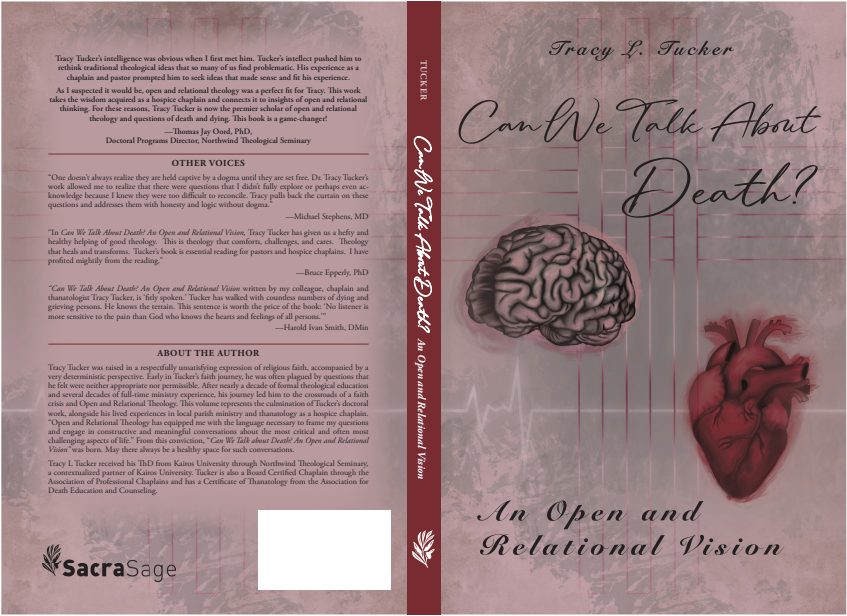


I’m interested in exploring ways that we can safely speak to each other, encouraging understanding and avoiding many of the ways we sometimes cause harm, even unwittingly. Primarily, I have been considering the language we employ on the topic of death. My book, *Can We Talk About Death? An Open and Relational Vision* is a relatable and readable text that I believe offers the kind of encouragement and language that we desperately need. Read through the Amazon reviews or perhaps pick up a copy of the book itself, available at Amazon in Kindle or paperback format.

<https://a.co/d/ayGXPfb>



Open and Relational Theology

Open

Thinkers who affirm open and relational theology believe the future is open, and God experiences that openness. Open and relational thinkers take free agency very seriously. In contrast to determinism, open and relational thinking insists that each moment or experience is born out of previous experiences. Each experience includes opportunities for any agent18 to make choices or lean in directions that might affect any subsequent experiences. Whereas choosing one’s vocation will significantly impact one’s life and the lives of many who enter their circles of influence, choosing coffee over tea will likely have much less ripple effect. However, even Maxwell House over Earl Grey still represents a particular choice that will, to some degree, shape the agent’s experience and will, in turn, be reflected in some corresponding experiences.

Freedom in this context implies that what will be has not yet been experienced and does not yet exist. Openness means that the future is still in the process of becoming. Because it does not yet exist, it cannot be known. Open and relational thinkers recognize that while God does know all that can be known and see all that is, God can discern much about what is yet to come, but cannot know with absolute certainty what will be.

Relational

Many traditional theologies organize their thinking with a controlling or power-based inclination about God. God, who is almighty, is in control and will bring about the outcomes as God chooses. This, of course, leads necessarily to a deterministic understanding of God and consequently leaves very little space for the influence of any other agents. Declaring that “well, God is in control, we just have to trust” can leave the grieving person empty in their feelings of loss. Suggesting that “God has a plan, we just don’t see the big picture” can raise questions about whether God is more concerned about a plan than my pain. This is not a concern for those satisfied with speaking of God as a mystery without requiring further understanding. However, for many others, a more helpful starting point is necessary.

Open and relational thinkers consider love the starting point for understanding God and the universe. People experiencing grief and feelings of loss may require a response of love, especially from those attempting to bring consolation. Thomas Jay Oord defines love as “to act intentionally, in relational response to God and others, to promote overall well-being.”

Open and relational thinkers emphasize the relational, loving aspect of God. Tripp Fuller wrote, “God is love. Divine love is not an occasional activity, as if there could be occasions in which God shed the identity given by God’s essence as love. Each moment of existence is one that shapes both God and the world, but what God brings to each respective moment comes from perfect divine love. God receives each moment of becoming into the divine love.”