



Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church
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"Buschart and Eilers have provided the church with an invaluable resource: a guide – a primer, one might say – for emerging theologians who recognize that the theological task is found in counterpoint between continuity and discontinuity. This kind of work requires discernment, and this is precisely what this publication will offer – a guide to effective discernment in drawing on the wisdom of the past for the theological vision and challenges of the church of tomorrow."

– **Gordon T. Smith**, president, professor of systematic and spiritual theology, Ambrose University

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Engaging History to Aid in the Present

In *Theology as Retrieval* David Buschart and Kent Eilers survey this varied movement and identify six areas where the impulse and practice of retrieval of the Christian past has been notably fruitful and suggestive: the interpretation of Scripture, the articulation of theology, the practices of worship, the disciplines of spirituality, the modes of mission and the participatory ontology of Radical Orthodoxy. Here they explain why this field of study is so necessary to scholarship today.

What made you want to study and write about retrieval? What makes the subject important for evangelical study?

David Buschart and Kent Eilers: The practice of looking back in order to move forward is inherent to Christianity, but the unsettling changes and dramatic challenges posed in the present era have triggered a fresh wave of retrieval. There is an increasing recognition across a wide swath of Christian traditions that the theological resources “of today” are not by themselves adequate. As a result, retrieval is blossoming in many areas of Christian thought and life. This book provides the first comprehensive introduction to and analysis of the present-day flourishing of this long-standing Christian pattern. Pressing beneath the surface of contemporary theologies, it offers a wide-reaching portrayal of theology in the mode of retrieval—one that will serve anyone concerned with the renewal of the church.

What can we learn from the study of retrieval?

Buschart and Eilers: We show that “retrieval” is a mode of theological reflection that draws on the past in order to engage the church’s present, and is in fact rooted in a long-standing pattern of Christian identity. Theological retrieval is an intensification of the fundamental Christian pattern of receiving and passing on the deposit of faith: “Timothy, guard the deposit” (1 Tim 6:20). In every age and setting stewarding the deposit of faith requires the church to navigate tensions: stability and change; continuity and discontinuity; freedom and constraint. Amidst these tensions, theology in the mode of retrieval receives from the past in order to renew the church. For theologies of retrieval, immersion in the texts, thought forms, and forms of life of the Christian past—whether distant or more recent—open fresh opportunities for Christian faithfulness in the present. Receiving well requires discernment, and our book resources such discernment by considering instances of theological retrieval in contemporary theology: the Bible, theology, worship, spirituality, mission and engagement with culture.

How does this book overlap with your own study?

Buschart: I am a theologian who works at the intersection of theology and history—a theologian who passionately believes in the necessity and benefit of digging deeply into the Christian past as a resource for the Christian present. This connection between past and

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present – change grounded in and richly informed by continuity – is ever-present in healthy Christianity. However, because our present context is one dominated by the pursuit of change without regard for continuity – what many observers refer to as our “historical amnesia” – I am all the more committed to theological work for the present that learns all that it can from the Christian past.

Eilers: Serving the life of the church and her captivation to the Spirit’s transformative work is my cheerful service as a theologian. I have tried to invest in projects that are never too far removed from the lived existence of the church, and this project is no exception. The joy and privilege of writing this book is directly tied to our purpose: showing how the church’s thought and life in the present is tied to her creative and Spirit-led reception of the past – not tied in suffocating ways as is commonly the modern way of thinking about such things, but tied, moored, connected to the past in enlivening, life-giving and sustaining ways. To receive the past well is to be wise about retrieval, and this book seeks to cultivate such wisdom.