

## HE WHO IS SENT

## EDITORIAL

AT Hawkesyard Priory, where THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT is edited from, we are in the middle of having a new heating system installed. Of the maze of pipes which make up the system, both mains and branch, some are known as *flow* and some as *return*; and of the *flow* pipes some are known as *risers*, since they carry the water up to the higher levels of the building. A ceaseless movement of flow and return, of rising up and sinking back, is what makes the system. The same is true of the Christian religion. Its life consists in a ceaseless movement of flow and return. But there is this rather important difference; the heart, indeed the hearth, of our heating system is down in the boiler-room underneath the building, so that the flow is in general a movement of rising upwards, and the return a movement of sinking back down again. The Christian life on the other hand has its heart, its sacred hearth up above with God in heaven, so that the flow of divine life is in general a movement downwards, and the return is a rising back up again.

The water will not move round the system unless it is sent round by the heat of the fire and by a pump. In the same way life only circulates in the Church of God because there is a divine impulse sending it down and drawing it back up again. It is through our Lord that life has been given to the world; but in order to give life he had to come down; and in order to come down he had to be sent. 'Mission' is just a special word for sending; we might say of our Lord that he came into the world on a mission from his Father. He was sent by the Father to come down *to* us, in order to return to the Father *with* us. To return to the Father with Christ is what the Christian life means for us, who have received that life from the Son sent down to us from the Father. We are meant to return to the Father in order to share the divine life itself, that timeless, motionless, flow and return within the godhead itself which we call the processions of the divine Persons, the eternal coming forth of the Son from the Father and of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son. It is to bring us men into that close eternal life of divine flow and return

that God sent his Son and his Holy Spirit, in time, in a wider movement of flow and return into the world.

But a condition of our returning with Christ to the Father is that we should share, at least in principle, in his being sent forth from the Father, share in his mission to the world. Christian life means being caught up in the flow as well as the return of the life that issues from the throne of God. This flow and return of the Christian life expresses itself in the twin virtue of charity: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole strength and thy whole mind'; that is the return to God, and is the essence of the Christian life. But it is meaningless and unreal, the whole impetus of the return is checked unless you enter into the flow of charity from God to men by 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

As the Father sent his Son, so the Son sends his disciples. He sends his Church, and his Church in all its members, not simply in the pope and the bishops and the missionaries, but in all the faithful, to continue his mission. He makes his Church capable of being sent effectively by sending upon it his Holy Spirit. There are two important things, then, to remember about the missions, the sendings. The first is that the centre of missionary activity, in the narrow sense of missions to the infidels, is not the mother house of this or that missionary society, not the sacred congregation for the propagation of the faith, not the pope himself; but it is rather the very throne of God where Christ sits in glory at the right hand of the Father. For mission is not primarily a spreading abroad of Christian doctrine on the horizontal plane, but a sending down vertically of divine life from above.

And the second thing to remember is that we are all of us missionaries by the very nature of our calling as Christians; missionaries in varying degrees and manners, but real missionaries none the less. If we are not so in fact, if the missionary spirit in the wide but true sense of love of our neighbour and zeal for the house of God is sinking low in any part or group of the Church, it means that the flow and return of divine life is growing sluggish in that part of the Church, is being obstructed by some air-lock or some accumulation of rubbish in the system. It means, in our Lord's own terrible words, that 'the charity of many is growing cold'.