



Towards a Theology of Relationship: Emil Brunner's *Truth as Encounter* in light of relationship science

by Michael Berra, Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2022, 248 pp., (paperback), Euro: 35.60, ISBN 9781666737653

Matthias Wenk

To cite this article: Matthias Wenk (2023) Towards a Theology of Relationship: Emil Brunner's *Truth as Encounter* in light of relationship science, *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 43:2, 226-227, DOI: [10.1080/27691616.2023.2205308](https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2205308)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2205308>



Published online: 04 May 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 19



View related articles [↗](#)




View Crossmark data [↗](#)

To Nel, the challenge of the Christian is to work toward eradicating underlying evils, to evince compassion toward suffering, and to maintain a high valuation of life. In this way, Nel attests that his theodicy is not so much theoretical but pastoral.

This book presents a plethora of sources with a strong bibliography, however, the author may have done well to address popularized writings on the subject by other academics, including Bart D. Ehrman's *God's Problem*.

This book is recommended to academics, specifically within the Pentecostal tradition, as well as those with a general interest in theodicy or philosophical theology. Contained within this writing is a host of opportunity for further research and dialogue. The extensive surveys of literature and theory likely decrease the relevance of this writing for many laypeople and pastors, but will appeal to those who are studious and committed to academic engagement.

Michael Blythe
South African Theological Seminary, South Africa
 michaelblythe@vaumc.org

© 2023 Michael Blythe
<https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2204457>



Towards a Theology of Relationship: Emil Brunner's *Truth as Encounter* in light of relationship science, by Michael Berra, Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2022, 248 pp., (paperback), Euro: 35.60, ISBN 9781666737653

This book is a slightly revised version of Michael Berra's PhD thesis from the London School of Theology. Berra, coming from an Evangelical/Pietistic background, picks up a topic that is at the heart of Pentecostal theology and spirituality, yet a topic that has often been taken as self-explanatory and that has hardly ever been critically reflected on: a personal relationship with God. His approach to the dialogue with Emil Brunner's *Truth as Encounter*, as well as with the current scientific research on relationships, gives due weight to a work that has often been overlooked in the theological discourse of our time. At the same time, Berra's thesis opens up new insights and aspects of a 'given' in Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality.

Parts I and II of the book present an excellent and detailed discussion on Brunner's *Truth as Encounter* in the context of his overall theology – and are enrichments in themselves. Part III, 'The Analogy of Relationship: Personal Correspondence in Light of Relationship Science,' relates the findings from Brunner's theology to the current academic discourse on relationships, and part IV elucidates the contours of a theology of relationships. There are several reasons why I think Berra's thesis is of interest for Pentecostals and Charismatics.

First, with the focus on relationship, both Brunner and Berra open up a way out of abstract theological concepts in speaking about God, and they both place theology, so to speak, into the world of the concrete, the particular, thereby giving due weight to the narrative character of (biblical) theology. Berra excellently underscores that Brunner's approach to truth as encounter, opened a way out of the unfortunate alternative often placed in front of theology: objectivism on the one side and subjectivism on the other. For both, Brunner and Berra, the way out is found in the I-You relationship, which is

always personal, without ever becoming subjective. With this focus on ‘the simplicity of the essential,’ and on ‘the actual parties involved’ in the encounter (53), theology is not simply ‘done’ from a new or different perspective, such as a feminist, black, Latin or whatever perspective, but it becomes the testimony of a particular individual (or group) of their encounter with the divine, that is placed in dialogue with the testimonies of others.

Second, Berra’s approach corresponds well with Pentecostal hermeneutics. That is, truth is neither subjective nor objective, but in the actual encounter with the divine.


Third, a theology of relationships is also very helpful for discussions on Pentecostal ethics, because this discussion is likewise often trapped between the claims for objectivism/ universalism and subjectivism/relativism.

Finally, Berra’s work is of ecumenical significance, especially in the dialogue between Evangelical and Pentecostal theology. Pentecostal theology with its emphasis on the narrative, the particular, and on the encounter with God often has found itself in conflict with some of the more traditional Evangelical approaches. Berra, coming from the Evangelical spectrum but emphasizing the encounter with God, as well as the narrative character of theology, establishes a bridge over which most Pentecostals will gladly walk in order to dialogue with their Evangelical sisters and brothers.

What about the role of the Holy Spirit in Berra’s theology of relationships? That will be the contribution Pentecostals and Charismatic theologians have to make to Berra’s endeavour, because the Spirit is the ‘Third’ that will turn the I-You relationship into an I-You-(S)he relationship, thereby affirming the particularity and the community of all involved in this encounter.

Matthias Wenk

BewegungPlus, Burgdorf and IGW Zürich, Hindelbank, Switzerland

 Bm.wenk@bewegungplus.ch

© 2023 Matthias Wenk

<https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2205308>



Rethinking the dates of the new testament: The evidence for early

composition, by Jonathan Bernier, Baker Academic, 2022, 318 pp., £58.76

(hdbk), £20.99 (pbk), £10.39 (kindle), ISBN 9781493434671

The dating of books of the New Testament is fluid. By and large liberal scholars will date late and conservative scholars date early although this is not an invariable rule as John Robinson’s *Redating the New Testament* demonstrated. Robinson in 1976 argued for earlier dates than many New Testament scholars were accustomed to. Bernier in a striking new book does for the twenty-first century what Robinson did for the twentieth by painstakingly going through the evidence for dating each of the New Testament books (as well as a few noncanonical writings like the Epistle of Clement) to assess its date. What is striking about Bernier’s approach is his strict, logical, thorough, and transparent method.

For each of the NT’s 27 books in turn he uses three concepts of *synchronisation* (or the ‘temporal relationship to other events or situations including the composition of