

Dear reader,

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Ashgate (Routledge) in Jon Stewart (ed.): *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology. Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology* in 2012 (e-book published on 8 November 2016), available online: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315234885/>

Original publication:

Roth, Ulli

Eugen Biser "Christology from inside"

in: Jon Stewart (ed.): *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology. Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, pp. 25-43

Aldershot: Ashgate 2012 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* Volume 10/Tome III)

URL: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315234885>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published in accordance with the policy of Routledge: <https://www.routledge.com/our-products/open-access-books/publishing-oa-books/chapters>.

Your IxTheo team

## Eugen Biser: Rediscovering “Christology from Inside”

Ulli Roth

Among those in the 20th century, who deeply influenced German Catholic theology and even Catholicism as a whole, there is a group of scholars who worked at the periphery of the academical area, both biographically and literarily. Alongside Romano Guardini (1885–1968), Erich Przywara (1889–1972) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988), there is to be named Eugen Biser (born in 1918). They all combined broad erudition in theology, philosophy, and literature with the intention to reformulate and revive Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of them were careful readers of Kierkegaard’s works. In order to conceive and to overcome the crisis of our modern and secularised culture, they crossed the borders of traditional dogmatical theology, which at that time was quite restricted and mostly dominated by scholasticism. Though Biser is the youngest of these theologians, his work has a high reputation. This assessment is supported by several Bavarian and international prizes, honorary doctorates, and the nomination as honorary papal prelate, which he achieved with an opus covering about 100 books, 1000 articles, and countless lectures held all over Germany. Although he never founded his own theological school and though he has to the present day not or only scarcely been discussed as a major figure in contemporary theology, his importance and impact should not be underestimated. The uninterrupted series of publications over half a century, often with quite popular publishing houses such as Patmos, Kösel, and especially Herder, and often with several editions, have reached a wide audience. In the same way, his lectures and public discussions, sometimes broadcast via radio and television, have made him a well-known man not only in theology, but in church and society as well. So it is not surprising that the honorary volume to Eugen Biser’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1998 was filled with contributions by professors of divinity and

philosophy, artists and teachers, bishops and politicians, among them the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.<sup>1</sup>

The following essay will give a survey of Biser's reception of Kierkegaard's oeuvre. Since Biser quotes or refers to Kierkegaard in nearly all of his countless books and articles, completeness cannot be achieved. But as Biser often repeats his former ideas and has a limited set of quotations, this article will present his main ideas concerning Kierkegaard and his importance for his own work. The bibliography lists the titles of the earliest and most important works of those of his own books which refer to Kierkegaard. In addition, all secondary literature, including the translations Biser names or uses, is collected. A short biography will provide information about both his character and his way to Kierkegaard.

When Eugen Biser was born on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1918, as the only son of Karl Biser and his wife Zita, née Müller, in Oberbergen in the Kaiserstuhl region of southern Germany, only the profession of his father, who was a teacher, would have given a hint to Biser's future.<sup>2</sup> His parents wanted him to become a teacher as well. But during the time he went to school in Oberbergen, Breisach, and Freiburg im Breisgau he was directly confronted with the ideology of Nazism. When finishing school in 1937, Biser felt that theology and medicine were the only fields of study which weren't fully controlled by the Nazis. This freedom and the possibility to help people attracted Biser. Against the will of his parents he chose theology, thinking that he wasn't suited for medicine. Soon after having started his studies in Catholic theology at the University of Freiburg in the winter of 1937, the current political developments began to affect his life and to leave their mark on his character. After his philosophy exam, he had to follow

---

\* I want to thank Stephanie Fischer, Laura Good, and Naomi Pilantz very much for proof-reading this article.

<sup>1</sup> See Erwin Möde et al. (Eds.), *An-Denken. Festgabe für Eugen Biser*, Graz et al.: Styria 1998.

<sup>2</sup> A complete biography of Eugens Biser's life is lacking, basic information can be found in Andreas Schaller, *Gott brach sein Schweigen. Ein Gespräch mit Eugen Biser*, München: Verlag Sankt Michaelsbund 1999, passim; Johannes Schaber (Ed.), *Eugen Biser. Leben–Werk–Denken. Eine Einführung*, Leutesdorf: Johannes-Verlag 2000 (Schriftenreihe der Ottobeurer Studienwoche 1), pp. 16-19, the curriculum vitae at the end of Eugen Biser, *Grenzerfahrungen. Die Bedeutung der religiösen Grenzsituationen in den Werken Gertrud von Le Forts*, Freiburg i. Br., unpublished dissertation 1956, and on the official homepage of the Eugen-Biser-Foundation, [www.eugen-biser-stiftung.de](http://www.eugen-biser-stiftung.de).

his fellow students to Fulda. There he was recruited by the military on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1939, and sent to France. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Biser was sent to the east front. Once he dared to voice his true thoughts about the disaster into which the German army was running at Stalingrad—“we will bleed to death”. Because of this he was nearly court-martialled. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1943, he was severely injured, but survived and was brought back to Germany. After his dismissal in 1944, he could continue his studies in Freiburg and graduated in 1946. In the same year he took holy orders, as his uncle did years before. Although he wanted to continue his studies, the church administration denied this wish. After six years in six different parishes, he had to start working as a chaplain and a teacher at Helmholtz-Gymnasium in Heidelberg in 1952. Beside his full teacher’s workload, he studied at night from 22.00 to 2.00 o’clock. He wrote two doctoral theses, the first one in theology (1956) with Bernhard Welte (1906–1983) as supervisor. Welte was a professor for Christian philosophy of religion at the University of Freiburg. He had rejected a previous manuscript with the title “The Cosmos of the Virtues” though Biser had revised it twice in accordance with Welte’s wishes. He also denied him permission to write about Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) while allowing his preferred assistant to do so. The second thesis was submitted to the faculty of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg with the well-known German-Jewish philosopher Karl Löwith (1897–1973) as supervisor (1961), who, though being an atheist, supported the Catholic priest Biser. Finally, Biser qualified as a university lecturer (“Habilitation”) in 1965 at the University of Würzburg with a third treatise and was allowed to give lectures in fundamental theology. In the same year he started his academic career, which first led him to Passau from 1965–1969 and then to Würzburg from 1969–1974, with interim professorships at Marburg, Bochum, and Saarbrücken. In 1974, he attained his academic goals when he was appointed to the reputable Romano-Guardini chair at the Ludwig–Maximilian–University of Munich. This chair for “Religionsphilosophie und Christliche Weltanschauung“ (philosophy of religion and Christian world view) was held by Romano Guardini from 1948 to 1965 and then by Karl Rahner from

1968 to 1974. Connected to the faculty of philosophy, it gives greatest academic freedom to reflect present changes and developments in religion and society from a Christian point of view. Biser worked there with remarkable success until 1986, reaching an audience of up to 300 persons during his lectures. Soon after his retirement, he founded the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age Department in Munich, which he led until 2007. During all these years, he never stopped to accompany his lectures with numerous books and articles. They concentrate on how to believe in God in our modern secularized or even atheistic society, how to recover a direct approach to Jesus Christ and how to tackle actual problems such as peace and reconciliation in our world. Looking back on the beginnings of his academic studies, Biser names three authors who influenced him the most: “Besides Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, this remarkable woman [Gertrud von Le Fort] became an important help in the orientation of my theology.”<sup>3</sup> He also mentions Karl Löwith, but going through his own *œuvre*, one shouldn’t neglect Augustinus (354–430), Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–1464), Martin Buber (1878–1965), Romano Guardini, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), and Rudolf Schnackenburg (1914–2002). The choice of these theologians reveals that Biser made his own way into theology. This was not the mostly neo-Thomistic and neoscholastic school theology which dominated Catholic faculties at that time and made any discussion on modern thought within theology completely fruitless. Quite on the contrary, Biser followed Guardini, who always remained an outsider in Catholic theology and never respected the traditional limits and taboos of his discipline, neither those concerning the distinction between philosophy and theology, nor those separating Protestant and Catholic denomination.<sup>4</sup> The works of Nietzsche were still on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and required a special permission to be read by any Catholic. Kierkegaard was a Protestant author whom Catholics started to discuss, but mostly outside the academic milieu.<sup>5</sup> Buber was a Jewish

---

<sup>3</sup> Biser in an interview in Schaller, *Gott brach sein Schweigen*, op. cit., pp. 25f.

<sup>4</sup> On Guardini see Peter Šajda \*\*\*\*\* in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> S. Heiko Schulz, “Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard,” in *Kierkegaard's International Reception*, Tome I, Northern and Western Europe [i kursiv], ed. by Jon Stewart,

philosopher, best known for his philosophy of dialogue, but of no distinctive importance for traditional Catholic school philosophy. Even Biser's reading of the church father Augustine, probably the most important theologian in the history of the Western Church, points to the renewal of spirituality based on the Patristic heritage inside the Catholic church, promoted by authors as, for example, Przywara and Guardini. Nicolaus Cusanus, the famous philosopher, mathematician, and bishop of Brixen in the late Middle Ages, was himself a loner whose philosophical-theological concepts were to be rediscovered in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but first of all in philosophy, not in Catholic theology. There Thomas Aquinas was and is still the official *magister*, though the richness and striking modernity of Cusanus' thought is more and more recognized nowadays. Bultmann, himself deeply influenced by Kierkegaard's works, and Schnackenburg were leading representatives of Protestant and Catholic exegesis respectively. The religiousness of Gertrud von Le Fort (1876–1871), after her conversion from Protestantism one of the most important Catholic women writers in the middle of the last century, was much inspired by the works of Kierkegaard. He was often discussed in the Catholic intellectual circles she was moving in, e. g. by Theodor Haecker (1879–1945) or Przywara, her spiritual father during her conversion.

Biser never wrote a whole book about Kierkegaard<sup>6</sup>, though he did so with his monographies about Gertrud von Le Fort, Nietzsche, and Guardini. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard is obviously even more important for Biser's theology than these three authors. A great part of Biser's books more or less explicitly develop an idea he originally conceived in dialogue with the Danish thinker. Though Biser never learned Danish and only cites a few words in the original

---

Aldershot: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 8). pp. 307-419, pp. 328–330 and 371f.

<sup>6</sup> To the present day, no substantial discussion of the impact Kierkegaard's works had on Biser's thought exists. Because of his precarious state of health, he was only able to respond quite laconically to some of my results in May 2009, confirming major tracks of my outline about his first studies of Kierkegaard's works, rejecting others. His valuable hints, which I am very grateful for, are all taken into consideration in the following paragraphs of this article.

language<sup>7</sup>, he is acquainted with both the biography and the literary heritage of Kierkegaard. Considering Biser's own way into theology, one could suspect that it was Gertrud von Le Fort who inspired him to read Kierkegaard when he was studying her works for his first doctor's thesis in the 1950s. Biser recognized the impact Kierkegaard had on Gertrud von Le Fort, and assumes that Karl Jaspers (1883–1869), whose lectures about Kierkegaard she followed in the summer of 1914 in Heidelberg, had led her to read Kierkegaard.<sup>8</sup> In her novel *Die Letzte am Schafott* (1931), she describes the anxiety and fear of the fictive protagonist Blanche de la Force who was to follow those 16 Carmelite nuns of Compiègne who were guillotined in Paris in 1794. Biser's interpretation refers to Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*<sup>9</sup> and distinguishes Le Fort's concept of contemporaneity from Kierkegaard's own<sup>10</sup>, a distinction that will be valid until Biser's own "Christology from Inside".

But for his own path to Kierkegaard, as for his theology as a whole, it was not Gertrud von Le Fort but Guardini who played the decisive role. It was not a fellow student or professor during his studies who called his attention to this Protestant thinker, but his own reading, formed by authors of the non-academic intellectual Catholicism by whom Kierkegaard was often discussed. Especially Guardini's famous book about Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) from 1935 attracted Biser's attention. Guardini not only describes Pascal's way of thinking with Kierkegaardian terms, but also compares Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Anselm of Canterbury (c.

---

<sup>7</sup> In his *Glaubensverständnis. Grundriß einer hermeneutischen Fundamentaltheologie*, Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Herder, 1975, p. 30, he mentions the meaning of "smuler" in the title of *Philosophical Fragments*, but this information is taken from the essay by Liselotte Richter in her edition of Sören Kierkegaard, *Philosophische Brocken*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1961. In Eugen Biser, *Der Helfer. Eine Vergegenwärtigung Jesu*, München: Koesel 1973, p. 160, he translates: "forunderligt: wunderbar".

<sup>8</sup> See Eugen Biser, *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch. Ansatz einer christlichen Anthropologie*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 1980, p. 113 footnote 74.

<sup>9</sup> Maintaining that the possibility has a precedence over reality, Biser, *Grenzerfahrungen*, p. 31 footnote 1, refers to the hypochondriac at the end of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

<sup>10</sup> See Biser, *Grenzerfahrungen* 42 about the Carmelite nun Blanche, "die in ihrem religiösen Selbstverständnis den als Todesangst erfahrenen Sinn der Epoche unablässig, wenn freilich auch nicht ausdrücklich, auf die Todesangst Christi in seiner bedrängten Kirche zurückbezieht... In geschichtlichen Kategorien ausgedrückt, besagt ihre religiöse Haltung demnach die volle Gleichzeitigkeit ihres Daseins mit dem Zeit- und Heilsgeschehen" *ibid.*, footnote 1: "Es legt sich nahe, diese Formulierung wiederum in dem von Kierkegaard präzisierten Sinn zu verstehen. Doch scheint es, zumal auch im Blick auf das Gesamtwerk, angemessen, die Vorstellungen der Dichterin von der Vergegenwärtigung des Heilswerks Christi durch die Gedanken der Mysterientheologie zu interpretieren, zumal in der ihr von G. Söhngen gegebenen Fassung."

1033–1109) as three different but deeply related forms of an “existential dialectic of the absolute”<sup>11</sup>. Though Biser knew Guardini’s œuvre, he frequently quotes his books about “Christian consciousness”<sup>12</sup> and “accepting oneself”<sup>13</sup>, but not the famous treatises about melancholy and the starting point of Kierkegaard’s thinking.<sup>14</sup> While the melancholic Kierkegaard of *The Sickness unto Death* attracted Guardini, who himself was suffering from depression, Biser’s dynamic, positive-minded, and vigorous character made him see this side of Kierkegaard’s thought as a symptom of anxiety, and thus more from a distance. He therefore interprets it as a characteristic of man as a whole and reintegrates melancholy and despair within the category anxiety as evidence of the divine.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Biser’s focus on the *Practice in Christianity* as Kierkegaard’s chef-d’œuvre has no equivalent either in Guardini or in any of Biser’s sources. So Guardini drew Biser’s attention to Kierkegaard, but did not really form his approach to this religious author. The same holds true for Biser’s reading of Theodor Haecker, the other outstanding representative of Kierkegaard reception in German Catholicism at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Biser found his own way to the Kierkegaardian universe. It was in the 1940s or the early 1950s that he studied Kierkegaard, as can be deduced from the editions which he quotes and keeps

---

<sup>11</sup> Romano Guardini, *Christliches Bewusstsein. Versuche über Pascal*, Leipzig: Hegner 1935, p. 219.

<sup>12</sup> Guardini, *Christliches Bewusstsein* is referred to in, for example, Biser’s *Der Freund: Annäherungen an Jesus*, München et al.: Piper 1989, p. 290 endnote 22, p. 298 endnote 129; *Interpretation und Veränderung. Werk und Wirkung Romano Guardinis*, Paderborn et al.: Schöningh 1979, p. 65-80; *Einweisung ins Christentum*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1998, p. 428 endnote 77, p. 454 endnote 39; *Das Antlitz. Selbstfindung in Jesus Christus*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 2006, p. 338 endnote 15f.

<sup>13</sup> Romano Guardini, *Die Annahme seiner selbst*, Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag 1960 is named in, for example, Biser’s *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch*, p. 26 footnote 42; *Der Mensch – das uneingelöste Versprechen. Entwurf einer Modalanthropologie*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 1995, p. 132; *Einweisung ins Christentum*, p. 451 endnote 91.

<sup>14</sup> See Romano Guardini, “Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Søren Kierkegaards,” in *Hochland*, München-Kempten: Kösel, vol. 24, 1927, Heft 2, pp. 12-33, and “Vom Sinn der Schwermut,” in *Die Schildgenossen*, Würzburg: Werkbundverlag, vol. 8, 1928, pp. 103-125 (many reprints, e. g. in Romano Guardini, *Unterscheidung des Christlichen*, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag 1935).

<sup>15</sup> See Eugen Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 84: “So enthüllt die Angst auch das göttliche Geheimnis, das [...] dem vom Sog des Nichts Ergriffenen letzten Halt verspricht und ihm diesen zugleich entzieht.”

<sup>16</sup> See e. g. Eugen Biser, *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende. Eine theologische Positionsbestimmung*, Graz et al.: Styria 1986, pp. 334f. endnote 163, referring to Theodor Haecker, *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit*, Munich: Schreiber 1913, and Carl Dallago, *Ueber eine Schrift: Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit (von Theodor Haecker)*, Innsbruck: Brenner 1914; cf. **Markus Kleinert, Theodor Haecker** \*\*\*\*\* in this volume.



quoting even in his latest works. He did not make use of the old edition by Christoph Schrempf (1860–1944)<sup>17</sup>, but read either the later translations of Haecker<sup>18</sup> or the new ones from the early 1950s<sup>19</sup>. Maybe in connection with his theological thesis about Gertrud von Le Fort, he also read some books by Jaspers dealing with Kierkegaard.<sup>20</sup> When he finished this book in 1956, Löwith proposed that he should write about Nietzsche. At the same time, Biser deepened his knowledge about Kierkegaard’s biography<sup>21</sup> and thinking<sup>22</sup> with a series of books published in the 1950s and the early 1960s, among them important systematical works by his second doctoral advisor, Löwith. In addition, his philosophical thesis led him to compare Nietzsche with Kierkegaard as a “congenial representative” of Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> See *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1–12, trans. and ed. by Hermann Gottsched and Christoph Schrempf, Jena: Diederichs 1909–22. Biser only refers to Søren Kierkegaard, *Leben und Walten der Liebe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. and ed. by Albert Dorner and Christoph Schrempf, introduced by Christoph Schrempf, Jena: Diederichs 1924 (*Erbauliche Reden*, vol. 3) in later works, e. g. in 1995 in his *Der Mensch*, p. 324 endnote 45, while earlier works such as *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch*, pp. 133f., from 1980 cite the first edition *Leben und Walten der Liebe*, trans. and ed. by Albert Dorner, Leipzig: F. Richter 1890.

<sup>18</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Tagebücher*, vols. 1–2, selected, trans. and ed. by Theodor Haecker, Innsbruck: Brenner 1923 (Leipzig: Hegner 1941), quoted in *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, München: Koesel 1970, p. 100; Biser, *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende*, p. 334 endnote 158, which explicitly mentions the 1941 edition. This confirms for Biser in the late 1940s and early 1950s, that it was still the Brenner circle and especially Haecker who were the most effective intermediaries for Kierkegaardian ideas, see Schulz, “A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard,” pp. 330f.

<sup>19</sup> Of the great editions of Emanuel Hirsch and Walter Rest, Biser only uses a few volumes, adding the translations of Liselotte Richter in the 1960s. Why he sometimes prefers one translation over another, and if he really does so, is not obvious and could not be clarified.

<sup>20</sup> See Biser, *Grenzerfahrungen*, p. V, where he names Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, vol. 2: *Existenzerhellung*, Berlin u. a.: Springer 1932; *Der philosophische Glaube*, München: Piper 1948; *Vernunft und Existenz. Fünf Vorlesungen*, Groningen: J. B. Wolters 1935.

<sup>21</sup> See especially Walter Lowrie, *Das Leben Søren Kierkegaards*, Düsseldorf et al.: Diederichs 1955, which is separate from *Søren Kierkegaard und sein Verhältnis zu “ihr”*. *Aus nachgelassenen Papieren*, trans. and ed. by Raphael Meyer, Stuttgart: Juncker 1905, is the only biographical work Biser frequently makes use of. Biser obviously later read the famous introduction by Georg Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard. Eine kritische Darstellung*, Leipzig: Reclam 1992, which he refers to in his *Der Mensch*, p. 42, p. 307 endnote 55 and 308 endnote 79.

<sup>22</sup> See Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts. Marx und Kierkegaard*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1950, referred to in, for example, Biser, *Gott ist tot. Nietzsches Destruktion des christlichen Bewußtseins*, München: Kösel, 1962, p. 80 footnote 1; Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, p. 149 footnote 57; Karl Löwith, *Die Hegelsche Linke. Texte aus den Werken von Heinrich Heine, Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, Max Stirner, Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx und Søren Kierkegaard*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann 1962, referred to in, for example, Biser, *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, p. 272 footnote 126, Biser, *Einweisung ins Christentum*, p. 426 endnote 21; Karl Löwith, *Wissen, Glauben und Skepsis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1956 (Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe 30), referred to in, for example, Biser, *Der Freund*, p. 326 endnote 14; Romano Guardini, *Die Annahme seiner selbst*, Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag 1960, frequently referred to in several of Biser’s books, see for example his *Der inwendige Lehrer. Der Weg zu Selbstfindung und Heilung*, München und Zürich: Piper, 1994, passim, and above footnote 13.

<sup>23</sup> See Biser, *Gott ist tot*, p. 80–85; *ibid.*, p. 54, he also recognizes, that Nietzsche wrote in a letter to Brandes from 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1888, that he wanted to read about “the psychological problem Kierkegaard”.

He reviewed two of those new books about Kierkegaard<sup>24</sup> in the Catholic but trans-denominational periodical *Hochland*, a quite influential voice of the modern, though not liberal, Catholicism of the so-called *Hochland-Kreis* among Haecker, Guardini, Gertrud von Le Fort and others. Biser acknowledges that Gerd-Günther Grau (born 1921) is correct when he constructs the impossibility of a repetition of something that has already been, biographically reflected in Regine's marriage, in theological terms "the unlimited delay of the Parousia", as the center of Kierkegaard's writing. Although Biser doesn't agree with Grau that this writing was self-destructive and fits into the Nietzschean pattern of "the self-dissolution of all great things", he confirms, that "Christianity is based on a personal event" and lies "far from the category of the system".<sup>25</sup> Reviewing August Vetter (1887–1976), he recommends this introduction, originally published in 1928, as one of the best because of its many insights and clear style<sup>26</sup>, but later he himself will constantly refer to the biography of Walter Lowrie (1868–1959).<sup>27</sup> Grau's book in particular accompanies Biser's working with Kierkegaard and will be referred to in his later works.<sup>28</sup>

Biser's own productive reception of Kierkegaard did not start until the beginning of the 1970s. Now he was elaborating and reformulating his own central ideas, which he has continued to present, sometimes without any change. There are two overlapping strata, deeply connected with Kierkegaard's central ideas, which form Biser's basis for his own approach to fundamental theology. The one is more theoretical, concerning G. E. Lessing's (1729–1781) famous 'ugly broad ditch' between history and faith and the concept of 'the disciple at second hand', the other more existential, analyzing present mankind, especially with the concept of anxiety. In his

---

<sup>24</sup> See Eugen Biser, "Kein 'Glaubensheld'. Zu zwei Büchern über Kierkegaard," *Hochland*, München-Kempton: Kösel, vol. 57, 1964-65, pp. 173-77, about Gerd-Günther Grau, *Die Selbstauflösung des christlichen Glaubens. Eine religionsphilosophische Studie über Kierkegaard*, Frankfurt am Main: Schulte-Bulmke 1963, and August Vetter, *Frömmigkeit als Leidenschaft. Eine Deutung Kierkegaards*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Freiburg et al.: Alber 1963.

<sup>25</sup> See Biser, "Kein 'Glaubensheld'," pp. 174f.

<sup>26</sup> See Biser, "Kein 'Glaubensheld'," p. 177.

<sup>27</sup> E. g. Eugen Biser, *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, p. 331 footnote 245 is one of the few citations of Vetter's book.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Biser, *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende*, p. 338 endnote 19; *Einweisung ins Christentum*, p. 443 endnote 27.

postdoctoral lecture qualification (“Habilitation”), Biser does not recognize an epoch-making rupture, separating us from the historical beginnings and Holy Scripture as such. Following the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), he reformulates a famous motto taken from the Lutheran Pietist Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) with Kierkegaard’s concepts of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity*. The first part of Bengel’s “te totum applica ad textum; rem totam applica ad te”<sup>29</sup> should be understood as an impulse to come to a contemporaneity of interpreter and text, thus overlapping the historical distance in an “intentional contemporaneity”.<sup>30</sup> Biser does not question this hermeneutical programme and even takes into consideration that the hermeneutical situation with God as the teacher, which Kierkegaard describes as the absolute paradox, could result in an experience of Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons”, thus too eirenicly combining these two hermeneutics.<sup>31</sup> Later on, Biser emphasizes the differences in these distinctions in his new approach to fundamental theology of 1975. Now he gives a detailed account of the ‘ugly broad ditch’ and its philosophical and historical background. Lessing’s call for help couldn’t be heard by theology, which at that time and even further on tried to base their apologetics on the credibility of miracles and the communicability of the foundations of faith, as postulated in the *First Vatican Council* (1869–1870).<sup>32</sup> As a consequence, faith was treated in terms of objectivity, subjectivity was rejected as not communicable. But faith is not primarily accepting dogmatical facts, as Biser points out, but a kind of certainty with the aim to strengthen men feeling insecure and tempted, in other

---

<sup>29</sup> This often quoted sentence is originally taken from Johann Albrecht Bengel’s introduction to his *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Tübingen 1734. Biser keeps on combining it with Kierkegaard’s concept of contemporaneity as a way out of the aporia of historical-critical exegesis, see, for instance, Biser, *Der Freund*, p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> See Biser, *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, p. 286: “Umgekehrt heißt auslegen, im Zusammenhang mit Kierkegaards Fragestellung gesehen, die zeitliche Distanz, die zwischen dem Werden und Gewordensein eines Sprachverhalts besteht und die sich im Fall ‘historischer Texte’ noch vielfach um die ihrer Überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung vergrößert, auf eine zumindest intentionale Gleichzeitigkeit hin überholen.”

<sup>31</sup> See Biser, *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, pp. 293f.

<sup>32</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, pp. 28-32.

words “an act of existential consolidation”.<sup>33</sup> To have worked out this fact has to be recognized as Kierkegaard’s greatest discovery.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Biser’s own “hermeneutical faith”, which not only refuses any *sacrificium intellectus*, but relies on confirmation in dialogue<sup>35</sup>, already reveals that he has never warmed to Kierkegaard’s “knight of faith“ or “faith by virtue of the absurd”.

Biser’s concept of “hermeneutical faith” is based on a new approach to Jesus and the gospels, which he had elaborated in his first book about Jesus from 1973 with the title *Der Helfer. Eine Vergegenwärtigung Jesu* (“The helper. A realization of Jesus”). There he tries to overcome the problematic historical-critical exegesis, which seemed to fragmentize our knowledge about Jesus and to cement the fragments in the past, thus making them inaccessible for today’s Christians. In contrast to the historical-critical reading of the gospels, Biser wants to represent, modernise, or bring to mind Jesus for our present time. Going back to the religious experience of those who met Jesus, which is reflected in all the texts of the New Testament, not only the historically verified sayings of Jesus, he tries to bridge the gap between past and present and thus to overcome Lessing’s “ugly broad ditch”.<sup>36</sup> In this context, Biser points to Mt 11: 28: “Come here to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest”<sup>37</sup>. It proves for Biser that the field of spiritual experience and insights lies close to the real intentions of the historical Jesus.<sup>38</sup> This quotation is not only the motto of *Practice in Christianity*, but also of a whole chapter in Biser’s own book, and the center of his own reading of Kierkegaard.<sup>39</sup> In his

---

<sup>33</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, p. 68 “Als Akt existenzieller Vergewisserung begriffen, entspricht der Glaube der Grundintention Jesu, dem es zunächst weder um die Belehrung noch um die Besserung der Menschheit zu tun war, sondern um die Entlastung der Bedrückten und Beladenen, um die Konsolidierung der mit sich selbst Überworfenen und die Festigung der Verunsicherten und Geängstigten.”

<sup>34</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, p. 68 footnote 19: “die größte Entdeckung des späten Kierkegaard”.

<sup>35</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, p. 69-71.

<sup>36</sup> See Biser, *Der Helfer*, pp. 25-32. Cf. Biser, *Einweisung ins Christentum*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *SKS* 12, 21 / *PC*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 29. In this early book, Biser still reflects that Bultmann tries to locate the origin of this saying in Jewish wisdom literature, later he will take for granted that it is originally from Jesus himself.

<sup>39</sup> See *Mensch und Spiritualität. Eugen Biser und Richard Heinzmann im Gespräch*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2008, p. 101: “Sören Kierkegaard hat in diesem Satz [Mt 11: 28], den er im Lichte Jesu gelesen hat, das Zentrum des ganzen Neuen Testaments entdeckt.”

meditation on this sentence, Biser inserts several long quotations from *Practice in Christianity*<sup>40</sup> and follows Kierkegaard by combining the suffering and inner passion with the deep love of Jesus, who draws all men unto him (cf. John 11: 32). Contrary to Bultmann's conviction that the consciousness and the true thoughts of Jesus are irrelevant, Biser stresses that Kierkegaard's reflections on the *incognito* and the inner passion or passion of the soul of Jesus reveal "a hermeneutically given fact without which in many traits the visible figure of Jesus would not have the transparency needed for a true understanding"<sup>41</sup>. Biser even agrees with Kierkegaard in deducing this suffering from his *incognito* and the situation of offense that Jesus himself provokes, which is developed in the second part of *Practice in Christianity*.<sup>42</sup> But he seems not to consent to Kierkegaard's hypertrophic self-reflection of Jesus' suffering, being itself the occasion for offense and thus for his own suffering.<sup>43</sup> Neither does he expand the whole panorama of Jesus' *incognito* and the bewilderment of the impossibility of direct communication.<sup>44</sup>

Instead, Biser leads the reader to the cross, where Jesus reveals his self-giving love when he entrusts mother and son to one another according to John 19: 26f., a verse Kierkegaard nearly never quoted. With the exception of the dialogue between the risen Christ and Peter, who shall love him (John 21), the same holds true for two other passages Biser meditates at the end of his book. Jesus assures us that he will always be with us (Mt 28: 20) and calls us to abide in him (John 15: 4). He concludes his book, being convinced that Jesus is really and directly present

---

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 159-163, and *SKS* 12, 21-26 / *PC*, 11-16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192: „Mit der Frage nach dieser Leidensgeschichte wird keine verbotene Tür aufgebrochen, keine Intimität verletzt, sondern eine hermeneutische Grundgegebenheit aufgerufen, ohne welche die sichtbare Lebensgestalt Jesu in vielen Zügen nicht die für ein wahres Verständnis erforderliche Transparenz erlangt.“

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189-198, citing e. g. *ibid.*, p. *SKS* 12, 108 / *PC*, 100: "Ah, to stand with open arms and say, 'Come here to me!'—and then all flee—not only flee but flee offended! Oh, to be the Savior of the world! And therefore this suffering echoes in the joyful words to Peter: Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonas."

<sup>43</sup> See *SKS* 12, 108 / *PC*, 138: "... he suffers so that this, his suffering, can become and does become an offense to the few believers. It is true that he suffers only once, but unlike a human being he does not escape with the first-time suffering—he suffers throughout the most grievous suffering the second time, in his concern and grief that his suffering is an occasion for offense. No human being can comprehend this suffering; to want to comprehend it is presumption." Biser, *Das Antlitz*, p. 60, cites this passage, yet without further interpretation.

<sup>44</sup> See *SKS* 12, 136-143 / *PC*, 131-139.

for those who believe in him. Thus he smoothes down the harshness of the impossibility of direct communication, which is central for Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*. So while the title of Biser's book about Jesus, *Der Helfer*, is taken directly from Kierkegaard<sup>45</sup>, the subtitle *Eine Vergegenwärtigung Jesu* transforms his ideas. This transformation becomes more evident in his subsequent books about Jesus. In his *Der Freund. Annäherung an Jesus* ("The friend. An approach to Jesus") of 1980, the epithet "friend" ("Freund") for Jesus, taken from John 15: 15, is quite unfamiliar to Kierkegaard, who obviously never quoted this verse. Biser keeps on following Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity* as a key work, especially with the idea of the inner passion of Jesus, the importance of Mt 11: 28, for Biser now the "essential word" of Jesus ("Wesenswort") in which he expresses his own essence<sup>46</sup>, and the dialectic of love and offense.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless he leaves out those traits in Kierkegaard which would be rather a sign of the modern crisis of faith than a solution for it.

From this it is evident that the more theoretical and hermeneutical stratum concerning the foundations of theology results in the more existential stratum and the analysis of present mankind. The problem of man in modernity and the questions about the meaning of life can only be solved with Christology, for Kierkegaard and for Biser as well. For Biser it is Kierkegaard who was the first to use the word "meaning" in its modern sense when he articulated the anthropological problem in his *Repetition*, mediated by his own biography.<sup>48</sup> So far he is the inventor of the so called "modal-anthropology". Its basis is "that man is not yet

---

<sup>45</sup> See Biser, *Der Helfer*, p. 162, referring to *SKS* 12, 26 / *PC*, 15: "The helper is the help."

<sup>46</sup> See Biser, *Der Freund*, pp. 189f., cf. *ibid.*, p. 104 and Biser, *Einweisung ins Christentum*, p. 100: „the centre of the gospel“.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54, he quotes the aforementioned passage *SKS* 12, 108 / *PC*, 100 (see above, footnote 42), but reintegrates Jesus' being an offense in an anthropological concept, see *ibid.*, p. 120: "Doch Jesus befremdet nicht nur durch sein irritierendes Urteil, sein provozierendes Verhalten und seine konventionsfremde Mitmenschlichkeit, sondern nicht weniger durch die Radikalität seiner alle Normen durchbrechenden Liebe. Es ist eine Liebe, die nach Kierkegaards hellstichtiger Einfühlung die menschliche Sinnerwartung sowohl in zeitlicher wie in sachlicher Hinsicht überbietet."

<sup>48</sup> See Biser, *Der Mensch*, pp. 40-43, quoting *ibid.*, 40 the beginning of the diary entry of 11<sup>th</sup> October (*SKS* 4, 68 / *R*, p. 100). Cf. Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 182, where he stresses that it was Milan Machovec (1925-2003) who first wrote about the meaning of life.

what he can be”.<sup>49</sup> Anxiety is for Biser the central characteristic of the present epoch in the history of mankind. Now it is man himself who hangs over the ugly broad ditch<sup>50</sup>, afflicted by the anxiety of man himself and his possibilities<sup>51</sup>. It was Kierkegaard who was the first to come to this diagnosis, especially in linking anxiety with the category of possibility<sup>52</sup>. In this he was followed by the philosophers Heidegger and Jaspers, the authors Gertrud von Le Fort and Werner Bergengruen (1892–1864), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), and many others. Biser often stereotypically refers to series of these authorities for his diagnosis, connecting Kierkegaard’s two books *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*.<sup>53</sup>

This diagnosis holds true to the present day, even with a reinforced dynamic, such as the “disintegrative situation” of the society with its mechanisms of suppression and diversion which makes it more and more difficult to become aware of its present state of mind, and thereby to overcome it. As Biser shows with Gertrud von Le Fort’s novel “Die Letzte am Schafott” (1931), anxiety itself resembles prayer in its structure, and as such guarantees “that today, man is standing in a really new form of affinity to the religious”.<sup>54</sup>

As a consequence, a Christian theology which should be a solution and not a part of the problem has to avoid two extremes. It should neither superimpose a “Christology from above” or “descendent Christology” over those who are not receptive to it and should not be made such by provoking their anxious and instable personalities. Nor should one start from the other side in a “Christology from below” or “ascendent Christology” which focuses too much on social and global problems instead of being an answer for the existential misery of the individual.

---

<sup>49</sup> See Biser, *Der Mensch*, pp. 294f.

<sup>50</sup> See Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 82: “Der Mensch ist das den Abgrund überspannende Wesen.”

<sup>51</sup> See Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 81: “Erlebt wird die Verzweiflung [...] als Angst, die damit zugleich in ihrer Primärform als die Angst des Menschen vor sich und seinen Möglichkeiten faßbar wird.”

<sup>52</sup> This idea, taken from *The Concept of Anxiety*, is frequently referred to in Biser’s books, cf. for example the quotation of the passage with the hypochondriac (*SKS 4, 460 / CA, \*\*\*\**) in his *Grenzerfahrungen*, p. 31 footnote 1; *Gott ist tot*, p. 283 footnote 41.

<sup>53</sup> See Biser, *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch*, pp. 111-114; Biser, *Der Mensch*, pp. 81-83 and pp. 126f.; *Einweisung ins Christentum*, pp. 56 and 329.

<sup>54</sup> See Biser, *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch*, p. 114. This idea was first developed in his interpretation of this novel, see *Grenzerfahrungen*, pp. 31-48, 83-92, e. g. p. 86: “Angst als religiös[e] Aufgabe”.

Quite on the contrary, only a “Christology from inside” (“Christologie von innen”) will avoid these aporias and answer the questions Kierkegaard formulated in his *Repetition*: “Where am I? Who am I?” The answer is: “The helper is the help.” Kierkegaard was the first to formulate this “Christology from inside”.<sup>55</sup> He not only realized the “anthropologic turn” in theology, but showed the way which should be pursued.

Biser developed this idea in the early 1970s. Yet, he seems to have had some reservations with respect to the way Kierkegaard fills his idea of contemporaneity.<sup>56</sup> On the one side, Kierkegaard only paves the way for the “Christology from inside”, but does not develop it.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, it is he who brings us to an “immediate access” to Jesus not only in the way of suffering, but also in accepting Jesus’ help according to Mt 11: 28.<sup>58</sup> Biser sees his own work as a modernisation of this program, which he makes quite obvious when constantly referring to *Practice in Christianity* in nearly all his books.<sup>59</sup> But he shows his own concern in his reading of the “Christology from inside”, for example in opposing it as a “Christology of solidarity and identity” against the “Christology of authority”.<sup>60</sup> Biser articulates the inwardness of his

---

<sup>55</sup> See Biser, *Der Freund*, pp. 226f., esp.: “[Kierkegaard] hatte vielmehr seine – als ‘Einübung’ getarnte – ‘Christologie von innen’ auch in einer Weise darauf abgestimmt, daß sie sich wie die Antwort des Glaubens auf die anthropologische Frage ausnimmt.” Cf. Biser, *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende*, pp. 261-265, esp. p. 264: “Denn der mit seiner Welt und sich selbst überworfenen Mensch ist allenfalls noch eine ‘schwebende Mitte’, die, um gehalten werden zu können, der stabilisierenden Hilfe bedarf. Die aber kann nur in jener ‘überkategorialen’ Hilfe bestehen, die der Selbstzuwendung des Helfers entstammt und so mit diesem identisch ist. Insofern ‘antwortet’ das Schlüsselwort der ‘Einübung’...unmittelbar auf die Doppelfrage der Wiederholungsschrift.” For an theological reaction on this “Christology from inside” cf. the Walter Kern, “Christologie ‘von innen’ und die historische Jesusfrage,” in his *Disput um Jesus und um Kirche. Aspekte, Reflexionen*, Innsbruck et al.: Tyrolia-Verlag 1980, pp. 73-87, which is frequently named by Biser and which refers to Biser Eugen, “Der Helfer und die Hilfe. Plädoyer für eine Christologie von innen,” in *Wer ist Jesus Christus?*, ed. by Joseph Sauer, Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Herder 1977, pp. 165-200, where Kierkegaard only is mentioned on pp. 182-186.

<sup>56</sup> In Eugen Biser, “Im Schatten des Kreuzes. Erwägungen zu Kierkegaards Gedanken der geheimen Passion Jesu,” *Geist und Leben*, 46, 1973, pp. 324-333, p. 331, after quoting *Practice in Christianity*, he cites Pascal, who goes even further and shows you how to understand Jesus as “the ‘being’ who is in us without being one with us in a univocal sense”.

<sup>57</sup> See Eugen Biser, “Geführt und gehalten. Spirituelle Impulse durch eine ‘Christologie von Innen,’” *Geist und Leben*, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, vol. 51, 1978, pp. 178-195, pp. 183-185 about Kierkegaard.

<sup>58</sup> See Eugen Biser, “Unmittelbarer Zugang zu Jesus? Die Wegweisung des Sören Kierkegaard,” *Wort und Antwort*, Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag der Schwabenverlags AG, vol. 27, 1986, pp. 154-158, pp. 157f.

<sup>59</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, p. 68 footnote 19 about his *Der Helfer* 1973.

<sup>60</sup> See Biser, *Einweisung ins Christentum*, p. 87. Cf. his plädoyer for a Christianity of freedom with Gal 5: 1 in his *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende*, p. 291: “ ‘Ermutigung zum Selbstsein’ ”; cf. the opposition of faith as “submission under the authority of an infinitely superior wisdom of God” and faith as “ascent” in Biser, *Menschsein*, p. 143.



“Christology from inside” more in terms of the mystic Christ-intimacy (intimacy of Paul’s Gal 2: 20<sup>61</sup> or as “christomathia”, i. e. to be educated by Christ). The whole book *Einweisung ins Christentum*, which in German sounds quite similar to Kierkegaard’s *Indøvelse i Christendom* (*Einübung im Christentum*) / *Practice in Christianity*, should be understood as a “bringing into wisdom” (“Ein-weis-ung”). So this title is both a reference to Kierkegaard and a differentiation.<sup>62</sup> However, the title of his first book about Jesus, *Der Helfer*, which is deliberately opposed to Guardini’s famous *The Lord* (“Der Herr”) from 1937, refers directly to Kierkegaard.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, Biser can reformulate his “Christology from inside” as a “therapeutic theology” or “theology as therapy”. With this approach, he seeks to regain the original message of Christianity. After the periods of interpreting Christianity in terms of law, as documented in the early literary work *The Shepherd of Hermas* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, in dogmatical terms as in the Middle Ages, and after Kant in moral terms, Christianity now seems to be more and more formulated in mystical terms of inwardness and spirituality with a focus on salvation, i. e. therapy.<sup>64</sup> Biser underpins this “therapeutic theology” with the same quotations from Kierkegaard as the “Christology from inside”, especially Mt 11: 28 and “the helper is the help”. Biser points out that Kierkegaard thought of calling his *Practice in Christianity* “The Radical Cure”.<sup>65</sup> The disease to be cured is, according to Biser, mainly the bewilderment of mankind

---

<sup>61</sup> See Biser, “Geführt und gehalten,” p. 195: “Wenn diese Hilfe aber identisch mit dem Helfer ist, kann nur das Personzentrum des Empfängers das ‘Organ’ dieser Annahme sein...Ein dialogisches Ich baut sich auf, in dem sich Wort und Antwort zu echter Einsinnigkeit verbinden.” Cf. Kern, “Christologie ‘von innen’ und die historische Jesusfrage,” p. 77, where he interprets “from inside” as “das allseitige In-eins des Menschen-in-Menschheit als des Christen-in-Jesus”.

<sup>62</sup> See Biser, *Einweisung ins Christentum*, pp. 17, 44 and 331.

<sup>63</sup> See Joachim Reger, *Die Mitte des Christentums. Eugen Bisers Neubestimmung des Glaubens als exemplarischer Versuch gegenwärtiger Theologie*. Mit einem Nachwort von Eugen Biser, Trier: Paulinus Verlag 2005 (Trierer Theologische Studien 71), pp. 86-89.

<sup>64</sup> See Eugen Biser, *Theologie als Therapie. Zur Wiedergewinnung einer verlorenen Dimension*, Heidelberg: E. Fischer 1985, p. 112.

<sup>65</sup> See Biser, *Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende*, p. 254. This information is taken from Gerdes, Hayo, *Sören Kierkegaards ‘Einübung im Christentum’. Einführung und Erläuterung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1982, p. 1, cf. *Pap. IX A 176 in SKS 21, 23: NB 6, 25 / JP 6, 6210 (PC, 273)*.

about itself, as Kierkegaard diagnosed in the *Repetition* at the beginning of the diary entry of 11<sup>th</sup> October, the day he ended his engagement:

**\*\*\* English text of:**

*Mit Liv er bragt til det Yderste; jeg væmmes ved Tilværelsen, den er smagløs uden Salt og Mening.. Hvor er jeg? Hvad vil det sige: Verden? Hvad betyder dette Ord? Hvo har narret mig ind i det Hele, og lader mig nu staae der? Hvem er jeg?\*\*\*<sup>66</sup>*

As shown, Biser's productive reception of Kierkegaard's oeuvre is centered around a few works or even a few thoughts and passages in them, mainly *The Concept of Anxiety* with the analysis of anxiety, *Philosophical Fragments*, and the Christian answer to Lessing's ditch, the *Practice in Christianity* with the ideas of contemporaneity, "the helper is the help", and the central motto taken from Mt 11: 28. The many other citations or more or less obvious allusions to Kierkegaard which can be found in nearly all of Biser's books are of less importance, except for Biser's approval of Kierkegaard's thoughts about self-love, love of one's neighbor, and self-denial in *Works of Love*<sup>67</sup>. As a kind of unproductive reception, they often function as an illustration of Biser's ideas without being systematically relevant for his reception of Kierkegaard himself. This can be seen in the passage where he cites the famous sentence about the 70,000 fathoms of water just to specify it and to call attention to the difference to Kierkegaard. The leap of faith which is required is not the one of Kierkegaard, but "the decision to start the dialogue of faith...in a community of faith".<sup>68</sup> The same holds true for some other quotations which

---

<sup>66</sup> SKS 4, 68 / R, 100, quoted in Biser, *Theologie als Therapie*, p. 89. This passage is often referred to in other works by Biser, e. g. "Der Helfer und die Hilfe," pp. 187f. footnote 50, and *Der Freund*, p. 227; *Der Mensch*, p. 40, cf. the first hints to *Repetition* in *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, p. 330-332, where Biser read it more from a hermeneutical than an existential point of view.

<sup>67</sup> See Biser, *Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch*, pp. 23f. and 133f. quotation of SKS 9, 20 and 65 / WL, \*\*\*

<sup>68</sup> See Biser, *Glaubensverständnis*, pp. 114f. Even the problem of those 70,000 fathoms is different from Kierkegaard, as it reflects the impact of the community of the believers, cf. *ibid.*, p. 114: "Hier schließt sich der hermeneutische Zirkel des Glaubens nachgerade zu einem Teufelskreis, da die volle Sicherheit erst im Bekenntnis – und seiner Resonanz im Kreis der Mitgläubenden – zu gewinnen ist, das Bekenntnis aber zugleich diese Sicherheit als seinen entscheidenden Impuls voraussetzt." Biser writes that the quotation is taken from the

demonstrate that Biser read more than the aforementioned books. These references to Kierkegaard either illustrate a genuine idea of Biser's or only inform about Kierkegaard and his works without further relevance to his own thoughts.<sup>69</sup>

Though Eugen Biser never tried to interpret Kierkegaard's writings as a whole, he constantly pointed to him as a key figure for everybody who wants to interpret our modern culture. Biser's own vigorous approach is an important voice in modern theology, and an outstanding example for how Kierkegaard is actualized and modernised in present Catholic theology which should not be neglected.

---

*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but his formulation could not be verified, it is probably taken from secondary literature.

<sup>69</sup> See the hints to *Either/Or* in Biser's *Der Freund*, p. 35 (Sophie Scholl as a bride) and p. 291 endnote 31, or in Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 179 and 320 endnote 151 (Don Juan as representative of the immediate erotic stage), and to *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* in Biser, *Der Mensch*, p. 42 (the "single individual" as Kierkegaard's category). See further Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Tagebücher*, vols. 1–2, selected, trans. and ed. by Theodor (Leipzig: Hegner 1941), quoted in *Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, München: Koesel 1970, p. 100, where he quotes the diary entry about the idealist, "der ein ungeheures Schloß erbaut und selbst daneben in einer Scheune wohnt" (SKS 18, 303, KK:490 / **JP** \*\*\*), taken from Haecker's translation from 1923. Later he also refers to the similar passage in *The Sickness unto Death* (SKS 11, 158f. / SUD, 43f.), cf. above footnote 18.

## Bibliography

*I. Works of Eugen Biser (selection)*

*Grenzerfahrungen. Die Bedeutung der religiösen Grenzsituationen in den Werken Gertrud von Le Forts*, Freiburg i. Br., unpublished dissertation 1956.

*Gott ist tot. Nietzsches Destruktion des christlichen Bewußtseins*, München: Kösel, 1962.

“Kein ‘Glaubensheld’. Zu zwei Büchern über Kierkegaard,” Hochland, München–Kempten: Kösel, vol. 57, 1964–65, pp. 173–77.

*Theologische Sprachtheorie und Hermeneutik*, München: Koesel 1970.

*Der Helfer. Eine Vergegenwärtigung Jesu*, München: Koesel 1973.

“Im Schatten des Kreuzes. Erwägungen zu Kierkegaards Gedanken der geheimen Passion Jesu,” *Geist und Leben*, 46, 1973, pp. 324–333.

“Verwirklichung der Liebe. Erwägungen zu dem Kierkegaard-Wort ‘Der Helfer ist die Hilfe’,” *Mitten in der Welt*, Lochham: Sekretariat Charles de Foucauld, vol. 11/12, 1973, no. 44/45, pp. 93–106.

*Glaubensverständnis. Grundriß einer hermeneutischen Fundamentaltheologie*, Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Herder, 1975.

“Der Helfer und die Hilfe. Plädoyer für eine Christologie von innen,” in *Wer ist Jesus Christus?*, ed. by Joseph Sauer, Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Herder 1977, pp. 165–200.

“Geführt und gehalten. Spirituelle Impulse durch eine ‘Christologie von Innen’,” *Geist und Leben*, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, vol. 51, 1978, pp. 178–195.

*Interpretation und Veränderung. Werk und Wirkung Romano Guardinis*, Paderborn et al.: Schöningh 1979.

*Menschsein in Anfechtung und Widerspruch. Ansatz einer christlichen Anthropologie*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 1980.

*Theologie als Therapie. Zur Wiedergewinnung einer verlorenen Dimension*, Heidelberg: E. Fischer 1985.

“Unmittelbarer Zugang zu Jesus? Die Wegweisung des Søren Kierkegaard,” *Wort und Antwort*, Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag der Schwabenverlags AG, vol. 27, 1986, pp. 154–158.

*Die glaubensgeschichtliche Wende. Eine theologische Positionsbestimmung*, Graz et al.: Styria 1986.

*Der Freund: Annäherungen an Jesus*, München et al.: Piper 1989 (Serie Piper 981).

*Der inwendige Lehrer. Der Weg zu Selbstfindung und Heilung*, München und Zürich: Piper, 1994 (Serie Piper 1852).

*Der Mensch – das uneingelöste Versprechen. Entwurf einer Modalanthropologie*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 1995.

*Einweisung ins Christentum*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1998 (1997).

*Das Antlitz. Selbstfindung in Jesus Christus*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 2006 (1999).

*Mensch und Spiritualität. Eugen Biser und Richard Heinzmann im Gespräch*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2008.

## *II. Sources of Eugen Biser's Knowledge of Kierkegaard*

Anz, Wilhelm, “Philosophie und Glaube bei S. Kierkegaard,” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 51, 1954, pp. 50–105.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, vol. 1, *Der deutsche Idealismus*, Salzburg et al.: Pustet 1937, pp. 693–734.

Brandes, Georg, *Søren Kierkegaard. Eine kritische Darstellung*, Leipzig: Reclam 1992.

Dallago, Carl, *Ueber eine Schrift: Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit (von Theodor Haecker)*, Innsbruck: Brenner 1914.

- De Rougemont, Denis, "Kierkegaard und Hamlet," in *Der Monat. Eine internationale Zeitschrift für Politik und Geistesleben*, Munich et al.: Gesellschaft für internationale Publizistik 1953, no. 56, Mai 1953, pp. 115–124.
- Fischer, Hermann, *Die Christologie des Paradoxes. Zur Herkunft und Bedeutung des Christusverständnisses Sören Kierkegaards*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1970.
- Gerdes, Hayo, *Sören Kierkegaards 'Einübung im Christentum'. Einführung und Erläuterung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1982.
- Grau, Gerd-Günther, *Die Selbstauflösung des christlichen Glaubens. Eine religionsphilosophische Studie über Kierkegaard*, Frankfurt am Main: Schulte-Bulmke 1963.
- Guarda, Victor, *Die Wiederholung. Analysen zur Grundstruktur menschlicher Existenz im Verständnis Sören Kierkegaards*, Königstein: Athenäum 1980.
- Guardini, Romano, "Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Sören Kierkegaards," in *Hochland*, München–Kempten: Kösel, vol. 24, 1927, Heft 2, pp. 12–33.
- "Vom Sinn der Schwermut," in *Die Schildgenossen*, Würzburg: Werkbundverlag, vol. 8, 1928, pp. 103–125.
- *Christliches Bewusstsein. Versuche über Pascal*, Leipzig: Hegner 1935.
- *Die Annahme seiner selbst*, Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag 1960.
- Haecker, Theodor, *Sören Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit*, Munich: Schreiber 1913.
- Jaspers, Karl, *Philosophie, vol. 2: Existenzerhellung*, Berlin u. a.: Springer 1932.
- *Der philosophische Glaube*, München: Piper 1948.
- *Vernunft und Existenz. Fünf Vorlesungen*, Groningen: J. B. Wolters 1935.
- Jens, Walter / Küng, Hans (Ed.), *Dichtung und Religion. Pascal, Gryphius, Lessing, Hölderlin, Novalis, Kierkegaard, Dostojewski, Kafka*, München: Kindler 1985.

- Kierkegaard, Sören, *Leben und Walten der Liebe*, trans. and ed. by Albert Dorner, Leipzig: F. Richter 1890 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. and ed. by Albert Dorner and Christoph Schrempf, introduced by Christoph Schrempf, Jena: Diederichs 1924 (*Erbauliche Reden*, vol. 3)).
- *Die Tagebücher*, vols. 1–2, selected, trans. and ed. by Theodor Häcker, Innsbruck: Brenner 1923 (Leipzig: Hegner 1941).
- *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1–28, trans. by Emanuel Hirsch, Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs 1950–69 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Gütersloh: Güterslöher Taschenbücher 1986–95).
- *Philosophisch-theologische Schriften*, vols. 1–4, trans. and ed. by Hermann Diem and Walter Rest, Köln et al.: Hegner 1951ff.
- *Randbemerkungen zum Evangelium*, trans. and ed. by Friedrich Aage Hansen-Löwe, Munich: Kösel 1956.
- *Werke*, vols. 1–5, trans. and ed. by Liselotte Richter, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1960–64.
- Löwith, Karl, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts. Marx und Kierkegaard*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1950.
- *Wissen, Glauben und Skepsis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1956 (Kleine Vandenhoeck–Reihe 30).
- *Die Hegelsche Linke. Texte aus den Werken von Heinrich Heine, Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, Max Stirner, Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx und Sören Kierkegaard*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann 1962.
- Lowrie, Walter, *Das Leben Sören Kierkegaards*, Düsseldorf et al.: Diederichs 1955.
- Reimer, Louis, “Die Wiederholung des Problems der Erlösung bei Kierkegaard,” in *Materialien zur Philosophie Soeren Kierkegaards*, ed. and introduced by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979 (Suhrkamp–Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 241), pp. 302–344.

Ries, Wiebrecht, *Transzendenz als Terror. Eine religionsphilosophische Studie über Franz Kafka*, Heidelberg: Schneider 1977.

Schäfer, Klaus, *Hermeneutische Ontologie in den Climacus-Schriften Sören Kierkegaards*, Munich: Kösel 1968.

*Sören Kierkegaard und sein Verhältnis zu "ihr."* Aus nachgelassenen Papieren, trans. and ed. by Raphael Meyer, Stuttgart: Juncker 1905.

Theunissen, Michael, Das Menschenbild in der 'Krankheit zum Tode', in *Materialien zur Philosophie Soeren Kierkegaards*, ed. and introduced by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 241), pp. 496–510.

Vetter, August, *Frömmigkeit als Leidenschaft. Eine Deutung Kierkegaards*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Freiburg et al.: Alber 1963 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., Leipzig: Insel 1928).

### *III. Secondary Literature on Eugen Bisers's Relation to Kierkegaard*

Fuchs, Franz Josef / Kreiner, Armin, " 'Ich glaube, darum rede ich' (2 Kor 4,13). Eugen Bisers hermeneutische Theologie," in Horst Bürkle / Gerold Becker (Ed.), *Communicatio Fidei. Festschrift Eugen Biser*, Regensburg: Pustet 1983, pp 399–414, pp. 405f.

Grau, Gerd-Günther, "Sören Kierkegaard: 'Glaubensheld' oder 'Ritter von der Unendlichen Resignation'?" in his *Vernunft, Wahrheit, Glaube. Neue Studien zu Nietzsche und Kierkegaard*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann 1997 (reprinted in *An-Denken. Festgabe für Eugen Biser*, ed. by Erwin Möde et al., Graz et al.: Styria 1998, pp. 157–167).

Heinzmann, Richard, "Zur Theologie von Eugen Biser. Einsichten und Konsequenzen," in *Mensch und Spiritualität. Eugen Biser und Richard Heinzmann im Gespräch*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2008, pp. 135–150, p.149.



Kern, Walter, “Christologie ‘von innen’ und die historische Jesusfrage,” in his *Disput um Jesus und um Kirche. Aspekte, Reflexionen*, Innsbruck et al.: Tyrolia-Verlag 1980, pp. 73–87, pp. 75, 78, 82–84.

Reger, Joachim, *Die Mitte des Christentums. Eugen Bisers Neubestimmung des Glaubens als exemplarischer Versuch gegenwärtiger Theologie*. Mit einem Nachwort von Eugen Biser, Trier: Paulinus Verlag 2005 (Trierer Theologische Studien 71), pp. 96–104 and 371–386.