

ANOINTED FOR A PURPOSE

Confirmed for Life in the Twenty-first Century

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AWAKENING VOCATIONS

Eugene, Oregon

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INTRODUCTION

Why do you and I, baptized and confirmed as we are in the Holy Spirit, do what we do? Why do we pray and strive to pray well? Why do we engage in relationships and strive to bring dignity and worth to a life shaped by such relationships? Why do we work and strive to find meaning in what we do? Why do we strive to discern God's calling—not only when we find ourselves at the threshold of adulthood but throughout the course of our lifetime?

We may stumble with our reasons and wrestle with the words that might best express this striving. Perhaps we long to succeed, or at least to somehow “get it right.” Perhaps we intuitively seek our place upon the larger stage of human affairs, or at least hope to find our niche, where we can touch others' lives in some positive, caring, creative, encouraging, or liberating way.

In truth, we do seek to discern God's calling, and to come to grips with the nature of God's calling, not because we understand what we seek but because we are impelled by the Holy Spirit. We have been everlastingly sealed in this same Spirit to discern and express the ways in which Jesus, the risen Lord, continues his creative, encouraging, healing, redeeming work in our twenty-first century world. He is not yet finished with this work, and therefore neither are we.

So why *do* you and I, baptized and confirmed as we are in the Holy

Spirit, do what we do? These questions of purpose are worthy questions. People who are sacramentally confirmed in the Holy Spirit are not the only ones who seek a life of meaning. Such seeking for purpose and fulfillment is deeply embedded in the human spirit—made, as we all are, in the image of God, and each of us with work to do.¹ But we who are sacramentally anointed are especially commissioned to seek and fulfill our unique work of love, compassion, and justice within the reign of God.

Therefore, these questions of purpose are *vocational* questions. We have been anointed for a purpose—a purpose that is seldom immediately clear to us, but which shapes the trajectory of our life-in-God and the trajectory of this world in which God is fully invested.

Grace upon grace, St. Paul would say of our lives, we progress “from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This progression is the lifelong unfolding of God’s calling and the seldom logical, predictable, or direct path of our response. Our anointed life in the Holy Spirit, shaped by this ongoing dynamic of God’s calling and our response, is the holy and living dialogue which we call “vocation.”

As you will discover within these pages, *Anointed for a Purpose* will help you to more fully be yourself-in-God—that wholehearted and holy self whom God has been desiring and calling into being all along. And as the title makes clear, the holy dialogue between God and self takes on a yet deeper meaning with the anointing and consecration of your life in the church’s initiating sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. While we refer to these as “sacraments of initiation,” they also are in essence the first of the vocational sacraments, drawing us into that lifelong dynamic of God’s calling and our response. The initiatory and the vocational are as linked as the in-breath and the out-breath, first experienced at birth and unstoppable until the moment of our return to God.

¹ See Genesis 1:26–30. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are to the *New American Bible* (hereafter *NAB*) (Grand Rapids, MI: Catholic World Press, 1987).

Indeed, *Anointed for a Purpose* speaks to men and women who have experienced “a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3). Equally, this resource offers encouragement and practical vocational guidance to recently confirmed youth and young adults. In fact, this is the book that I wish had been written when I was early on in my own sacramentally anointed spiritual journey.

It seems to me that for those who are baptized and anointed in the living Christ, there is, over time, either engagement in this sacramental anointing, or flight from such engagement—whether that flight be passive or intentional. We are baptized and anointed into the One who gave himself completely with selfless devotion to the most noble mission the human mind and spirit can ever imagine: restoration of humankind and of all creation to its original loveliness, beauty, creativity, and fruitfulness in the company of God. But this work of divine restoration is still underway. We are either increasingly engaged in this redemptive, restorative enterprise, or we are fleeing, even if inch by inch, from its rightful claim upon our lives. Every day offers a new decision point. And our decision for engagement defines the very core of vocation: God’s calling and our authentic response.

In these pages I will be honest with you about *your* life, *your* destiny, and why the anointing you have received in Confirmation matters beyond what you may have imagined. No matter your age, claiming your place in the Christian community as surely as you claim your place in the world is a work of great spiritual importance; your place within the Christian community is the unique place from which you touch your world with the power of the Holy Spirit according to the particular ways you have been gifted.

I know with absolute certainty that as long as the church continues to anoint people in Baptism and Confirmation, and feed us in Eucharist, our church will experience no shortage of vocations. God’s calling is unstoppable! The depth of Jesus’ work of redemption, a work in which we participate, is unfathomable. The movement of the Holy Spirit—in our lives, in our church, and in our world—is irrepressible.

In Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist the Christian community is washed, anointed, fed, and spiritually equipped for work in our twenty-first century world. And this Christian community includes every member, at every stage and state in life. No one is insignificant. Indeed, every one of us is significant—in fact, a signifier, or a sacramental expression, of the dynamic presence of the risen Christ at work in the world.

These powerful sacraments of initiation were never meant to enable you to merely *imitate* Jesus. They empower you, with the full strength of his holy Spirit, to actually *stand in his place* and, with his divine authority, to reveal more fully the reign of God.² You can think of the sacraments of initiation as the launch pad from which God sends forth—through you to the world—mighty bursts of love, compassion, healing, justice, mercy, and peace. In short, you participate directly in the work of redemption. You are the anointed carrier of God’s unstoppable love. Just as God counted on the young Virgin’s wholehearted Yes, God is counting—more than you know—on *your* wholehearted Yes to your calling to a worthy work of everlasting value within the reign of God, no matter where you are in your life right now.

What you do with your life *is* important; who you are becoming matters immensely to God and to the world you touch. And the world you touch may be your immediate family, or a handful of clients; it may be co-workers, or customers you will encounter only once; the world you touch may be the audiences you have not yet met, or constituents who count on you to stand up and give voice to the needs of the voiceless.

Anointed for a Purpose gives you entry into a necessary conversation on the particular contours of God’s unique calling of you and the quality of your personal response. Sparked by what you read here, this conversation might be interior, between you and God; it might be courageous conversation with a

² Regarding the term *reign of God*, I note in the introduction to my book *Touching the Reign of God* that the term *kingdom of God* suggests the “secure consolation of place. But the *reign* of God is more verb than noun, . . . the invitation and the challenge of participating in a radically new way of being.” See Mary Sharon Moore, *Touching the Reign of God: Bringing Theological Reflection to Daily Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), xii.

spouse or trusted family member, or with peers; or it might be ongoing conversation with a spiritual mentor. It is the honest, engaging, and necessary vocational conversation that will shape, animate, and sustain you through life, because your real, though hidden, conversation partner is the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation you have been anointed for a purpose: to reveal in your unique and gifted way, in your time and place in this world, nothing less than the reign of God.

PART I
BECOMING ANOINTED

What does it mean to be sacramentally anointed, smeared with the sacred chrism? Was your chrismation, your anointing into Christ, merely a rite of passage? Or has it become a lifelong invitation to enter into a new quality of relationship with the risen Lord, with his church, and therefore with your world?

Part I, *Becoming Anointed*, explores the nature of God's calling in your life. In these first four chapters we will view the sacrament of Confirmation through an integrative lens, and through that lens bring into clearer focus your relationship with the living Christ and your rightful and necessary place within the Christian community.

CONFIRMATION

The Name Says It All

Therefore, ... be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble.

2 Peter 1:10

The New Testament scriptures have a way of hurling us into the depths of spiritual matters, hurling us directly indeed into the mystery of God. An intriguing definition of the mystery of sacramental life can be found in these words of St. Paul: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of [Jesus] Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Just as these words point us to the *sacramental* dimension of Christian faith, St. Paul's next sentence points us equally to the *vocational* dimension of our faith: "But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us" (v. 7).