

Opening Remarks for the Open and Relational Theologies Unit
An Additional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion
Atlanta, Georgia November 2003

by Thomas Jay Oord

I welcome you to the inaugural meeting of the Open and Relational Theologies group.

We are a group of scholars who gather for reflection and study because we affirm several basic beliefs. We assemble to reflect deeply upon the beliefs that unite us, to learn from each other, and to become clearer about ways in which we might disagree.

What unites us is substantial. We believe that theology can and should involve constructive discussions about an actual, personal God. This God's primary feature is love; or as Charles Wesley has said, "[God's] name and nature is love." God is a relational being who both affects and is affected by creatures. Creatures are free, being entirely determined by "neither the heavens above nor the atoms below." Both God and creatures adventure into an open future that is not entirely settled.

More and more people are finding this open and relational vision attractive. And it is this vision that brings together in this gathering theologians and scholars of related disciplines who identify themselves as open, process, trinitarian, feminist, Arminian,

Wesleyan, holiness, liberation, etc. In fact, many of us feel comfortable being identified by several of these labels.

The Open and Relational Theologies group steering committee reflects these diverse labels. Along with me, the list includes my co-chair, Lynne Lorenzen, as well as John Cobb, Catherine Keller, Michael Lodahl, Andrew Sung Park, John Sanders, and Susie Stanley.

This diversity will likely influence the direction of next year's Open and Relational Theologies group discussion of the God-world relationship. We will explore in what ways the God-world relationship might be contingent and in what ways it might be necessary. Pertinent to the discussion would an assessment of the importance or viability of the classic doctrine of creation from nothing, the possible significance of trinitarian relations, what the God-world relationship might say about divine and creaturely power and love, and other matters.

For today's session, I have asked three individuals to respond to the theme, "The Promise of Open and Relational Theologies." Here are the individuals and their paper titles:

John Cobb: "Realistic Theology"

Clark Pinnock: "Relational Theology for Evangelicals"

Lynne Lorenzen: "Some Political Implications"

We thank you for supporting this fledgling assembly of scholars.

(113 in attendance)