whole and the whole is not complete without each unit.⁴²

Brent thought that the characteristic prefix for his times should be *inter*. The watchwords for the day were aggregation and interdependence, not separation and independence. Men were becoming more world-conscious, he thought, and from this universal consciousness he hoped that a universal conscience would be born. Life had expanded from the horizon of the national to the international and men were beginning to realize that one's national welfare could best be attained in relation with all the nations of the world.⁴³ After the First World War Brent fought for the League of Nations as a concrete expression of this trend to unity. At that time, the commonwealth of all mankind became a central theme in his sermons and books.⁴⁴ In 1920 he wrote: ". . . the first purpose we see clearly and to which we must put our hand is that the world must be a unified world."⁴⁵ Individualism, he was convinced, was a thing of yesterday. Revelation begins with a garden and ends with a city; it begins with man and ends with men; it begins with a unit and ends with a unity.⁴⁶

39. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 66, 78-79; *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 35, 49; *The Commonwealth*, p. 151.

40. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 51, 77.

41. *Things That Matter*, p. 92.

42. *The Commonwealth*, p. 53.

43. *Liberty*, pp. 97-98, 147; *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 238-39; *Understanding*, pp. 31-32; *The Commonwealth*, pp. 39-46.

44. Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, 103.

45. *The Commonwealth*, p. 39.

46. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 35.

Against the background of a unifying world, Brent projected his thoughts, hopes, and labors for a unified Church. Because the world is now one neighborhood we can no longer be concerned with our own affairs only. Therefore, he wrote after the 1925 Life and Work Conference, the churches must shed their timidity, their self-importance, their localisms, and put on the seamless garment of brotherhood and unity according to the mind of Christ.⁴⁷ Because the Church is the Body of Christ, unity in the Church is as much a necessity as unity in the human body. The purpose of the Church is to unify men with God and each other, and only a Church which itself is unified can do this.⁴⁸ The chief reason which has prevented progress toward the realization of unity is that men have not believed that it was the purpose of Jesus Christ to bring it about. After the World Missionary Conference in 1910, Brent believed that there could be no doubt any longer about Church unity being the will of God. An idea always antedates and is superior to its embodiment, and with Edinburgh in 1910 Brent felt that the idea of Church unity had finally started on the road to embodiment. He agreed totally with the Edinburgh principle: "God's Church is one; man's Church is multiple." If the divisions of Christendom were not the creation of man, they could not be healed; but they are his in inception and continuance, so he must work to remove them. All churches, Brent believed, have sinned against unity, yet none of them has made adequate reparations.⁴⁹

Religion for Brent could not be reduced to a matter of personal concern and individual conduct. The Church had to be relevant and to speak meaningfully to the world. It is precisely this mission which was greatly hampered by Christian disunity. Because the Church is divided, Brent thought that it was incapable of coping with the problems of the times.⁵⁰ Because of sectarianism the cult of the incomplete held sway. The product was a diluted and mediocre religion which was incapable of exercising moral and spiritual authority in national and world affairs. This became especially clear to Bishop Brent after the 1925 Conference on Life and Work. Members of the different churches had great difficulties in agreeing about basic matters of Christian ethics and international

47. *Understanding*, p. 36.

48. *The Commonwealth*, pp. 55-56; 92; *The Mind of Christ*, p. 25; *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 35.

49. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 52-54; 69-82.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

relations, such as war, the League of Nations, race problems, economic conflicts, inadequate educational opportunities, alcoholism, and sexual morality. Here was proof, he thought, that the divisions of the Church result in an inability to use a common Christian ethic on common Christian moral problems. Confronted by the evils of modern society, Brent was convinced that unity was needed if the churches were to speak with one voice on justice, marriage, property, the use of force, and peace.⁵¹

Brent had a strong point to make here. The history of the last 50 years shows that the situation has not changed that much. It might be observed, though, that Brent seemed to advocate something which would be impossible in the modern, pluralistic world. Idealist that he was, he seemed to expect a rebirth of Christendom as a result of Church unity. He therefore looked for a truly Christian society that would be controlled by the spirit of service and self-donation.⁵² Perhaps he was too utopian.

Brent saw four obstacles to Christian unity. The first was the acquiescence in the present broken order. Just as acceptance of mediocrity is fatal in Christian life, so too, a mutilated Christendom can never have more than a mutilated conception of the Lord. Secondly, he thought that the sense of security among the dominating communions, the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church, was unfortunate. Thirdly, he thought that the word *church* was misused. As mentioned earlier, Brent felt that there was no warrant for the application of this word to any existing Christian communion. Finally, he believed that certain substitutes for unity had to be avoided, namely, undenominationalism and uniformity. The former could only bring about a federative patchwork which would slur over distinctions of conviction that call for treatment. The latter is a distortion which could rob Christians of their royal freedom.⁵³

Considered positively, the ideas of Brent on unity lend themselves to the following division: the basis of unity, the motive for unity, its goal, and the means for attaining it. The basis is extremely simple: our common humanity and the fact that we are sons of God. Love of God and love of men are the twofold foundations for unity. The motive for unity is the motive for mission. At times

51. *Understanding*, pp. iii-iv, 26; *The Commonwealth*, pp. 95-105.

52. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 49-50.

53. *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 36-38.

Brent expressed it in terms of John 17:23: "so they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me."⁵⁴ The goal of Christian unity, according to Brent's ecclesiology, is what he calls organic unity. The term is not clear in his writings. It is not the uniform "imperialism" of the Roman Catholic Church; nor is it the mere federative efforts of modern Church communions. Organic union is not reunion either. The former is from within; the latter from without. The one is fundamental; the other artificial. Synthetic unity is the goal, not the imperfect patchwork of federation but the organic perfection in which all the churches will lose themselves in the grandeur and unity of the Holy Catholic Church wherein will be found contributions of higher value from every communion.⁵⁵

Brent was bold in his vision of Christian unity. At the laying of the cornerstone of the National Cathedral in Washington in 1910, he said, "It were better far to risk the loss of this Church's distinctive character in a loyal effort to bring about the fulfillment of our Lord's prayer for unity than to sit in the idle contemplation of a shattered Christendom." What will be lost, he continued, would be that which is of men; but true men can never lose the truth although they happily lose their limited conception of it in a larger vision of faith.⁵⁶

Brent realized that Christian unity would be a slow project. The chief means which he advanced for reaching it was the conference method.⁵⁷ Edinburgh in 1910 was only a start, he felt, and for political reasons it did not discuss matters of faith and order. This was a must if there was to be Christian unity. Accordingly, in the fall of 1910 Brent succeeded in getting the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States to pass a resolution for a worldwide Faith and Order Conference. It was slow in coming, with the first World War doing much to delay it, but it finally took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927 with Brent as chairman.

Brent's ecumenical theology can be concluded by mentioning

54. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 25; *With God in the World*, pp. 63, 74; *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 49; *The Commonwealth*, p. 113.

55. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 90; *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 38.

56. *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 149.

57. Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, 38; *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 38; *The Commonwealth*, p. 114.

the attitudes he saw as necessary if unity were to be achieved. The first principle is to look on other Christians as Christians, and on other churches as churches, and to treat them as such.⁵⁸ "When each Church shall have learned to discern and appraise the true value of all other churches, the day of disunity will be drawing to a close," Brent wrote in 1925.⁵⁹ Secondly, no church can afford to stand aloof. This would be the antithesis of the Christian principle of the Incarnation. Rather, each church must be ready to submit itself, its faith, and its polity to criticism, the same searching criticism which has been applied to the Bible. The churches, Brent thought, will become Church only when there is between them a mutual self-giving. They must think in terms of the whole, come to realize that life is larger than prescribed boundaries, and that a self-centered church is headed for self-destruction.⁶⁰ A third attitude that Brent urged was that churches and movements in a church be studied for the sake of discovering their strengths first; their weaknesses will readily declare themselves. Brent advocated a concern for perspective, inasmuch as truth consists in perspective not less than in substance. The strength of the various Protestant communions is not in their eccentricity but in the elements of catholicity they possess; they live not by error but by the truth they have. Brent thought that it was important to be loyal to that aspect of truth set forth by the communion to which one immediately owes allegiance.⁶¹

BRENT'S SPIRITUALITY

In a sense the most important part of this essay has been left to the last, Bishop Brent's spirituality. To understand his spirituality is to understand his thought and action at their source. This section will concentrate on two themes of his spiritual life: presence and self-giving. A fuller presentation of his thought would have to take into consideration other areas such as the role of the Holy Spirit and worship. Presence and self-giving, however, seem to be at the heart of his spiritual life.

58. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 88.

59. *Understanding*, p. 18.

60. Charles Henry Brent, *The Mount of Vision, Being a Study of Life in Terms of the Whole* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), p. 67; *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 74; *The Commonwealth*, pp. 111-12.

61. *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 97-99; *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, pp. 89, 108.

People who knew Brent attest to his deep spirituality. Bishop David L. Ferris, a friend, said that few men of his generation lived a more profoundly spiritual life, and that he was a mystic in the highest sense.⁶² A recent anthology of Brent's prayers is subtitled, "The Prayers of a Modern-Day Saint."⁶³ Brent's spirituality certainly owes much to the two-and-a-half years he spent with the Cowley Fathers in Boston. There he learned the first lessons of the mystical life – meditation and the practice of the presence of God, exercises which were to be the foundation of his spiritual and intellectual life.⁶⁴

Throughout the years he deepened his life of prayer and faith. He wrote a book on what he called the sixth sense, the mystical sense, his name for the faculty of faith. He contended that prayer is a universal practice of human nature, not artificial, but as instinctive as breathing. The background of all other activity and the chief aim of life, he wrote, should be to bring the Unchanging into the changeable. To do this, contemplation is essential, for activity without a background relationship with God is footless. He recommended 15 minutes of intensive effort Godward to change the whole complexion of life. The world needs better service, he felt, but before this is possible it needs better prayer; a low character of prayer leads to low quality in service.⁶⁵

There is a strong current of incarnationalism in Brent's thought. He viewed the Incarnation as a model for the way the different Christian churches should enter into each other and understand each other. The Incarnation, Brent believed, is the great operative force in the world; it is the pivotal truth of all truths – man in God is God in man. There is no truth so thrilling as that which speaks of God's abiding presence not merely with, but in, his creation.⁶⁶

It is clear then, why awareness of the presence of God and of Christ was one of the foundations of Brent's spirituality. We must be God-intoxicated men, and the universe must be soaked through and through with the presence of God. The world needs men

62. Quoted in Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, p. vii.

63. Frederick W. Kates, ed., *No Other Wealth: The Prayers of a Modern-Day Saint, Bishop Charles Henry Brent, 1862–1929* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1965).

64. Slater, *Charles Henry Brent*, 10–11; Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent*, 27.

65. *The Inspiration of Responsibility*, p. 111; *With God in the World*, p. 7; *Things That Matter*, p. 25.

66. *Things That Matter*, p. 29; *With God in the World*, pp. 135–37.

who by their own experience in Christ can sweep away the veils that hide him from others. Brent pleads for the cultivation of a subconscious grasp of Christ's presence by being in the Spirit and by making steady efforts to develop our faith.⁶⁷

Brent saw the sacraments as special forms of God's presence to men. Although God is present everywhere because he is infinite, Brent preferred to see his presence in the Eucharist rather than in a flower. God is present in a special way in the sacraments because he is personal, and as such he is there to forgive and to feed his people. Christ's presence in the sacrament is the result of the second creation and every communion is a new point of contact with God in Christ through the working of the Spirit.⁶⁸

Prayer and a sense of the presence of God were not sterile practices for Brent. By their very nature they overflowed into action. This is the second foundation of his spirituality – service and self-giving. These two notions also unify many themes in his theology. They dominate his notion of God: "God has been, fundamentally and always, a servant, the servant of men. We call him love. Service is love in active, intelligent operation."⁶⁹

The chief characteristic of Christ is that he is the self-giver, the Lamb, always offering himself. Man's likeness to God rests in his capacity for self-giving. Brent prefers the term self-giving to love because it accentuates the positive effort of choice, the keynote of liberty. Another way to look at religion, he thought, was to see it as giving one's self to the Self-Giver. Just as God's first gift to man was himself in the endowment of the divine image, so the first gift of man to God must be in kind. The gospel of Christianity, Brent held, is sharing; and the only tenable conception of Christian practice is what has been called the Prodigal Son Conception – one's sharing must reach even to those whom society dismisses as worthless. In sum, Brent described life as a high-hearted adventure in the name of God and for the sake of mankind.⁷⁰ There is no doubt that this is the way he lived his life.

67. *Liberty*, p. 110; *Prisoners of Hope*, 18–21, 59.

68. Charles Henry Brent, *Presence* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1917), pp. 41–42; *Things That Matter*, pp. 107–8; *Liberty*, p. 86; *The Revelation of Discovery*, pp. 86–90; *With God in the World*, pp. 104–5.

69. *The Mount of Vision*, p. 12; *Presence*, p. 59.

70. *The Mount of Vision*, pp. 57–59, 114; *Prisoners of Hope*, pp. 226–27.

CONCLUSION

From today's point of view more than half a century later, the least outstanding elements of Bishop Brent's thought are parts of his missiology. Here he is often a man of his times, one who rode the latest crest of the many waves of sword and cross that came to Asia, waves which started with the *conquistadores* and culminated for America with the War of 1898. His view of the American occupation of the Philippines, his ideas about the interrelatedness of Christianity and democracy, and his patronizing attitudes to the peoples and cultures of Asia are out of date today.

Brent comes out somewhat better in his estimation of the worth of non-Christian religions. Although there is ambiguity in his thought, he does give them a positive worth in his philosophy of religion. Perhaps his most significant contribution to missionary thought is his desire to break down the notion that the missionary vocation is a special vocation. He believed, rather, that the Church was missionary by its very nature, and, therefore, that all Christians are called to share in, and contribute to, spreading the faith. This approach was different from that of the missionary sending societies of the nineteenth century, the great century of Protestant missions.

Bishop Brent was much more of a seminal thinker in the areas of ecclesiology and ecumenism. Here his thought seems very contemporary even 50 years later. His dissatisfaction with nationalism and his vision of world unity, his stress on the Church as the instrument for unifying men with each other and with God, his refusal to accept denominationalism as the last word, his notion that the Church must be more than any denomination, his broad concept of ministry, and, finally, his conviction that Christian unity was an absolute necessity for effective Christian witness — all these insights remain meaningful for Christians in the 1970s. Finally, it cannot be forgotten that Bishop Brent was instrumental in beginning the Faith and Order movement. The necessity he saw for in-depth discussions of belief and structure among the Christian churches is only beginning to bear fruit in our times.

Lastly, Bishop Brent was a man of God: His spirituality of living in God's presence in order to give one's self in service to others makes him an inspiring and outstanding churchman in any era.