

# UNSUNG HERO

## *A Lutheran Who Makes a Difference*

### **Carter Lindberg** A Hero of the External Word



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Dr. Carter Lindberg, Professor of Reformation History at the School of Theology at Boston University for 20 years, has written a half a dozen books, edited a dozen more, written over 70 articles, and received numerous honors.

A main focus for Lindberg has been **Luther's opposition to renewal movements**. What a subject for today! As mainline Christianity declines, renewal movements rise up. Yet Luther opposed them because he saw in them the same kind of works-righteousness he had struggled with in the monastery. As Lindberg writes:

#### **Holiness is always alien.**

"Theologically, Luther's judgement was that **holiness**, like justification, **is always alien**: It is extrinsic not intrinsic to the person; it is *extra nos*. . . Sin is forgiven but it still remains. The Christian, that is the forgiven sinner, is therefore simultaneously righteous and sinner" (p. 162).

#### **No growth in holiness.**

"The significance of the *simul* motif for Luther's judgment of renewal movements is that it precludes a progressive sanctification which attributes growth in righteousness *coram Deo* to the Christian. This may be spelled out by an examination of the following aspects of the motif: 1) It is a confession of faith, not a universal philosophical truth; 2) it is a living dialectic, not a doctrinal abstraction; 3) **it was developed prior to Luther's conflicts with the Schwärmer** and thus was not a reaction to them; 4) it remained **a consistent theme throughout Luther's career**; 5) it presents an understanding of sanctification in **temporal-qualitative** rather than quantitative terms" (p. 164).

#### **"Certainty" in the Word, not in visible transformation.**

"All efforts to usher in the Kingdom of God both politically and spiritually are therefore repudiated as theologies of glory. **Christ's kingdom cannot be visibly identified with either remade social order or 'reborn' persons but only with God's Word.** The certainty (*ceritudo*) of the presence of God is always and only his Word, not human works, lifestyles, feelings, or even faith. Thus Luther continually repudiated all attempts by his opponents to create security (*securitas*), whether it be by spiritually authenticated leadership, lifestyle, or exegesis."

#### **Not visible transformation but an ongoing battle.**

'Pietism overcomes radical doubt not by hearing the Word of God as an address of promise but by experientially verified faith. Thus Pietism introduces the usage of modifiers for the term faith: weak faith, living faith, powerful faith, and so forth. Luther's straightforward position – that **faith simply takes God's promise as true and honors it** in that it does not take God to be a liar – is displaced by discussions about the quality of faith and its accomplishments.

This orientation allows the development of a hermeneutic of the Bible as the pattern for life. . . . Pietism emphasized the visible formation of the renewed person verified by the ethical fruits of faith. . . . Luther, on the other hand, remains with an ongoing battle between the old and new person which is never transformed into a visible victory on earth. Victory always remains the judgement of God not the possibility of the Christian" (pp. 169-70).

#### **Not the recognizable elect, but the Word.**

"The church is not a community of the recognizable elect but **an institution with earthly means of communicating the gospel**. The church, therefore, is recognized **not by its holiness** of life but by the 'possession of the holy word of God'" (p. 169).

Excerpts from "Justice and Injustice in Luther's Judgement of 'Holiness Movements,'" *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*, eds. Peter Manns and Harding Meyer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), emphasis added. Full text available under Heavy Lifting/Spirituality, at [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us).