

Preface

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF healing gave me insight into human suffering and a way God continues to create and heal through nature. In wandering through a variety of healing experiences, I learned to identify patterns in how that healing became present to me and to others. Over time, I learned to work with that healing and gain insight into other ways God's continued creating could unfold in my life. As I sought to understand my experience in terms of the theology I studied, I recognized a principle of immanent creativity in nature, which continues God's creating and orients my co-creating with God toward healing.

Academically, I believe the important, timely, and understudied topic of healing can benefit from theological reflection and systems analysis. Philosophically, the reality of suffering resists easy reduction of the human person to scientifically analyzed properties of a physical body and thwarts easy dualistic isolation of human spirituality into individualistic and disembodied (Cartesian) minds. Theologically, I draw upon the American pragmatic philosophy of C. S. Peirce and Josiah Royce as interpreted in the theological anthropology of Donald Gelpi, SJ, the theological aesthetics and cosmology of Alejandro García-Rivera, and the emergent dynamics of Terrence Deacon to develop a panentheistic understanding of continuing Creation in places of human suffering. Scientifically, I situate human systems within nature by drawing upon findings from six areas in science and the humanities: (i) modern physics and cosmology to define a foundation for material existence; (ii) classical physics and chemistry to describe the physical world; (iii) biology and neuroscience to characterize the human body with a brain; (iv) cognitive science to examine the mind's decision making and learning; (v) a historical-linguistic understanding of culture to situate religious community; and (vi) a semiotic understanding of spirituality to ground religious experience in human existence.

Somewhat surprisingly, healing—as co-creating at places of suffering—not only integrates ongoing Creation and human presence, but an

Preface

investigation of healing also yields insight into nature's unfolding. Suffering indicates places humans can continue the unfolding of creation, and compassionate healing not only has religious value but also appears scientifically fruitful and a relevant orientation to explain nature's development. Human tendencies of incorporating suffering into continuing creation combine with a pervasive natural potential for beautiful creative making to create an unfolding world oriented toward healing. By considering human tendencies within nature's unfolding, scientific investigations have a broader scope to discover nature's tendencies in response to human existence and suffering rather than prejudge nature as cold and uncaring by eliminating creation's response to suffering from scientific study. I hope my investigation of healing within religion and science will facilitate discourse about (a) how theological insight into the beauty of Creation can guide scientific endeavors oriented toward alleviating human suffering, and (b) how scientific insight into the unfolding of nature through human experience can inform an embodied theology oriented toward healing and continuing creation.

In addition to presenting novel academic connections between theology and science, I attempt to make the material accessible to experienced chaplains, counselors, and other ministers who need to situate their work in a medical or scientific context. This book may be challenging for readers unfamiliar with theology and science scholarship. (The topics covered in this book overlap with my academic monograph *Mind, Brain, and the Elusive Soul*, which has more extensive explanations and citations, and I frequently draw upon and summarize that material here.) Some of the material is notoriously difficult to explain (such as the pragmatic philosophy of C. S. Peirce), and other material is recent and novel with wide-ranging implications (such as neuroscience and the emergent dynamics of Terrence Deacon). In investigating diverse areas of theology and science, I have discovered some surprising resonances and places for possible integration between theology and science. I wish I could also present these nuggets of insight in highly accessible discourse, but that will likely require communal reflection to discover. However, one of the shared scientific and religious observations is the significance of practice in learning new ways to interpret one's world, and I have oriented the material toward a practice of healing.

In organizing the book, I begin with personal experience, then reflect on that experience theologically, analyze the correlated scientific findings, and finally integrate those categories in a natural theology. I believe this

four-step, experiential, constructive postmodern method incorporates a contemporary understanding of the way the mind processes new information; draws upon similar methods in education and theology; and increases accessibility and incorporation of the abstract theological, scientific, and philosophical material. I organize the four steps into four chapters, respectively, and repeat that pattern three times in the book with attention first to (i) individual religious experience in nature, then (ii) systems analysis of human spiritual communities, and finally (iii) a theological aesthetics of nature's immanent creativity.

SAMPLE