

## ***Elisabeth Schneider-Böklen***

### **Elisabeth Cruciger – Nun, Minister’s Wife and First Lutheran Poetess<sup>1</sup>**

The hymn *Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn* [Lord Christ, the only son of God] originating from the time of the Reformation is still sung today. It was written by Elisabeth Cruciger, a nun from Pomerania who had already been convinced by Johannes Bugenhagen of Martin Luther’s theology. In 1524, she married Caspar Cruciger, one of Luther’s co-workers, in Wittenberg, and in that same year her hymn was first published. Elisabeth Cruciger’s text combines biblical theology, parts of the patristic thinking and religious experience of female mysticism. Besides her hymn, a letter exists which is mentioned in another one written by Joachim, a baptised Jew in Stettin. In this letter Cruciger shows a very profound knowledge of the new Lutheran doctrine of Justification, and also empathy for Joachim’s spiritual situation. Elisabeth and Caspar Cruciger were married by Martin Luther in 1524. A document detailing the ceremony, discovered in 1717, reveals an anti-romantic view of marriage.

Das Lied “Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn” aus der Reformationszeit wird bis heute gesungen. Es stammt von Elisabeth Cruciger, geborene von Meseritz (ca. 1500–1535) einer Nonne in Pommern, die um 1522 durch Johannes Bugenhagen von Luthers Theologie überzeugt wurde. 1524 heiratete sie Caspar Cruciger, einen von Luthers Mitarbeitern in Wittenberg. Ihr Lied wurde 1524 das erste Mal gedruckt, der Text verbindet biblische Theologie, patristisches Gedankengut und die religiöse Erfahrung weiblicher Mystik. Neben ihrem Lied gibt es einen Brief von ihr, der in einem Brief eines getauften Juden Joachim aus Stettin von 1524 zitiert wird. Darin zeigt sie eine tiefe Kenntnis der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre wie auch Empathie für Joachims geistliche Situation. Ein Porträt von Elisabeth Cruciger findet sich vermutlich im Epitaph der Familie Cruciger “Jesus segnet die Kinder” aus der Werkstatt von Lukas Cranach d. J. von 1560.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is based on a lecture given at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Reformation Studies in Cambridge (9-11.4.2014). Thanks to Mary Ratcliffe for her help in translating into English!

Elisabeth Cruciger, née von Meseritz, is one of the almost forgotten women of the Church; however, only “almost”, because in the German Protestant church her hymn “Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn” [Lord Christ, the only son of God] has for many years been the required hymn in the service held on the last Sunday after Epiphany.<sup>2</sup> The paper shall take a brief look at Elisabeth Cruciger’s life and work, aiming to show that her life – as a nun and also as a married woman – was determined in the first place by her deep faith and relationship to the God Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, expressed by the feeling of love, rooted in Church practice by praying, singing, living with Scripture and the Sacraments. All of these points are also to be found in her song.

The last 15 years have seen the publication of several new scholarly articles about Elisabeth Cruciger’s life and her hymn. In 2001 Mary Jane Haemig started a new discussion about the reasons for which Elisabeth Cruciger had not always been recognised as the author of the hymn.<sup>3</sup> Then in 2002, in an article published both in German and English, Albrecht Classen praised Elisabeth Cruciger as a religious poetess and also as a theologian of great importance, although mostly neglected in literary studies.<sup>4</sup> These opinions about Elisabeth Cruciger were well summarised by Linda Maria Koldau in 2005.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, Micheline White published an article about the reception of Elisabeth Cruciger’s hymn in England, where it had already been translated into English at the time of Reformation.<sup>6</sup>

## Her Life as Nun

Elisabeth was born in Pomerania (today Poland), on the estate of Meseritz, located southeast of the town of Treptow (nowadays Trzebiatów) and northwest

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<sup>2</sup> Various interpretations may be listened to on [www.youtube.de](http://www.youtube.de).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Jane Haemig, “Elisabeth Cruciger (1500?-1535): The Case of the Disappearing Hymn Writer,” in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 32, No. 1 (2001), 21-44.

<sup>4</sup> Albrecht Classen, “Elisabeth Creutzigerin oder Crucigerin,” in: Albrecht Classen, *Mein Seel fang an zu singen. Religiöse Frauenlieder des 15.-16. Jahrhunderts. Kritische Studien und Texteditionen (Studies in Spirituality, Supplement 6)* (Peeters: Leuven/Paris/Sterling/Virginia 2002), 258-265.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Maria Koldau, *Frauen-Musik-Kultur. Ein Handbuch zum Sprachgebiet der Frühen Neuzeit* (Böhlau: Köln 2005), 419-423.

<sup>6</sup> Micheline White, “Women’s Hymns in Mid-Sixteenth-Century England: Elisabeth Cruciger, Miles Coverdale, and Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit,” in: *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 24, No. 1-2 (2011), 21-32, 23.

of Schivelbein (Świdwin), in about 1500.<sup>7</sup> In her childhood, she entered a convent for nuns, probably Premonstratensians, in Marienbusch Abbey (which no longer exists), near Treptow. There, a nun's education in late mediaeval piety may have acquainted Elisabeth von Meseritz with chants. In her years at Marienbusch, she also learnt something about the most important biblical and theological matters of interest (in Latin). There she most probably led a spiritual life with a mystical relation to Jesus Christ, embedded in the daily monastic prayers and services. The song she wrote later, in 1524, obviously reflects both.

In 1517, Johannes Bugenhagen arrived at the monastery of Belbuck, near Marienbusch, as a Bible teacher. Later on, Bugenhagen was impressed by Martin Luther's theology,<sup>8</sup> and it is also probable that Elisabeth von Meseritz was affected by this new thinking and belief. The emergence of her evangelical thinking can be detected in a letter dated 1524 which she wrote to Joachim, a baptised Jew in Stettin (Szczecin). A rough translation of an excerpt reads as follows:

Dear brother, grace and peace. I understand, dear brother, that we are living reluctant to accept God into our lives and not able to receive God's grace (although we are redeemed by the blood of Christ)... But console yourself, dear brother, look, I have asked God by a gentle request before His divine eyes, I wish you and give you grace and peace through His power... (Christ) will cover our injustice, so that we will not be accused by anybody. Therefore, enjoy yourself and console yourself, my dear brother, (as I do). So receive this letter and get consolation from it, as it pleases God, that we may console ourselves and kiss each other with the kiss of God's love..."<sup>9</sup>

Though Elisabeth von Meseritz wrote this letter only in 1524, it reflects the influence of the reformatory body of thought in the years before. This may be seen in the following:

1. Her ability to express her thoughts and beliefs focussing on the doctrine of justification ("Christ will cover our injustice..."), which leads to "enjoy yourself and console yourself," meaning a deep emotion.

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Volz, "Woher stammt die Kirchenlied-Dichterin Elisabeth Cruciger?" in: *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 11 (1966), 163-165.

<sup>8</sup> Anneliese Bieber, *Johannes Bugenhagen zwischen Reform und Reformation* (Vandenhoeck: Göttingen 1993), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Clemen, "Ein Brief eines getauften Juden in Stettin aus dem Jahre 1524," in: *Pommersche Jahrbücher* 9 (1908), 175-180, here 179 (translation into English by the author).

2. She writes confidently (in the reformationian “priesthood of all believers”): “I have asked God by a gentle request before His divine eyes, I wish you and give you grace and peace through His power...”
3. She has no problem sending Joachim kisses in her letter: “It is a pleasure to God that we may console ourselves and kiss each other with the kiss of God’s love.” As mentioned above, the loving relation to God is the most important point, integrating body, soul and mind. Although the kiss she mentions will be the traditional “kiss of God’s love” according to 1 Pet., or the “holy kiss” in Rom. 16,16 and 1 Cor. 16,20.

In 1521, Bugenhagen went to Wittenberg to study directly under Martin Luther. The abbot and several monks from Belbuck Monastery left with him. It is not quite clear why they departed; perhaps it was not only for the Lutheran ideas but also because of the fact that the Pomeranian Duke was “land-grabbing” Belbuck.<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth von Meseritz also left Marienbusch and went to Wittenberg, where she could live with Bugenhagen’s family. Bugenhagen, although a priest, had already married Walpurga (Triller?) in 1522.<sup>11</sup> This complete change from a purely female environment must have been a big step for Elisabeth von Meseritz: to leave the nunnery that in every respect had been a home and a safe place for her entire life in order to face uncertainty. What happened then to her parents, brothers or sisters is not known, or rather not yet researched. It is at the end of this period of her life – about 1524 – that she must have written her hymn, “Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn”.

### **Her Life as a Minister’s Wife in Martin Luther’s Circle of Friends**

On 14th June 1524, Elisabeth married the theologian Caspar Cruciger (the Elder), a 20-year-old student and assistant to Martin Luther; a text of the marriage ceremony conducted by Martin Luther exists. This text was first printed

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<sup>10</sup> Norbert Backmund, *Monasticon Praemonstratense* (de Gruyter: Berlin 1983), 330; Hans Hermann Holfelder, “Bugenhagen,” in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (de Gruyter: Berlin 1981), 7, 356; Hermann Hoogeweg, *Die Stifter und Klöster der Provinz Pommern 2* (Saunier: Stettin 1925), 68-71 [Kloster Belbuck], 758-769 [Kloster Marienbusch].

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Diestel, “Ein Schreiben der Witwe Bugenhagens,” in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 11 (1890), 483; Inge Mager, “Theologenehefrauen als ‘Gehilfinnen’ der Reformation,” in: *Cistercienser Chronik* 120/2, (2013), 175-193, about Walpurga Bugenhagen, 176-180.

in 1717, but quotes Spalatin as the author.<sup>12</sup> This wedding was a far cry from being a romantic ceremony “in front of the parish church in Wittenberg.” Almost without exception, it was the difficult times of family life which were mentioned: “misery, sorrow and hard work,” quoting also Genesis 3, 19 to the bridegroom: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” and Gen. 3:16 to the bride: “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” Then, both had to say yes, Doctor Martin Luther put the rings on their fingers and thus ended the ceremony by quoting Gen. 1:28: “Be fruitful, and multiply.” Two points here are interesting:

1. No word of the submission of the bride, but very realistic duties and tasks for both the bridegroom and the bride, founded in Scripture.
2. Sexuality means children and fertility – nothing more.

Since Elisabeth von Meseritz was of noble birth, Johannes Bugenhagen wrote in a letter to Georg Spalatin that he had not been able to reply any sooner because he had to prepare Elisabeth's wedding, and that Spalatin should please bring some venison for the wedding breakfast as they had to prepare food for about 10 tables, taking into account the bride's noble family – even though none of them would come!<sup>13</sup>

Caspar Cruciger became a very successful assistant and writer to Martin Luther (It was said: “*Lutheranos Scribam habere omnibus Pontificiis doctiorem*” [The Lutherans have a writer more learned than all the pontificals!]).<sup>14</sup> Then, he became a School Director in Magdeburg and following that again a preacher and professor in Wittenberg.

What had Elisabeth's life as Cruciger's wife been like? A detailed picture of her personality and private life has not been handed down; only a few pieces of the puzzle are available. Here are only two examples: Elisabeth Cruciger was occasionally mentioned in correspondence between her husband and Luther. Thus, in a letter dated 21 December 1532, Martin Luther wrote to

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<sup>12</sup> Johann Joachim Müller, “Was heut zu Tage bey Copulationen vor Ceremonien gebraucht werden, ist bekannt; wie es aber zu des seeligen D. Luthers Zeiten damit ergangen, zeigt folgender von Spalatio gefertigter Aufsatz,” in: Johann Joachim Müller, *Entdecktes Staats-Cabinet* (Jena 1717), 8. *Eröffnung*, 218-219.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Thommen, “Drei Briefe des Johannes Bugenhagen,” in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* XXI (Innsbruck 1891), 154-159, here 158.

<sup>14</sup> Johann Caspar Wetzel, *Historische Lebensbeschreibung der berühmtesten Liederdichter* (Roth-Scholz: Herrnstadt 1719), I, 391.

Caspar Cruciger that his wife, Katharina and Elisabeth were exchanging gifts. Elisabeth bought Katharina golden jewellery and so Martin Luther sent Elisabeth something similar, a necklace.<sup>15</sup> In another letter from Johannes Bugenhagen to Martin Luther of 24 January 1532, Elisabeth is mentioned as an intelligent and sensible (“*prudens*”) woman.<sup>16</sup>

Nearly every word that Martin Luther spoke at his Table Talks (Tischreden) has been recorded. But that does not prove that he alone was talking in those days: on the contrary, the intellectual academic elite, (young) men and also sometimes the wives of Luther and his friends took part in the discussions.

So Elisabeth Cruciger is mentioned in Martin Luther's Table Talks. She once asked what to do in a (Catholic) church when the priest has raised the host. Martin Luther answered: “Liebe Els, nimm nur den Pfaffen nicht vom Altar, lösche auch die Kerzen nicht aus!”<sup>17</sup> [Dear Els, do not remove the priest from the altar, do not snuff out the candles!]<sup>18</sup> This shows that Elisabeth Cruciger was perhaps an occasional guest at the Table Talks (“Dear Els” being a familiar form of address), and that she may also have been involved in the theological debates there, although there is no other proof or source in the Table Talks of her participation. Surely, she had the natural right to be a member at Luther's table in Wittenberg, like Katharina von Bora, the so-called “*doctorissa*”,<sup>19</sup> who is also quoted as speaking Latin.<sup>20</sup>

Elisabeth had two children: in 1525 a son Caspar, called The Younger, who later became a theologian and a follower of Philipp Melancthon,<sup>21</sup> and a daughter, Elisabeth, who first married the rector Kegel in Eisleben and after his death Johannes, Martin Luther's son.

Elisabeth Cruciger died on 2 May 1535, probably only 35 years old.<sup>22</sup> Later on, Martin Luther referred to this and praised her as a great example of faithfully dying, saying to Caspar Cruciger in a Table Talk: “We must let *Dei misericordiam* [God's Mercy] be bigger than our *calamitates* [troubles,

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<sup>15</sup> D. Martin Luthers *Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe* [hereafter WA] (Böhlau: Weimar 1883), BR 6: *Letter Nr. 1981 of 21 December 1532*, 396.

<sup>16</sup> Otto Vogt, *Dr. Johannes Bugenhagens Briefwechsel* (Saunier: Stettin 1888), 123.

<sup>17</sup> WA TR 1, Nr. 803, 382-383.

<sup>18</sup> Translation into English by the author.

<sup>19</sup> WA TR 5, Nr. 5567, 247.

<sup>20</sup> WA TR 4, Nr. 4860.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz, “Elisabeth Cruciger,” in: *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (Bautz: Nordhausen 1990), I, 1171-1172.

<sup>22</sup> WA BR 7, 384, footnote 5.

calamities], for your dear wife was dying with such a seriousness of faith, that I would like to be with her. Oh, if I had jumped over the creek, I would never want to come back”!<sup>23</sup> Caspar Cruciger himself must have been very sad, as Philipp Melanchthon wrote in a letter to Camerario, dated 23 May 1535: “Cruciger took Sebalduß as a companion with him, that he will lift his mourning, for Cruciger lost his wife.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Her Indirect Living-On in her Husband’s Booklet about Marriage**

“Childbearing is also a way of serving God” wrote Elisabeth’s husband, Caspar Cruciger in a booklet about 1. Tim. 2:15 (How wives also become blessed) after her death in May 1535.<sup>25</sup>

The text was translated into German in 1538 by Georg Spalatin and printed in Erfurt. Here, one may risk saying that Caspar Cruciger must have written the text not only because he was a well-educated theologian and Bible expert, but also as the result of a good and fulfilling marriage to Elisabeth Cruciger. And as for the theme of “Gender and Sexuality”, here proof may be found for the thesis mentioned above: that Elisabeth’s life – as a nun and additionally as a married woman – was determined in the first place by her deep faith and relationship to Christ, integrating (not repressing!) sensual feelings and sexuality.

Let it be put this way: she lived her life in this manner, and he wrote it down. Caspar Cruciger described the five virtues of a wife according to St. Paul: bearing children, love, faith, sanctification, and moderation:

- Bearing children: for Caspar Cruciger, that was a duty to the Church and the occupation and vocation of a wife; he wrote in addition of the difficulties and hard work involved in raising children;<sup>26</sup>
- Love: meaning living with love to God and one’s neighbour. This applies to everyone, and for a wife it may mean, according to Caspar Cruciger, that she may love both God and her husband – for instance, staying with him

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<sup>23</sup> WA TR 2, 78, Nr. 1377, 14-17.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum* (Schwetschke: Halle 1835), II, No. 1276, Philipp Melanchthon to Joachim Camerario from 23 May 1535.

<sup>25</sup> Caspar Cruciger, *Herrn || Doctor Cas=||par Creutzigers ausle=||gung/ vber Sanct Pau=||lus spruch zum Thimotheo/|| wie die Eheweiber...* (Christoffel Golthammer: Erfurt 1538); original without numbered pages, hereby numbered by author. (<http://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vd16/content/titleinfo/995895>, 8 October 2016)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, [24]

in hard times – as well as showing love to her children. Furthermore, she shall also love the poor;<sup>27</sup>

- Faith: meaning trusting in Christ to receive His forgiveness for sins and thus becoming God's children and brothers and sisters in God and to one another?;<sup>28</sup>
- Sanctification: meaning that marital sexuality is holy and chaste. Therefore, Caspar Cruciger rejected both adultery and celibacy, and called marriage a wonderful thing;<sup>29</sup>
- Moderation: meaning a wife's (public) moderate behaviour in eating and drinking, in dressing and living. (It should not be forgotten, that in the 16th century there was no social concept of privacy as we know it today).<sup>30</sup>

To date, no pictures of Elisabeth Cruciger have been unearthed, but a certain idea of how she may have looked can be discerned from the memorial plaque for the Cruciger family produced by Lukas Cranach the Younger's workshop in 1560 ("*Jesus segnet die Kinder*") – perhaps Elisabeth is the married woman behind Caspar Cruciger.<sup>31</sup>

**Her song "*Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn*"<sup>32</sup>**

1. *Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn*  
*Vaters in Ewigkeit,*  
*aus seim Herzen entsprossen,*  
*gleichwie geschrieben steht,*  
*er ist der Morgensterne,*  
*sein Glänzen streckt er ferne*  
*<sup>33</sup>vor andern Sternen klar;*
2. *für uns ein Mensch geboren*  
*im letzten Teil der Zeit,*  
*daß wir nicht wärn verloren*  
*vor Gott in Ewigkeit,*  
*den Tod für uns zerbrochen,*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., [12-13]

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., [12]

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., [15-16]

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., [19-20]

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.lucascranach.org/digitalarchive.php>, 7 February 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther et al., *Enchiridion oder Handbüchlein geistlicher Gesänge und Psalmen* (Loersfeld: Erfurt 1524), 47.

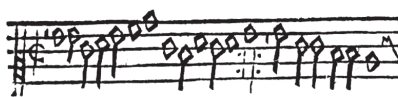
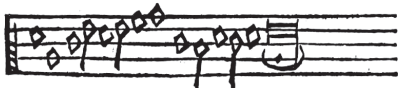
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



*den Himmel aufgeschlossen,  
 das Leben wiederbracht:*

3. *laß uns in deiner Liebe  
 und Kenntnis nehmen zu,  
 daß wir am Glauben bleiben,  
 dir dienen im Geist so,  
 daß wir hie mögen schmecken  
 dein Süßigkeit im Herzen  
 und dürsten stets nach dir.*
  
4. *Du Schöpfer aller Dinge,  
 du väterliche Kraft,  
 regierst von End zu Ende  
 kräftig aus eigener Macht.  
 Das Herz uns zu dir wende  
 und kehr ab unsre Sinne,  
 daß sie nicht irrn von dir.*
  
5. *Ertöt uns durch dein Güte,  
 erweck uns durch dein Gnad,  
 den alten Menschen kränke  
 daß der neu' leben mag  
 und hie auf dieser Erden  
 den Sinn und alls Begehren  
 und G'danken hab zu dir.<sup>34</sup>*

he des heuere kin nou on.  
 Des reit uns in di. teneu. and kei. er an. (Lut  
 weilt nou ein in eue. me. lte. vns eiden unep.  
 In erch. he. v. di. d. u. on. de. ce. i. r. e. p. e. v. l. t.  
 An reit. en. and on. i. en. i. re. u. er. di.  
 lo. Des in. die un. den. i. r. u. e. re. u. de. in. i. n. i. e. r. e.  
 Des in. q. u. i. t. r. e. u. r. e. n. r. i. e. r. e. and d. i. e. n. e. n. l. u. d. e. l. i. g.  
 T. e. s. t. a. n. s. l. u. d. e. n. e. i. r. e. r. e. and k. e. u. i. n. i. s. u. e. m. e. n.  
 I. e. n. d. e. s. i. e. r. e. n. i. n. d. e. r. e. p. e. r. e.  
 Deu. i. o. d. h. i. n. s. i. n. p. r. o. p. t. e. d. e. d. i. n. a. n. e. i. v. n. i. t. e. i. e. r. i. o. b.  
 De. i. u. n. i. t. e. r. d. u. n. n. e. i. t. o. s. e. l. p. s. l. u. d. e. r. e. t. r. a. n. s. p. e. r. k. e. n. t. e. r. e. l. i.  
 I. n. s. i. n. e. e. i. n. w. e. l. c. h. e. r. e. r. o. s. e. l. u. d. e. i. t. e. r. e. t. e. i. d. e. i. t. e. l. i.  
 I. r. e. c. h. t. e. i. t. e. i. n. e. l. i. n. v. u. d. e. l. i. h. e. i. n. e. i. k. r. i. t.  
 I. e. p. t. e. r. e. n. i. e. r. i. t. e. i. t. e. s. w. o. r. d. e. n. h. e. i. n. e. i. s. l. e. i. n. d. e. u. d. e.  
 v. e. l. e. g. a. n. s. i. e. l. u. d. e. i. n. e. n. e. i. t. h. o. l. l. e. i. n. d. i. e. r. e. d. i. e. t. e. a.  
 I. d. e. i. n. e. r. e. i. t. e. i. t. e. l. i. n. e. i. t. e. d. o. r. t. e. i. o. u. n. d. e. i. t. e. l. u. d. e. i. t. e.



C HAN FORTUNE NOU CRISTO

Figure 1: Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn  
 im Erfurter Enchiridion (1524) 33

Micheline White gives a line-by-line literal translation by Johannes Wolfart:<sup>35</sup>

1. Lord Christ, the only son of God  
 of his father in eternity  
 From his heart sprouted  
 As it is written  
 He is the morning star  
 who extends his radiance further  
 than other bright stars.
  
2. For us a person born  
 in the last part of time

<sup>34</sup> *Evangelisches Gesangbuch, Ausgabe für die Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchen in Bayern und Thüringen* (Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern: München 1994), Nr. 67.  
<sup>35</sup> White, "Women's Hymns," 30.

The mother did not lose  
her maidenly chastity  
He broke death open for us  
unlocked heaven  
brought life again.

3. Let us in your love  
and knowledge increase  
That we may remain in faith  
and serve in the spirit so  
that we here may taste  
your sweetness in our hearts  
and thirst constantly for you.
4. You creator of all things  
you fatherly power  
Reign from end to end  
mighty in your own power  
Turn our heart to you  
and turn away our senses  
so that they do not err (or wander) from you.
5. Kill us with your goodness  
awake us through your grace  
Sicken the old man  
so the new one may live  
And here on this earth  
all senses and all desires  
and thanks (thoughts) will go to you.

Four extraordinary characteristics of Elisabeth Cruciger's poetry show her Lutheran thinking and feeling, and may also be partly linked to the context of "Gender and Sexuality" in a wider sense:

1. Biblical allusions

According to the reformatorian "*sola scriptura*", Elisabeth Cruciger puts particular emphasis on citing the bible "as it is written", which is given a line of its own in her hymn. So, for instance, in the first stanza, like in Jn 1:18, the son is "from his (the father's) heart sprouted," as it is translated in the King James' Version: "the Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," or Jesus Christ called "the morning star" according to Rev. 22:16.

In the second stanza, she sings about the incarnation (“in the last part of time” according to Gal. 4:4), that is the Christmas story in the Gospels according to Mt. 1 and Lk. 1:26-56 and 2:1-21, and also the cross and resurrection in their meaning for man’s salvation (according to 2 Tim. 1:10, Rev. 2:7).

In the third stanza, she prays “Let us in your love ...increase” according to 1 Pet. 2:2, or “that we serve in the spirit so” according to Jn 4:24; also, “that we here may taste / your sweetness in our hearts,” which is rooted in Ps. 34:9 (vulg.) and 1 Pet. 2:3.

In the fourth stanza, Elisabeth Cruciger praises Christ’s deity and reigning according to Rev. 11:15; the demand “turn our heart to you / and turn away our senses” may be rooted in Ps. 119: 36 and 37 (“*inclina – averte*”).

And the fifth and last stanza describes the spiritual change according to St. Paul’s old and new man (Rom. 6:6, Eph. 4:22 and Col. 3:9-10).

## 2. The (Early) Christian tradition

As in the Credo or the hymns (sung at daily prayers in the nunnery), in the second stanza the words “The mother did not lose her maidenly chastity” are part of the credo: “born of the Virgin Mary” – which Miles Coverdale in the 16th century translated: “yet kepte she maydenheade unforlorne [not lost],”<sup>36</sup> but nowadays in the German hymnal, the Virgin Mary is no longer mentioned at all. According to Christa Reich, it was only in 1932 that Wilhelm Thomas and Konrad Ameln changed the phrase to its current state.<sup>37</sup> The words about Christ mentioned above in the first stanza are also to be found in Prudentius’s hymn “*Corde natus ex parentis*” (4th century).<sup>38</sup> However, Christa Reich prefers to regard a sermon given by Ambrosius (for the consecration of a virgin, his sister) as the more direct source for the biblical thoughts used by Elisabeth Cruciger, as, for instance:

*Hunc, inquam, dilige. Ipse est quem pater ante luciferum genuit ut aeternam, ex utero generavit ut filium, ex corde eructavit ut verbum. Ipse est in quo complacuit pater, ipse est brachium, quia creator est omnium...patris virtus* [see stanza 4], *quia*

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>37</sup> Christa Reich, “Liedanalyse ‘Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn’,” in: *Liederkunde zum Evangelischen Gesangbuch 2* (Vandenhoeck: Göttingen 2000), 48-54.

<sup>38</sup> Waltraut Ingeborg Sauer-Geppert, “To the song ‘Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn’,” in: Christhard Mahrenholz and Oskar Söhngen, *Handbuch zum evangelischen Kirchengesangbuch, Liederkunde 1* (Vandenhoeck: Göttingen 1970), 100; Prudentius’ hymn is found in: *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* 50, Nr. 26, 25.

*divinitatis in eo corporaliter habitat plenitudo. Quem pater ita diligit, ut in sinu portet, ad dexteram locet... ut virtutem noverit.*<sup>39</sup>

As for other allusions to hymns, Micheline White uncovered several more Latin sources in Elisabeth Cruciger's hymn.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Mystical devotion

The mystical devotion of many nunneries in mediaeval times with its very emotional bridal mysticism and inner love to Christ is also found in the third stanza: "that we here may taste / your sweetness in our hearts and thirst constantly for you." Yet, there are, of course, biblical roots such as Canticum Canticorum or Ps. 34:9 (Vulgata): "*Gustate, et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus.*"<sup>41</sup> However, Elisabeth von Meseritz may also have been thinking of tasting and thirsting not only in a physical but also a spiritual way at Holy Communion.

### 4. The new evangelical doctrine

Beside "*sola scriptura*", "*solus Christus*" – in the last stanza Elisabeth von Meseritz points out the effects of God's grace ("*sola gratia*"): "Awake us through your grace / sicken the old man / so the new one may live." (In the German poem, the noun used is *Mensch*, which refers to both males and females, unlike the English "man").

In the hymn, one can see the deep devotion of Elisabeth von Meseritz to God the Father, the son and the spirit, combined with the feeling of love while also

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<sup>39</sup> Ambrosius, *De virginibus* 3,1,3/ Patrologia Latina 16, 232-233 (here cited according to Christa Reich, footnote 33, 49); underlining added by the author. ["Love Him I say. He it is Whom the Father begat before the morning star, as being eternal, He brought Him forth from the womb as the Son; He uttered him from His heart, as the Word. He it is in whom the Father is well pleased; He is the Arm of the Father, for He is Creator of all...the Power of the Father, because the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him bodily. And the Father so loved Him, as to bear Him in His bosom, and place Him at His right hand...and know His power." Translation into English by Philip Schaff, from "Ambrosius, De Virginibus," in: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Series II, Volume 10, 844. (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.pdf>, 2 April 2017)]

<sup>40</sup> White, "Women's Hymns," 23.

<sup>41</sup> "Das gehört seit Augustin und Bernhard (von Clairvaux) zu den kennzeichnendsten Bildern der Mystik," [that has belonged to the most typical expressions of mysticism since Augustinus and Bernhard of Clairvaux], according to Martin Rößler, *Da Christus geboren war... Texte, Typen und Themen der deutschen Weihnachtslieder* (Calwer: Stuttgart 1981), 189.

integrating the senses, rooted in church practice of praying, singing, living with Scripture, and the Sacraments.

### **Final remarks**

The hymn was first printed in the *Enchiridion* 1524, without naming an author,<sup>42</sup> and then, in 1531, Elisabeth Cruciger was named as the author.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the centuries there has been an ongoing controversy about her authorship of the hymn, until in 1966, Hans Volz ended the discussion by verifying that Elisabeth Cruciger was indeed its author.<sup>44</sup> Mary Jane Haemig demonstrated very carefully that the reason for not crediting Cruciger as the author previously had been rather complex, stating that an “unwillingness by scholarly circles to credit a woman and an unwillingness to credit Elisabeth Cruciger because of the activities of her husband and her son may have played a part.”<sup>45</sup> The latter part of her remark refers to the fact that in the intra-Lutheran disputes of the late sixteenth century, mostly over the theology of Melanchthon and the “true” Lutheran theology ending with the Formula of Concord 1577, Elisabeth’s son, Caspar Cruciger the Younger, a follower of Melanchthon at the university of Wittenberg, had been imprisoned in Wittenberg in 1576 and then exiled. However, this argument, concludes Mary Jane Haemig, “though plausible, [it] cannot be proved”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Luther, *Enchiridion*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Andreas Rauscher, *Geistliche Lieder* (Erfurt 1531).

<sup>44</sup> Hans Volz, “Woher stammt die Kirchenlied-Dichterin Elisabeth Cruciger?,” in: *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 11 (1966), 163-165.

<sup>45</sup> Haemig, “Elisabeth Cruciger,” 43.

<sup>46</sup> Haemig, “Elisabeth Cruciger,” 34.