COMMENT

"This Is Not Martin Luther"

by Martin J. Lohrmann

For some years I have wondered about the image shown here, which has recently been featured in academic and church resources. It serves, for instance, as the cover of *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Third Edition,[1] and as the picture accompanying the entry "Luther, A Biography" in *The Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*.[2] It is commonly labeled in online images of Martin Luther, if it is attributed at all, as an 1833 engraving of Luther, based on a painting by King Henry VIII's court painter Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543). Having seen many Luther portraits—especially paintings by Luther's friend and collaborator Lucas Cranach the Elder—I never thought this one looked like other images of Luther from the sixteenth century.

Because copies of copies invite error, I was willing to grant that some artist in the nineteenth century had simply done a bad job imitating a sixteenth-century original. However, with a little research, I discovered that the image in question was never based upon a picture of Martin Luther at all. It is, instead, a mislabeled reproduction of a Hans Holbein portrait of Bishop John Stokesley, who served as bishop of London in the 1530s. Ironically, Stokesley was himself an opponent of the "Lutheran" reforming efforts then underway in England; he remained a loyal Roman Catholic until his death in 1539.

A first piece of evidence for this misattribution appears in an 1867 book entitled *Some Account of the Life and Works of Hans Holbein, Painter, of Augsburg* by Ralph Nicholson Wornum, who was at the time the Keeper and Secretary of the National Gallery of London. In an extended footnote, Wornum explained that the image was

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Fig. 1. Image appears in James Gardner, *The Faiths of the World; An Account of All Religions and Religious Sects, Their Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs. Compiled from the Latest and Best Authorities, and Illustrated from Authentic and Trustworthy Authorities, Volume 2. H–Z*, (London & Edinburgh: Fullarton & Co., 1858), following page 340 (Scanned from the copy at the Princeton Theological Seminary library). The original caption reads, "Luther. From the Original Picture by Holbein in Her Majesty's Collection at Windsor." The publication of this image in the 1850s matches this paper's findings that the misattribution of this portrait as Luther began to be corrected by English art historians in the following decade.

engraved in 1833 by C.E. Wagstaff, who attached the name "Martin Luther" to it for Windsor Castle's portrait gallery.[3] Indeed, the common descriptors "1833" and "Windsor Castle" match information that online versions of the picture frequently contain. Wornum, however, dismissed the notion that Holbein ever painted Luther's portrait and denied that Wagstaff's copy was an image of Luther. According to him, the image identified as "Martin Luther" was based on a Holbein-credited portrait of Bishop Stokesley. This correction appeared again in an 1869 annual survey of English culture. In a section discussing an 1868 exhibition of Holbein's portraits, the author states, "That [portrait] of Bishop Stokesley, which was formerly at Hampton Court, under the name of 'Martin Luther,' is now preserved at Windsor Castle."[4]

The aptness of these corrections becomes clear when one sees an original version of Holbein's portrait of Stokesley. Because the image that is available online belongs to the Royal Collection Trust and has a copyright belonging to the Queen, it is not reproduced here; it can be viewed on the webpage given in the endnote below.[5] However, as the sources from the 1860s affirmed, the likeness between the authentic sixteenth-century image of Stokesley and the mislabeled Luther of the nineteenth century is unmistakable, including facial features, cap and gown, position of the hands, and the crest in the upper-right corner.

As best as I can reconstruct it, C.E. Wagstaff—a prolific engraver of the mid 1800s—was commissioned to make images of prominent historical figures for display. Wagstaff seems to have preserved a previous misattribution or himself wrongly identified Holbein's portrait of Stokesley as a painting of Luther. In either case, within a relatively short span of years, the mistake was noted and corrected by English art historians. One hundred and fifty years later, however, we have the internet. Wagstaff's engraving of Holbein's Stokesley still has the name "Martin Luther" under it in many versions. Although English curators of the nineteenth century addressed the error in their own time, the same image now resides online, mislabeled and uncorrected. Thus, an error of the past has gained new life today.

NOTES

1. The copyright notice for the cover art of *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings, Third Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) gives the following attribution: "Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) © Stock Montage/Getty Images."

2. *The Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*, edited by Mark A. Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 443. The image credit in that volume makes a further incorrect attribution: "A facsimile reproduction of the portraits from Theodore Beza's *Icones: Contemporary Portraits of Reformers of Religion and Letters* (1580) and in Goulard's *Edition* (1581). London, The Religious Tract Society, 1906. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library," 905. Neither the 1906 reprint of Beza's *Icones* nor a 1909 edition of the same contains the image included with the "Luther, a Biography" encyclopedia entry. Instead, the Beza volume reproduces a Cranach portrayal of the older Luther.

3. Ralph Nicholson Wornum, *Some Account of the Life and Works of Hans Holbein, Painter, of Augsburg, with Numerous Illustrations* (London: Chapman and Hill, 1867 [available online]), 152.

4. Edmund Burke, editor, *The Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad, 1868. New Series* (London: Rivingtons, 1869 [available online]), 311.

5. https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/662313/john-stokesley-bishop-of-london (accessed on June 7, 2019).