

Charles Henry Brent¹

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A GREAT MANY YEARS AGO, strolling round a bookshop in London, I picked up the Bishop of London's Lent book for that year, 1918. It was *The Mount of Vision* by a (to me) entirely unknown author, C. H. Brent. I liked the title. I bought the book and read it. And then for more than forty years I never looked at it again. It is interesting to consider what had remained in my mind during more than a generation of human existence.

I was intrigued by the remark in the Preface that the preliminary draft had been "sketched while travelling on horseback over the mountains of Luzon."² I remember wondering whether the archangel Gabriel had been charged with a special mission to prevent the bishop from falling off his horse. I still wonder. Or did he mean no more than that he used those long, lonely rides to meditate on his book and to think through the outline of it, just as some ministers are alleged to prepare their sermons at the wheel of their cars, to the greater or less peril of themselves and the rest of humanity?

I was attracted by Brent's idea of wholeness, as applied to many spheres of life. Yes, here it is again in the Preface: "Catholicity has nothing to recommend it unless it is the condition in which everything is measured and considered in terms of the whole. There is no graver offence than to use a catholic garment to hide a sectarian heart." Sectarianism is "the cult of the incomplete."³ Only a day or two ago I observed for the first time that my contemporary at Cambridge, Dean Zabriskie, had chosen these very words to stand on a blank page at the beginning of his life of Brent.

Then I recall the bishop's plea for the whole Bible, and for "a Bible which is but the beginning of a library, Divine and human, and which will rest not on a lonely table as a thing apart, but which will rub covers with Dante and Bacon and the sages of the orient, and be the richer and the more masterful because of its company on a crowded shelf."⁴ I had been brought up to a very high view of the inspiration of the Bible; I was not quite sure that the right place for the Bible was not precisely on a lonely shelf, in recognition of its unique character as light and revelation. But I could not but be pleased by the bishop's interest in poetry and literature, and by the width and generosity of his appreciation of all things good and

1. A public lecture given at Trinity College, Toronto, on 29 March 1962, to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Bishop Brent (9 April 1862).

2. *The Mount of Vision* (London: Longmans, 1918), p. xviii.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

beautiful. The reference to Dante is very characteristic. With him, as with me, Dante tends to be like King Charles's head, popping out at all sorts of odd moments, as notably in a moving passage towards the close of that most characteristic (and perhaps best written) of all Brent's many books, *The Splendor of the Human Body*.⁵

Yes, there is very much of Brent in *The Mount of Vision*. Almost all that I have since learned of him has been an amplification of this first experience, gained as a schoolboy, of contact with his mind. But one thing I did not learn. It was only thirty years later, when I was engaged with Ruth Rouse on the *History of the Ecumenical Movement*,⁶ that I learned that Brent had been born a Canadian. But this too, in a way, was characteristic; whatever Brent did he did thoroughly. When he felt led to seek American citizenship, he accepted with enthusiasm the outlook and ideals of our neighbours, not as a repudiation of his past but in the hope that he might come to be an interpreter, a servant of two nations, better understanding between which he regarded as being so important for the future of the world.

It was by chance, as we men would say, that Brent was led into the service of America and the American Church. If the Bishop of Toronto had had a place for him at the time of his ordination as priest, he would never have moved around the end of Lake Ontario to Buffalo. If he had not had a rather serious disagreement with the then bishop of what was later to be his own diocese, he would not have gone to Boston; if he had not violently disagreed with the treatment of his friend Father Hall, later Bishop of Vermont, by the Society of St. John the Evangelist in England, he would probably have joined that Society, and become absorbed in the details of its life. If he had not become an American citizen, he could hardly have been chosen to be Bishop of the Philippines. If he had not been sent as one of the few delegates from the American Episcopal Church to the great missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910, he might have missed the challenge of the urgent problem of Christian unity. And then the Church would have lacked one of the great prophets of our time. Contrasting the apparently fortuitous in human life with the underlying reality of divine guidance and providence, we enter one of the thorniest areas of theology, and we do well to be silent. If opportunity had not been offered to Charles Henry Brent, he could never have become the man he was; yet, if he had not been the man that the years had already made him, the opportunity would not have been offered. The pattern is more complex than our minds can grasp. Reliving the life of a servant of God, such as Brent was, we are aware of the uncertainties and perplexities, the apparently chance circumstances that affected decision; the fortuitous seems to prevail. Looking back on the story from the end, we can see how patiently God was at work, how he was

5. New York: Longmans, 1904, pp. 58f.

6. Ruth Rouse and S. C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

guiding all things to their fulfilment; we became aware of this other dimension, before which we stand silent in adoration.

But we have gone ahead of our story. Brent ceased to be technically a Canadian. But he always acknowledged his past. He recognized all that had come to him from his home—from the quiet manse at Newcastle, presided over through a long ministry by a father who perhaps was too old to be a companion to his boys, a revered example rather than a familiar friend; and a mother who seems to have had the gift of making religion real to her children simply in virtue of what she was. It was on this foundation of solid, simple Anglican godliness that the whole later life of Brent was built.

As the second major factor in his preparation for his great work we must, I think, reckon the ten quiet years spent in the poorer parts of Boston. In the lives of many great servants of God we can trace such a time of apparent obscurity in which nothing much seems to happen, but in which the seeds of greatness are being sown. When the time appointed by God arrives, it is seen that he is a careful workman who wastes nothing, and the observer is often astonished by the richness of the harvest that then appears. So it was with Moses during the long, quiet years in which he did nothing except feed the flocks of his father-in-law; with David when he dwelt among the rocks of the wild goats, and amidst his rough companions learned to be a leader of men. We often forget the ten years that Saul of Tarsus spent as a missionary on the periphery of the Christian cause, in parts of Syria and Cilicia. It is not only in Scripture that we find this principle of the quiet years in which the hidden ripening takes place. Mandell Creighton came forth from the remoteness of the ten years spent in his country parsonage, to become within another ten years the most notable bishop of the Anglican Communion. Carey's dazzling years at Serampore were prepared for by the years that he spent, hidden and unknown, as an indigo planter in the interior of Bengal. And so it was with Brent. Ten years were spent in the endless routine, the monotony tempered by occasional excitements, the many frustrations illuminated by occasional brilliant successes, of a poor mission parish.

If, somewhere about the year 1897, an intelligent passer-by had been asked: "What do you think will become of that tall, slim cleric, now not quite so young as he used to be, whom you see so constantly on the move in these poor and depressing streets?" the answer would probably have been, "He will wear himself out, poor devil, as they all do. I give him another five or six years." In the light of all human probability, this would have been a reasonable judgment. Our spectator would have had no reason whatever to suppose that this Episcopal parson, so like so many others in so many ways, would just thirty years later come to the end of a long road that would set him among the princes of the Church, and lead him to the presidency of one of the greatest assemblies that have ever taken place in the history of the Church. God's judgment was not that of the casual

observer; Brent was called out of the obscurity that he had gladly and willingly accepted, and out of the years of darkness he brought with him treasures of light of immense value that were to remain with him for the rest of his life.

In the first place he had become a dedicated man of prayer, with an exceptional awareness of the secret places where even the elect spirits walk with dread, and which are never penetrated by those whose prayers are not more than superficial. He had always been devout; here he learned new and deeper things. The influence on him of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, with its special emphasis on the inner life and its steady discipline in spoken and unspoken prayer, never left him. This is a point to which we shall return.

Secondly, he had learned to get alongside men and women of all sorts, those of backgrounds entirely different from his own, rough types who might well have seemed to have nothing in common with him, and gentler types who could appreciate something of the delicacy of spirit with which he walked among them. Brent accepted men and women as they were, in the three-dimensional reality of their existence: sorrowfully, if they were out of the way, since he had so high an ideal of what it means to be a man; hopefully, because he set no limits to what the grace of God could do for him and for others; charitably, since he knew that he too stood in need of the mercy of God. He was by no means always right in his estimate of others. But those whom he encountered were from the start aware of his utter sincerity; and so he drew to himself friends in every walk and on every level of life. This too was something that never left him; later in life he was to win the awed respect and affection of generals and governors, apparently as easily as he had slipped into the affections of the parishioners of his city mission.

Thirdly, he learned patience. This was not easy for him. He had a quick mind, apt to come rapidly to conclusions, and sometimes to express those conclusions with less than caution. Those who are as sensitive to goodness and beauty as he was are often irritable by temperament, and find it hard to accept the frustrations of delay, the perversity of a universe that just will not go the way we want it to go. Brent could so easily see what ought to happen, set himself with all the impetuosity of devotion to make it happen, and then recoil hurt and crestfallen, because results were so different from those that he had planned. In the work of the ministry that way leads to disaster—an exhausted mind and, not infrequently, an embittered spirit. From his wise colleagues he gradually learned to adapt his rapid pace to the slower movement with which the spirit of God is apparently content. He was willing to wait for the early and for the latter rain. No one, I suppose, ever learns this lesson perfectly; we are all always at school. Brent made progress; like his older contemporary Bishop Creighton, he might have said, in answer to the comment, "My Lord, you don't suffer fools gladly"—"No; but I do suffer them!"

As we have said, when the time came God called his servant out of obscurity. The quality of his mind and spirit had become known through sermons and retreat addresses, and through his first book, *With God in the World*,⁷ a collection of twelve addresses, sent out in the hope that "the book may help a few here and there to take up life's journey with steadier steps and cheerier mien." One door that seemed to be opening out before him was that of a professorship at the General Theological Seminary, New York, a post which he would probably have filled with grace but without great intellectual distinction—he was never a scholar in the technical sense of that term. But this was not the call. In October, 1901, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church elected him to be the first bishop of the new missionary district of the Philippines.

The new world, into which Brent entered without special preparation, was a troubled world. For four centuries the Philippine Islands had been under the rule of Spain. In that period almost the whole population had been Christianized. It may well be maintained that the Christian faith was no more than a veneer; yet the Philippines has become that remarkable phenomenon, a nominally Christian nation, the only one of its kind outside the geographical limits and the thought-world of the West. In any Christian assembly today, the Filipinos stand out as different from all the rest; they are so unmistakably Asians, yet they are unaware of any strong cultural ties other than those that link them to the rest of the Christian world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, dissatisfaction among the Filipinos at the lack of regard for their aspirations shown by their Spanish rulers had resulted in a number of nationalist movements, and in outbreaks of violent rebellion. A sudden change in the political climate elsewhere led to the expulsion of the Spaniards by the Americans, and the American colonial occupation—the first American venture into a sphere that they had somewhat sharply criticized others for entering, and in which they in their turn had to make their own mistakes and buy experience through painful experience. It is not always remembered that this was the moment at which Rudyard Kipling coined the immortal expression, "the white man's burden," in the poem which he directed to the American people on the occasion of the formal annexation of the islands as an American colony. All did not go peaceably. The Filipinos had not revolted against the Spaniards simply in order to find themselves under the unfamiliar rule of the Americans; at the time at which Brent arrived in the islands to begin his work, resistance had not finally died down, and fighting was still in progress. The unflinching desire of the people for independence was part of the background of Christian work throughout the whole period of Brent's missionary service.

Under the Spaniards, Protestantism had been almost completely excluded from the Philippines. Now the barriers were down, and a great many American churches came forward rapidly to enter this new field. Most

7. New York: Longmans, 1899.

of them gave themselves at once to the rather easy task of picking off discontented Roman Catholics and penning them in the various Protestant folds. And at that time there were plenty of discontented Roman Catholics; large churches came rapidly into existence. Very different was the idea of Brent. At this time he manifested a slightly sentimental veneration for the Roman Catholic Church, and a perhaps slightly supercilious distaste for the forms of Protestantism with which he was familiar. It did not prove possible to exclude Roman Catholics who found themselves no longer at home in the church of their origin and were attracted by the ordered and dignified worship of the Episcopal Church. But this work was never the primary aim. Brent found that he had quite enough to occupy him in two other fields of labour which he claimed as his own.

In the first place, there was the increasingly large number of Americans serving in the army or concerned with the civil administration of the country. These responded at once to the efforts of the bishop to provide them with a church and regular worship. Among his friends in this circle were two men who later were to exercise a profound influence on Brent's career: General Pershing, whom he led to accept confirmation in the Episcopal Church, and who many years later was to invite Brent to hold the office of Headquarters' Chaplain to the American troops in France in the First World War—a service which was fruitful in many ways, but was episodic in the general development of the life of Brent and will not be further dealt with in this study; and William Henry Taft, Governor-General of the Philippines, whose action turned a missionary bishop into an international figure.

Brent's other field was among the mountain peoples, who had as yet never been touched by the Gospel. While other missions tended to stay comfortably in the plains and the cities, Brent's little team, inspired by their leader, plunged intrepidly into the vastnesses of the mountains, and founded the Church of Christ in the almost inaccessible villages of the head-hunting Igorots. The mission was established in the face of the greatest difficulties; there it still remains, as evidence of the vision and persistence of the bishop who first planned and prayed and hoped for it. Even more remarkable was Brent's attempt to serve the Muslim Moros, who were unapproachable by any ordinary preaching of the Gospel. His agricultural school on the island of Jolo, established and maintained in the spirit of service, in which the nature of the Christian Gospel was to be expressed in act rather than in the spoken word, showed a spirit of liberality and patience by which Christian missions among Muslims have not always been distinguished.

As a result of the attitude which we have described, and of his concentration on other tasks, Brent missed one great opportunity. The political discontent of the Filipinos was matched by discontent with the Roman Catholic Church and its failure to develop an indigenous priesthood and hierarchy. At the head of this movement of discontent stood two remarkable men,

Isabelo de los Reyes, a layman, and Father Aglipay, a priest. Failing to find any satisfaction in the Roman Church, these men and their followers were led eventually to form the Philippine Independent Church, commonly called the Aglipayan Church. It is curious that, in all the material on Brent that has passed through my hands during the preparation of this lecture, I have found no reference at all to Aglipay and his movement. Perhaps Brent, with that tenderness towards the Roman Church of which I have spoken, felt that it was no part of his business to foster dissent; probably he thought that, like so many other movements of separation from Rome, this would be temporary and transient. Events have turned out very differently from such expectations.

The Philippine Reformers looked widely round the world for help and support in what they regarded as a justifiable movement of reform—and obtained no help from any one of the larger churches of Christendom. Their only encouragement came from the Unitarian churches, with which they were put in contact by Governor-General Taft. For a time, like the Czecho-Slovak national church after the First World War, they came under strong Unitarian influence. More recently, they cleared themselves of such influences and sought fellowship with the American Episcopal Church. After careful negotiations, three of their bishops, who had no other succession than that derived from Father Aglipay, received episcopal consecration in 1946 from three American bishops. The American Church trains the Aglipayan priests in its seminary in Manila, and one of the most recent events in the history of the movement for Church Union has been the establishment of intercommunion between the American Church and the Philippine Independent Church. Other Anglican provinces, with the exception (I think) of the new province of Uganda, have so far taken no action in the matter. It can hardly be doubted that Bishop Brent, if he had lived, would have rejoiced in these developments; it may be that, through lack of necessary information, I have judged his attitude in the matter a little harshly. Still, it is a fact that what claims to be by far the largest non-Roman Christian body in the Philippines was left to struggle on for half a century without any help from that church to which it felt itself most naturally to be akin.

I receive from the documents the impression that Brent was a good rather than a great bishop. There is no question that, wherever he went, men felt the influence of his alert mind and his transcendent goodness; what was true in the Philippines was true also in his second diocese of Western New York, to which he moved in 1919. But there was much in the episcopal office, as understood in the American Church, which was not wholly congenial to him. He was not good at administration, and did it conscientiously rather than willingly. The inevitable round of confirmations and other visitations took much out of him, and often left him tired and with a sense of frustration. Like his great contemporary William Temple he was not a good judge of men; perhaps because he was so good himself,

he read into other men's characters goodness which was not really there. And above all he was away far too much. As he grew to international stature, he was called hither and thither; and his spiritual children, proud of the growing reputation of their bishop, allowed him to go. But the job of a bishop is like that of an editor; he has to be always on the job, if the job is to be done. When Brent's successor reached the Philippines, two years after his departure, he found that he had to build up everything almost from the beginnings. Without Brent's ardour and vision, there would have been no foundations on which to build; patient building on the foundations that he had laid was perhaps not his strongest point.

I have found myself wondering whether Brent did not stay too long in the Philippines. He certainly stayed too long from the point of view of his own health; when he returned to America he was already a very tired man, whose heart was not able to respond to the ceaseless demands that he put upon it; and the last few years were a ceaseless struggle against weakness, patiently and heroically borne. If he stayed at his job, it was not for lack of opportunities elsewhere. In 1912 he was called to be Provost of this College. He considered the offer very seriously, but in the end turned it down—wisely, I think. He was not an academic, and for all his love of young people, I doubt that he would have been happy in the administrative tasks and the official status that are inseparable from such office in an academic body. Twice he was elected Bishop of Washington. It would be presumptuous to question the decisions of a holy and humble man, yet I find myself wishing that he had accepted; it would have been, humanly speaking, the ideal job for him; he could have had the necessary help in those parts of the work that were not congenial to him, and at that central focus of the nation's life, he would have found a notable vocation as the spokesman of the Christian cause and the Christian case. When at last he returned to his own country, it was to the diocese of Western New York, an exacting rather than exciting task, that he went. On the evidence of those who worked with him, he brought back new life to a diocese that had become depressed and anæmic in its spiritual life; yet it is hard not to think that he might have lived longer and done greater work in a rather different setting.

The Philippines held him, and yet could not hold him. I have already mentioned his friendship with Mr. Taft, later President of the United States. It was this friendship, and the confidence felt by the Governor-General in his bishop, that first brought Brent on to the international stage. Before he had been long in the Philippines he became aware of the terrible evils connected with the traffic in narcotics and their use by a large section of the population. He set himself to studying carefully the facts and the history of the problem, and became convinced that only through the action of governments could the worst evils be stayed. It was largely through his pleading that plans were made for international action, and when the time came it was only natural that he should be appointed as the American representative

to the international conference that met in Shanghai in 1909. We are so familiar with action of this kind that it is hard for us to realize what a portent it was fifty years ago. That many nations, of different backgrounds and traditions, should meet in the persons of their representatives and attempt to find a solution for an age-long problem was something almost unheard of. That one great nation should choose an ecclesiastic as its representative was a nine days' wonder. And, as a climax of improbabilities, Brent was chosen by general consent as the chairman of the proceedings.

This was just the beginning of a long crusade. Two years later an even more important international meeting was held at the Hague; once again Brent was chosen to preside—a most remarkable testimony to his wisdom and fairness as a master of assemblies. It was here that he learned new lessons of patience and diplomacy that were to stand him in good stead in very different spheres. Brent was a crusader; he saw what ought to be done, and found it very hard to endure what he regarded as the pusillanimity of other representatives who could not go as far and as fast as he. Some of the delegates, so loud in their admiration of the urbanity and kindness of their chairman, might have been startled, could they have read some of the remarks that he made about them in the privacy of his personal diary. It was a long, slow battle. But the cause was not lost. Brent's last appearance in this field was in 1924, when the committee of the League of Nations for the control of narcotics met in Geneva. Once again Brent was disappointed by the attitude of some of the representatives of the nations. Seeing clearly that evil was evil, he felt that the necessary steps to eliminate it should be taken courageously and without delay; it was not always easy for him to understand the hesitations of others, or to recognize that politicians, committed to the wise maxim that statesmanship is the art of the possible, might have to move more slowly than their own convictions recommended. But the achievement was permanent; at no point was the work of the League of Nations more effective than at this, and the United Nations has inherited this service and responsibility as one of the best legacies from the past of international activity for the welfare of men. The battle is far from being at an end, as the lamentable statistics of drug-addiction constantly remind us. As long as the craving for drugs is as strong as it is, and as long as men are prepared to run great risks in view of the fantastic rewards offered by their nefarious traffic, nations, statesmen, and churches will have to pay the price in unflinching vigilance and effort. It may be that few of those engaged in this service remember the name of the American churchman to whom historically they are so deeply indebted; it is right that we of the churches should keep alive the memory of what he attempted and what he achieved.

Brent being what he was, it was almost inevitable that he should be selected as one of the twenty-one representatives of the American Episcopal Church to attend the first World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in the summer of 1910, and that he should be chosen to address the great assembly on the sufficiency of God. No one, least of all Brent himself, could

have foreseen the momentous results that were to follow from his presence at that conference. Letters and addresses from the previous ten years show that the question of Christian union had increasingly come to play a part in his concerns. Faced with the problems of the Philippines, he had been driven to see that, if we wish to win whole nations for the Gospel, we cannot do so on the basis of a fragmented and therefore weakened presentation of that Gospel. The unity of the Church of Christ is a divine and imperative necessity. It was at Edinburgh that the disciple received the call to be an apostle.

Like everyone else who was at Edinburgh, Brent was deeply stirred by his experiences. He has himself placed it on record that "I was converted. I learned that something was working that was not of man in the Conference; that the Spirit of God . . . was preparing a new epoch in the history of Christianity."⁸ In his mind this epoch was connected with a call to establish Christian unity, of which the churches for the most part were wholly unaware. To this he referred in a passage in his public speech that seems to have been overlooked by the majority of historians:

Our ideal as it is in our minds to achieve a perfect unity, not merely the unity of the various portions of Christendom here represented, but the whole of Christendom. It is for us to shame Rome out of her proud loneliness; it is for us to startle the Greek Church out of her starved orthodoxy. That is the task before us. Let us be satisfied with nothing less, and we cannot be satisfied with anything less, because God is our sufficiency.⁹

Here we encounter an interesting illustration of the difficulty of arriving at accurate history, even when we are dealing with such recent events as these. All questions of faith and order had been rigidly excluded from the Edinburgh programme, and rightly since this was an assembly not of the churches but of the missionary societies. None of the official records give any hint that Brent had at any time stated in public his conviction that this limitation, right and proper in these circumstances, ought in other circumstances to be transcended. But Dr. J. H. Oldham, the secretary of the Conference, is convinced that Brent did make a brief speech to this effect in one of the Conference discussions. In a letter to Dr. Richey Hogg, dated 12 June 1950, Dr. Oldham writes:

There is no doubt in my mind that Bishop Brent raised this issue at the Edinburgh Conference. It is one of two or three hundred seven-minute speeches that stands out vividly in my memory. . . . Bishop Brent . . . went on to say that while questions of faith and order were rightly excluded from the purview of that conference, they must, in a different context, be frankly and openly faced. . . . We must not rest content with co-operation between separated bodies. The

8. Quoted from Brent's private diary. His diaries for 1901-06 and 1909-29 have been deposited in the Library of Congress. On these and other papers, cf. *Bishop Charles Henry Brent: A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1959).

9. *World Missionary Conference, 1910*. Vol. XI: *The History and Records of the Conference* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, n.d.), p. 334.

causes of separation must be examined with a view to their removal. He also made it clear that he felt about this so strongly that he intended to do something about it.¹⁰

Students of the form-criticism of the Gospels will immediately appreciate this testimony to the significance of the oral tradition. We depend entirely on the memory of one man, writing forty years after the event. Yet I see no reason to doubt the accuracy of Dr. Oldham's memory; and, though it is unlikely that he remembered many of the bishop's actual words, I am confident that what we now have is a substantially accurate report of what he said. Though no one knew it at the time, "Faith and Order" had been born.

Dr. Oldham is clear that Brent did not at that time propose the holding of a conference, and this is confirmed by evidence from Brent himself. He notes that it was on the first day of the General Convention of his church, held at Cincinnati in October, 1910, that, kneeling at the early celebration of the Holy Communion, he received the conviction that a conference must be held to discuss frankly and in charity precisely those matters on which the churches were disagreed. From this time on events moved rapidly. On the very next day, in a mass meeting held in connection with the Convention, Brent for the first time proposed the idea of a World Conference on Faith and Order. A day or two later a committee was appointed to consider the question. On 19 October a commission was appointed to promote the World Conference, and naturally Brent was a member of the commission. The first step, the step that counts, had been taken.

At a distance of fifty years, it is hard for us to understand how great a spirit of adventure was involved in the proposal and in the decision of the General Convention to implement it. Until the formation of the continuation committee of the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, the non-Roman Christian world had had literally no permanent organ of any kind for international and interchurch action. Such action was held by many to be impossible, and by many others to be undesirable. It could not be said that there were no precedents. In connection with other lectures, I have lately been re-reading the records of the Colloquy of Ratisbon in 1541 and the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561, the failure of which set the seal on the division of western Europe into Catholic and Protestant worlds. The pages of the *History of the Ecumenical Movement* are studded with the record of similar ventures, always with the melancholy conclusion of failure. Yet for a century or more, men had sunk down into the timid conclusion that it is better to talk only of those things on which we are agreed, and to let the differences fade into insignificance in face of a common loyalty to Jesus Christ. The other great ecumenical movement, "Life and Work," came into being on the basis that "doctrine divides, service unites." Faith and order are precisely the most sensitive areas in the life of the churches; to challenge discussion on such matters could hardly be other than dangerous, and might be disastrous. The attitude of perhaps a majority of leaders in the Christian world was expressed

10. W. Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations* (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 398.

by one of them in these words: "If they meet, they will do nothing but quarrel and scratch one another's eyes out. They had much better stay at home." It was only through the faith that moves mountains that the dream became actuality, the vision a historic event.

To the credit of the Anglican Churches let it be said that in the formative period Faith and Order was almost exclusively an Anglican concern. To the honour of the American Church let it be said plainly that for ten years the inspiration, the finances, and the endless diligence in detailed administration came from that comparatively small section of the Church of Christ. And in this matter the heart and soul of the American Church was Charles Henry Brent.

The story of the preparations for the First World Conference of Faith and Order has often been written, though not yet perhaps with the fulness that it deserves. Plans are being made to write the life of Robert Hallowell Gardiner, the devoted layman who until his death in 1924 served as secretary of the movement. He it was who wrote most of the thousands of letters that formed an essential part of the preparation, and who issued from his office those modest little Faith and Order booklets, which in many languages kept the faithful abreast of progress. When his life has been written, we shall be able to follow in fuller detail the ebb and flow of thought and the endless patience without which the work could never have been accomplished. The First World War delayed all the proceedings; in the end, seventeen years were to pass between the first moment of inspiration and the day on which the World Conference convened. Through all these years Brent was endlessly busy with other concerns in three continents; yet perhaps Faith and Order was the darling of his heart, and amidst all other preoccupations he found time for service to it—attending meetings, travelling widely, interviewing church leaders, softening prejudice, dispelling illusions, creating confidence, and contributing perhaps more than any other man to the creation of that climate of mutual trust and joyful expectation without which the Conference would have been wholly other than it was.

We pass over the intervening years to the assembling of the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne. The Conference opened on 3 August 1927. Three hundred and eighty-five men and women from one hundred and eight churches had assembled. The conference was overwhelmingly Western; there were only a few representatives of Asia and Africa, and some parts of the world were not represented at all. The Orthodox were there in fair strength; the Roman Catholics were not officially represented, though one or two unofficial observers followed the proceedings with attention. The first impression received, as we look down the list of delegates, is of the extraordinary distinction of those who had come to represent their churches. It seemed that the churches had sent their very best. If we look only at the Anglican list, we find there such names as Charles Gore, a little aged but still with a powerful mind, and still perhaps the most influential man in the whole Church of England; Arthur Cayley Headlam,

Bishop of Gloucester, at least as learned as Gore, but with a different kind of mind, cautious, shrewd, impatient of artifice or evasion, a little cold—he was once heard to say, “I deprecate any reference to the work of the Holy Spirit”—but amazingly effective in the assemblies of the Church; Edwin James Palmer, Bishop of Bombay, acute and fertile in resource, chief author of that notable document, the Constitution of the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon, and one of the principal architects of the Church of South India; Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, Bishop of Dornakal, who was here, as so often, to speak in moving tones of the need of the younger churches for union. He who would preside over such an assembly of giants must himself be a giant. In all his life Brent never received a greater compliment than in the clearly expressed will of this great gathering that he should be its chairman.

The exact extent of Brent’s contribution to the Conference will never be known, unless his diaries are published in full. On the surface, that contribution was notable. He preached the opening sermon. He presided whenever his health allowed it—he was already a sick man, and had insisted that the work of chairing must be shared with his deputy chairman, Dr. A. E. Garvie. His chairmanship was marked by firmness, grace, and humour, but above all by a determination that the delegates should not forget that they were met in God’s presence, and that the business with which they were concerned was divine. Opening one of the plenary sessions, he remarked:

You and I must put ourselves in the right relationship to God. I am as strongly convinced on many subjects as the rest of you, but I am anxious to get rid of prejudice and ignorance, and it is for us, in a way that perhaps we have never done before, to put ourselves at the disposal of God, to give our minds and our judgment and our hearts into His hands that He may sway us whither He will.¹¹

But this external and visible presence was perhaps the least of the services that Brent rendered. All such conferences are fraught with endless difficulties and dangers; Lausanne 1927 was no exception. Many delegates had come without any clear idea of the purpose of the Conference. There was a danger that the Conference might break up without doing anything except record differences, and this would have been a lamentable conclusion to so many years of work. As it was, four groups, with the Orthodox leading, found it necessary to send in separate statements defining their attitude to the Conference and its work; if this process of fragmentation had continued, the unity of the Conference would have been gravely impaired. Behind the scenes Brent was tirelessly active. Injured feelings had to be soothed, sensitivities attended to, misunderstandings cleared away. One group threatened to put forward resolutions which would have had the effect of an ultimatum, and would have split the Conference from top to bottom; it was only after long hours of patient discussion and explanation that they could be persuaded to take a less militant road to their end. At the very end, the

11. H. N. Bate (ed.), *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), pp. 33f.

Report of Section 7 on "The Unity of Christendom and the Relation thereto of existing churches" ran into very stormy water. Only consummate handling by the chairman steered the Conference away from a damaging crisis; on his suggestion, the report was accepted *nemine contradicente*, but handed on to the Continuation Committee for further consideration. All this work took a heavy toll of Brent's limited strength. Nothing of this was allowed to appear outwardly; his unflinching spiritual strength had the mastery over physical weakness, and many bore witness to the quiet, radiant simplicity with which he carried out all his duties. The price paid was heavier than at the time he or any one else understood.

Lausanne 1927 had met, had deliberated, and had departed. It had accepted six reports, and in part accepted a seventh. It had appointed a strong continuation committee in the expectation that other similar conferences would be held. All this constituted a major achievement. But the really great thing that had happened was that the Conference had met. Christians from the most varied backgrounds had come together and made friends; under all the disagreements—and there was no tendency at all to forget the disagreements or to play them down—they had discovered the range and the power of Christian agreement. This was a *Christian* conference. The lordship of Christ might be understood in different terms and confessed in a variety of tones, yet this lordship of the unseen head of the Church was the great reality, believing in which the delegates came together, and with a strengthened belief in which they went their several ways. There was no doubt in the mind of anyone present as to the identity of the chief architect, under God, of this great building. Brent would have claimed no monopoly of merit; he was always unflinching in his recognition of the services of those who in countless ways had made the great achievement possible. But it was in the mind of one man that the great vision had dawned; in the providence of God it was that same man who was called to serve as the hand and the voice of the churches, as they met to seek closer fellowship with one another. And the work was well done; the original inspiration has not yet faded, and we take it for granted today that "Faith and Order" is part of the life of every church that is not prepared simply to live unto itself, without regard for the larger reality of the Church in the world.

Brent had ruled with wisdom and courtesy over this great assembly. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he hardly ever worked again. When the Conference ended he was an exhausted, broken man. Though he was given another eighteen months of life, these months were really only a prolonged time of preparation for death, and Brent knew it. As may be supposed it was no coward's soul that prepared itself for the inevitable end. In his last article, written less than two months before his death, Brent wrote courageously of the world as it is seen from the brink of eternity:

My experience of the past twelve months and more has shown me that the Valley of the Shadow of Death is a highly illumined valley, and is more akin to a mountain top which reveals long views and endless vistas, than it is to a

place of gloom. It is not with any sense of fear, but with an extraordinary clearness in one's estimate of values that one views the world from the edge of the grave. . . . I would say that it has given me a new zest for life as we know it, and a yearning desire to live longer in this world which is so full of extraordinary wealth in thought and idealism, so abundant in its opportunities for adventure, and so full of God and his purpose. So what I say will not be in any sense valetudinarian but rather as I hope as youth might view it, and with an unbounded expectation for the coming generation and those who share with its best aspirations.¹²

Warm-hearted friends had arranged for Brent a Mediterranean cruise to take place in the spring of 1929. But it was not to be. He had reached Switzerland, and there most appropriately the end came in the place of his crowning glory. He died peacefully in Lausanne, in the early hours of 27 March 1929. The last entry in his diary was no profound theological reflection; it read, "Cambridge walked away from Oxford in the boat-race, winning by 7½ lengths"—surely the remark of a man utterly at peace with his God and to the last intensely interested in every facet of human life. Before his death Brent had given instructions that he was to be buried wherever the end might come; and so, once again surely most appropriately, the tired body awaits the resurrection in the place which more than any other in the world is associated with the name of Charles Henry Brent.

The records leave no doubt that Brent was a man of power; to this almost all who knew him are enthusiastic witnesses. It remains to assess the secret of his power.

Its origin was certainly not to be found in superlative natural endowment. One who knew him well writes that "in his earlier days he was quite inconspicuous and almost inarticulate. He was struggling then with the sense of his own limitations." There is no reason to doubt that he enjoyed his school and college days here in Ontario as any reasonably healthy boy and student does; but there was at that time no sign either of outstanding ability or exceptional promise. If, during his time here at Trinity, one of his friends or teachers had been asked to pick out that one in his generation who would go furthest and reach the highest pinnacle of distinction, it is most unlikely that the choice would have fallen upon Brent. Clearly he was one of those "quite average" people, who have been inspired by the Spirit of God to do far more than average work.

Brent was not a scholar. The kind of life that he led was hardly compatible with precise and technical scholarship. He was a widely read man, who used his opportunities for reading with discretion, and pillaged the resources of his memory for the illumination of his sermons and addresses. It is typical that each chapter of his Paddock Lectures, published under the title *Adventure for God*,¹³ is headed by a quotation from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*—a charming conceit. The quotations are well chosen ("In many

12. F. W. Kates (ed.), *Things that Matter: The Best of the Writings of Bishop Brent* (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 24.

13. New York: Longmans, 1905.

strange adventures have I been in this quest. And so either told other of their adventures"—surely it is Brent himself who is here speaking); and perhaps it is not without significance that almost all the quotations have reference to Sir Galahad.

It is relevant in this connection to note the stress that Brent, in these lectures as often elsewhere, lays on the imagination:

Theology is the queen of sciences only so far as it is humanized and made to blend with the divine in man and on earth. Melt your theology into poetry. . . . Our modern world is a world of facts and things, and for this very reason the pulpit should be all aglow with imaginative skill. . . . Neglect the imagination and you offer an affront to faith—I do not hesitate to say so, for I believe the imagination to be as truly divine as the reason in conjunction with which it is to be used. . . . The missionary more than other men, perhaps, stands in need of imaginative development.¹⁴

He was obedient to his own counsel; to the end he was always striving to cultivate his own imagination. To this was due in part his imaginative sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men.

Brent was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a great preacher. In almost every one of his published sermons it is possible to find striking and impressive sayings, enriching insights. But he lacked constructive capacity; the sermons are not as a rule architectural wholes. This is true, notably, of his sermon at the opening of the Lausanne Conference. The delegates had come with great expectations; the records echo with carefully muted disappointment. It is easy to understand why this was so. Brent said exactly what needed to be said, but the form lacks distinction and vigour. Short staccato sentences, unmarked by any clear or impressive rhythm, follow one another in rapid succession. Transitions of thought are not clearly marked. It must have been difficult for the hearers to follow what the sermon was really about. This was the sermon of a tired, sick man, but it only reveals in an extreme degree the weaknesses that had been present in Brent's preaching from the beginning, and were rarely completely absent. But this is not to say that his sermons are without value today. His preaching is not markedly dated; where it is so, this is rather through the quotations which he employs and the contemporary allusions which he makes. He is dealing for the most part with the eternal in the soul of man and in the revelation of God, and therefore much of what he has to say is as relevant and as moving as when the words were first written.

What is true of the sermons is equally true of the books. Most of these are, in point of fact, sermons and lectures written up (or in many cases taken directly) from stenographic reports. Few had received careful revision by the author before being sent to the press. In the circumstances of Brent's life this was almost inevitable. We have referred already to the way in which *The Mount of Vision* came to be written, and in this, one of his latest books, we note the same faults as in the sermons—the procession of short,

14. *Adventure for God*, pp. 121-4.

breathless sentences, the paragraphs which seem to have strayed away from their natural home, the imperfect mastery of the theme. Brent would have replied, I think, that to him the all-important thing was to get his message across as effectively as possible, and that questions of arrangement and form were necessarily secondary. Perhaps he was right. Yet I do not think that any man with an ear keenly trained to rhythm, and a mind carefully disciplined in the relation to form, would ever have allowed these books to go out as they stand. He would somehow have found the time to put them in better shape. But, if he had been the man to do this, his name would not have been Charles Henry Brent!

The world recognized Brent as a saint. Yet he was anything but a ready-made saint. We have already mentioned his sense of his own limitations. These were many; his saintliness was in fact the glow of his triumph over the handicaps which to the end of his life were always there.

Brent was essentially a lonely man. The devotion of his sisters provided him over many years with a home—but it was not quite the kind of home that he longed to have. To this there is one touching allusion in a book published in 1906:

I shall remain unable to tell you why a child's life conquers me whenever I come close to it, why its caresses are a sacrament of benediction, why, if it were within my power to choose, I would live out my days among young children.¹⁵

Of the loneliness of the missionary life he gives an occasional hint:

Loneliness among a people who baffle our efforts to understand them is loneliness indeed.¹⁶

The documents available to me give no single hint as to why Brent never married; but it is clear that there was an emotional vacuum in his life that even the closest and most varied of friendships could not wholly fill.

With loneliness came depression. The references to this in his diary and in the recollections of his friends are unceasing. On the last night of the first year of his episcopate he wrote in his diary (31 December 1902): "There was no call for worry and yet I have worried." These words may be taken almost as setting the pattern of his life. In part the depressions were simply the expression of physical and nervous weariness; Brent drove himself too hard, and indignant nature took her revenge. A brief rest would often set him to rights, and he would resume work with confidence restored. But it is probable also that the early diffidence always remained, though successfully hidden in later years; an extremely high ideal of effectiveness, an exacting conscience, uncertainty of his capacity to deal with the unknown—all these probably combined to create an almost unvarying element of tension in everything that he did.

Depression was naturally accompanied by irritation. The sharp temper and the barbed tongue were probably always there, though increasingly

15. *Liberty, and Other Sermons* (New York: Longmans, 1906), p. 127.

16. *Adventure for God*, p. 124.

under the control of the spirit in later years. Brent's saintliness was born of conflict; it was a supernatural gift, rather than the development of some natural and latent powers. Nothing will account for it save the self-discipline of a mind and will steadily and consciously directed towards God. This was the gift of imperishable value that Father Hall and his friends in the early days in Boston had given him. They had taught him the necessity of discipline in the Christian life; they had shown him what it means to live continually in the presence of God. Brent has often been referred to as a mystic. This is a question-begging term; but I ask leave to doubt that he had any of the so-called mystical gifts, any natural propensity for dwelling in the hidden and interior world. I believe that he was an ordinary, believing Christian, who by ceaseless hard work attained to a certainty of God such as would be within the reach of every one of us, if we worked as hard as he did. He constantly affirmed that the work of prayer was extremely difficult; if he persisted steadfastly in it, that was not because it was natural and congenial to him, but because it was the only road to the goal that he so earnestly desired—the fellowship of a dedicated will with the God who had revealed himself as Father and Saviour.

Dean Zabriskie gives us some amazing information as to Brent's practice of the life of prayer. "Whenever possible he spent from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 in meditation; from 7:00 to 7:30 in prayer; from 7:30 to 8:30 in study."¹⁷ Even during the exhausting days of the Lausanne Conference, he never spent less than an hour in prayer in the early morning. One who has read his sermons and devotional books might have guessed this. Nevertheless it comes as a sobering shock to find that a busy bishop, an international figure concerned with all the great questions of the day, should have thought it right to maintain, and should have succeeded in maintaining, such a division of his time. This was the secret of his strength, and of the quiet, tranquil diligence under which the inner fears and sufferings were for the most part hidden away. This was the secret of all the great men of that generation. Brent was of the same period as John R. Mott, Robert P. Wilder, Robert E. Speer, and the other founders of the Student Movement and the modern missionary movement in America. They were all men who knew what it meant to take literally everything to the Lord in prayer, and who took seriously the maxim endlessly impressed upon us by the spiritual writers, that prayer is the greatest of all the tasks in which the human spirit can engage. Brent was at home in the sanctuary; that was why so many men and women of all sorts and kinds found to their astonishment that Brent had opened for them too the door of the sanctuary and had made it possible for them to be at home with God.

It was Brent's custom, in his times of meditation, to write down the prayers that sprang from that day's thoughts and experiences. A great many of these have been preserved. To the biographer these intimate revelations

17. Alexander C. Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent, Crusader for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. 201.

are of the utmost value; they provide a running commentary on the external events that he is describing. To our own perhaps more reticent generation they are from time to time embarrassing. Yet if, on the last page of our study of Brent, we desire to write words that may fittingly serve as his epitaph, we can find none more suitable than those that are found in one of his own prayers:

In hours of hardship preserve me from self-pity and endow me with the warrior's mind, that even in the heat of battle I may be inspired with the sense of vocation, and win the peace of the victor.

But perhaps the very last word of all may fittingly rest with Malory, in the quotation found at the head of Brent's concluding Paddock Lecture:

Now may we well prove that we have not lost our pains.