

# The Ministerial Commission, a Trust From Christ for the Benefit of His People

by J.H. Newman

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*The Ministerial Commission is a trust from Christ for the benefit of His people, and Ministers are responsible to be faithful stewards of God's mysteries and to be Ambassadors for Christ.*

**Scripture:** Daniel 9:7, Luke 10:16, John 20:23, 2 Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 4:11

**Topics:** "Church Leadership", "Ministerial Duty"

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## Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the strength of the Church of God in times of trial, emphasizing the importance of humbly acknowledging sins and imperfections while also firmly relying on God's promises. He highlights the duty of the clergy to magnify their office not for personal exaltation but for the benefit of the people, as ambassadors of Christ entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Newman urges the clergy to faithfully proclaim the message of forgiveness and redemption, guarding the sacred treasure of their commission for the edification of the Church and the glory of God.

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## Transcript

IT will be acknowledged by all who have followed the Jewish Church through her days of suffering, and who have learnt the deep feeling of our own impressive Litany, that the main strength of the Church of GOD, in her times of trial and danger, is in the lowliness of her humiliation before her heavenly guardian for her many imperfections and sins. But there is another element of her strength, which, it is to be feared, is sometimes forgotten, though not less essential to her character; I mean, her firm and unshaken reliance upon the promises of GOD made to her. We find in Daniel's prayer the most heart-broken confessions of sin in the name of his Church and people; but, at the same time, there is throughout a stedfast hope of GOD'S mercy, as pledged to His holy city and temple. "O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of face, as at this day; to our kinds, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee." "O LORD, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. O LORD, hear: O LORD, forgive; O LORD, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my GOD: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy Name." It can scarcely be necessary to remind the members of our own Church, how beautifully the close of her Litany breaches the spirit of Daniel's prayer: how, in the midst of reiterated supplications for GOD'S forgiveness and mercy, now addressed more especially to the

SON, now to the FATHER, now to every person of the Blessed and Holy Trinity, now in the prevailing words which CHRIST Himself has taught us-supplications so deeply expressive of "the sighing of a contrite heart, the desire of such as be sorrowful,"-there still breaks in a gleam of faith and hope in the memory of the noble works which we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, a strong yet humble confidence, that GOD will yet again arise and help us, and deliver us for His Name's sake, and for His Honour.

Now this is a point which it is of great importance to have strongly impressed upon our minds; because it is to be feared, that there are many of our brethren, in the present day, who allow the thoughts of present and past transgressions, of our own sins, and those of our fathers, to banish entirely the remembrance of the glorious promises and privileges which belong to us. They see so much neglected, and so much to be done, that they think it were better for us each to work apart in lonely humiliation, "in fear and in much trembling," than to endeavour to magnify our office and cheer one another with the songs of Zion. now, I would ask, if this notion exist in any of our brethren, whether, under the semblance of good, it does not argue something of mistaken feeling, and that in more than one essential point.

1. Does not this opinion seem to imply the supposition that the dignity conferred on the Ministerial Office, is something given for the exaltation of the Clergy, and not for the benefit of the people? as if there were a different interest in the two orders, and, in maintaining their Divine appointment, the Clergy would make themselves "lords over GOD'S heritage?" I do not now enter upon the point, that to magnify the office is not necessarily to exalt the individual who bears it; nay, that the thought which will most deeply humble the individual, most oppress him with the overwhelming sense of his own sufficiency, is the consciousness "into how high a dignity, and to how weight an office and charge" he has been called; an office "of such excellency, and of so great difficulty."

I would now rather ask, for whose benefit this high and sacred Office has been instituted. For the Clergy, or for the people? The Apostle will decide this point: "He gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of CHRIST." (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." (I Cor. iii. 21.) And this, it should be well observed, the Apostle says on purpose to put an end to that exaltation of individuals, which the Church of Corinth had fallen into from forgetting that their pastors and teachers were all "Ministers of CHRIST," Ministers by whom they believed "even as the LORD gave to every man."

And so again to the same Church, and in reference to the same subject, St. Paul says, "All things are for YOUR sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of GOD." (2 Cor. iv. 15.) Scripture then is express upon this point, that whatever power and grace CHRIST has given to His Ministers, He has given them for the good of His people, and the glory of His heavenly FATHER. And do not our own understandings and consciences bear witness to the same truth?

For what is our commission? Is it not a "Ministry of reconciliation?"-"to wit, that GOD was in CHRIST, reconciling the world unto Himself;" and hath committed to us the proclamation of the pardon? Let us put the case on which the Apostle's language is founded; the case, I mean, of a people in rebellion against their Sovereign, visited with the news that their king is willing, nay, even anxiously desirous to grant them forgiveness and favour. In such a case, would not the first question be, what authority does this report go upon? who are the persons who bring it? is it merely a matter of their individual belief, or are they duly authorized and commissioned from the Court; are they come as volunteers, or have they been sent by

their Master?

"Now then WE are Ambassadors for CHRIST;" we are sent to "bring good tidings and to publish peace," "to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and if we allow our commission to be questioned, nay, if we do not most unequivocally and prominently assert it, whom are we robbing? not ourselves of honour, but the people, to whom we are sent, of the blessedness and joy of knowing, that GOD "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" and that, in token of this desire, He "hath given power and commandment to His Ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins."

We are sent to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn; and it is the meek, and the broken-hearted, and the mourners, that will feel the loss, if our blessed Office be set at nought, or disregarded. Let us well consider this point. There is a humble and fearful member of CHRIST'S flock, who desires to strengthen and refresh his soul by the Body and Blood of CHRIST; but he cannot quiet his own conscience; he requires further comfort and counsel.

Surely it is to his comfort, that there is a duly commissioned Minister of GOD'S Word at hand; to whom he may come and open his grief, and receive the benefit of the sentence of GOD'S pardon, and so prepare himself to approach the holy Table "with a full trust in GOD'S mercy, and with a quiet conscience;" and thus draw near with faith, and take that holy Sacrament to his comfort. And then again when he lieth sick upon his bed, does not his SAVIOUR "make all his bed in his sickness," when his Minister comes to him, to receive the confession of his sins, and to relieve his conscience of the "weighty" things which press it down: and then, ("if he humbly and heartily desire it,") by virtue of CHRIST'S authority committed to him, assures him of the pardon of all his sins, that so, as his sufferings abound, his consolation also may abound through CHRIST; and as his outward man perisheth, the inward man may be renewed day by day.

How then ought we to look upon the power which has been given us by CHRIST, but as a sacred treasure, of which we are Ministers and Stewards; and which it is our duty to guard for the sake of those little ones, for whose edification (2 Cor. xiii. 10.) it was that our LORD left power with His Church. And if we suffer it to be lost to our Christian brethren, how shall we answer it, not only to those that might now rejoice in its holy comfort, but to those also who are to come after us? "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and unto all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our GOD shall call."

2. But if we are thus bound by our duty to the Christian flock, are we not also still more solemnly bound by our obligation to its Chief Shepherd, and Bishop? For we are "Ministers of CHRIST and Stewards of the mysteries of GOD;" and "in Stewards it is required that a man be found faithful." It becomes us, therefore well to consider and know, what is the full amount of the riches which have been committed to our care; what is the height and depth of the Mysteries which have been entrusted to our keeping; for we serve a Master who will strictly require at our hands every talent that He has left with us, and rigorously examine whether we have been afraid and hid it in a napkin, or have diligently put it out to usury and turned it to full account.

Let us turn our thoughts again to the representation, which St. Paul gives us, of our character and calling, "We are Ambassadors for CHRIST." Now what should we think of the Ambassador of an earthly king, who when he came among the people to whom he was sent, should seem to regard it as a matter of slight importance, whether he were indeed commissioned or not, or appear willing to conceal the full powers

with which he was vested, and speak only as an individual? Would this be to be faithful to him that appointed him? would his Master own him as a "good and faithful servant?"

And if we are Ambassadors for CHRIST, His "deputies for the reducing of man to the obedience of GOD," we must follow the example which our Master has set us, and, as He was, so must we be in this world. For He has Himself declared to us, "as My FATHER hath sent me, even so send I you." How then did CHRIST fulfil the office which His FATHER had committed to Him? Let us look to His discourses as recorded in St. John's Gospel, and to the solemn prayer with which He concluded His earthly Ministry.

We there find Him again and again proclaiming that He had been sent from the FATHER; it was for this end that He prayed so earnestly for the unity and holiness of His Church, that the world might believe that the FATHER had sent Him; it was because His chosen disciples had believed that the FATHER had sent Him, that He poured forth such fervent thanksgivings on their behalf. "I am not come of Myself, but He sent Me." "I have not spoken of Myself, but the FATHER which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak."

They have known that all things are of Thee; they have known that I came out from Thee; they have believed that Thou didst send Me." Thus did CHRIST stand in the midst of His generation as an Apostle, as one sent from GOD; and so must His deputies likewise stand among their brethren; as men sent to a rebellious house, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, speaking with authority-"as though GOD did beseech you by us, we pray you in CHRIST'S stead, be ye reconciled unto GOD."

And if we are asked by what authority we speak, and who gave us this authority, we have our credentials at hand; "whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." (Vid. St. John xx. St. Matt. xviii St. Luke x.)

If ever, then, we are tempted to be ashamed of CHRIST and of His words, or to allow His high and heavenly mission to be thought lightly of in the person of His Deputies and Ministers, let us remember, that it is no matter of personal consideration, that two sacred interests are involved, the glory of GOD, and the edifying of His people. Let us remember that, as CHRIST received of the FATHER "a commandment," so we too have received a commandment from Him, the "commandment" as well as the "power" to declare to His people the message of forgiveness; that CHRIST has commanded us to teach all nations to observe whatsoever He has commanded us, and then He will be with us alway, even to the end of the world. And above all, let us not be silenced by the sense of past unworthiness and neglect, whether is ourselves individually, or in the Church at large; this would be but to add sin to sin. Rather, seeing we have this Ministry, this glorious ministration of righteousness (2 Cor. iv. 1. comp. ch. iii.), let us not faint; but strive how we may show ourselves "dutiful and thankful to that LORD who hath placed us in so high a dignity." The world would fain silence our glorying, and would have CHRIST rebuke his disciples, but let us not be ashamed of the good confession; for with such powers and graces, given to us by CHRIST Himself, as Ambassadors for Him, and Workers together with GOD, if we should hold our peace, the very stones would immediately cry out.

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