

Preface

“I wouldn’t have pegged you to write a science and theology book,” said my friend. I nodded my head in agreement, and she continued, “And I really wouldn’t expect that you could do that through youth ministry.” And yet here it is! I actually think the issue of how we engage scientific theories and think about their place next to faith is most important (and probably most interesting) with young people. My hope for those of you who wade into this book is that you’ll find some help in engaging in such conversations with youth, but even more so that your own imagination would be ignited and your vision broadened for how God acts in the natural world. Yet, this book isn’t easy. We will tackle some big theological ideas. For instance, chapter 10 does the heaviest theological lifting, and throughout you’ll be taken into scientific and philosophical terrain. Even so, this book should be read as a story: a youth worker trying to make sense of doing ministry in our time.

In the end, this story is about ministry, but that means it is also a direct theological project. While my friend at first couldn’t see it, this project actually fits very closely with the trajectory of my other work. My work has explored ministry as the location of divine action. I’ve made a strong push for practical theology, and particularly youth ministry, to focus on *divine action*, seeking descriptions of how human forms of agency can be connected to God’s agency. Of late, this has taken me deeply into Charles Taylor’s understandings of the secular, and how our late modern world makes divine action seem impossible, odd, or at the

very least, contested. If ministry is to engage with real people, witnessing to divine action, then coming to grips with science and its claims about reality will be very important to all those doing ministry in our time. At the center of how I've imagined the encounter of divine and human action is *personhood* (I've even called my practical theology a "critical realist personalism"). With less jargon, I've called this "place-sharing" in other works, asserting that the location where persons share in each other's lives as an act of care and love (what I call "ministry") is the place where the living Christ, and therefore divine action, is present. This project will not depart from this focus. I'll explore how the sciences point to the possibility of a personal world, where ministry is a hidden-but-sure force, moving across the universe.

Speaking of persons, there are many to thank for their help in this project. This book is part of a John Templeton Foundation grant called "Science for Youth Ministry," housed at Luther Seminary. Drew Rick-Miller, and all the staff at the Foundation, have been wonderful to work with. This book is only one of many of the grant activities. My co-leaders in the project, David Wood and Tony Jones, have also produced important work (you can find more information about the grant at scienceym.org). Together we believe we've pushed this faith-and-science conversation deeper into the youth ministry world, a place it hadn't been. The grant was originally the brainchild of David Wood, and since working on this project, David has become a close friend. I've dedicated the book to David, because not only was the grant his original idea, but also, over the last decades, his work as much as anyone's has moved this faith-and-science conversation into the life of churches. I'm deeply thankful for our many intellectual conversations and friendship.

Nancy Lee Gauche has also worked directly with us, keeping us in order and providing amazing support. But Nancy Lee has done more for me; she's been my key partner in educating students at Luther. Our partnership has been deeply rewarding to me. Some friends were also kind enough to read the full manuscript and offer comment. Kevin Alton read with a youth worker in mind. My colleague Alan Padgett, who has written important books on theology and science, pushed me in a

number of areas. He saved me from some mistakes (though in the end, any shortcomings are all mine). And my dear friend Blair Bertrand offered sharp insight, as he has many times before to my projects. I also need to thank my children, Owen and Maisy, who had to endure too many Einstein stories at dinner. And, finally, to my wife Kara, who, again, read, edited, and made my writing so much clearer. Her talents and support are more than I deserve.

Andrew Root
St. Paul, Christmas Eve, 2016