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What Is Theological Retrieval?

A Primer

JORDAN L. STEFFANIAK, PHD

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Most know the fifth commandment well, but few reflect on its full implications:

**“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long
in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”**

Exodus 20:12¹

The scope of this command goes beyond our biological fathers and mothers, but extends to our spiritual fathers and mothers, as well—our ancestors in the faith from centuries past. As Christians, we live in the midst of a great cloud of witnesses that extends across time and space. We are not marooned in our time or geographical location. While many of these witnesses are the foundation of the household of God, like the apostles and prophets, many were faithful in later times, all jointly being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph 3:20–21). All are to be honored as we seek to know, love, and obey God.

That’s a fancy way of saying that the task of theology is one of communal dependence. We are not lone wolves, relying solely on our own individual grasp of Scripture. We are joined to a living community that continues to grow together. This community—the church—remains a necessary element for every Christian’s journey to the celestial city. It rears us, nourishes us, and protects us. And we are called to honor our parents in the church. This honoring isn’t static or rote. It isn’t universal obedience. The church errs. It fails. Not every teaching it makes should be obeyed. Nor is our relationship to the church always a parent-to-child relationship. As we are nurtured in the faith, sometimes we are

¹ Various sentences and phrases throughout this essay are published elsewhere. But this is largely a new adaptation of my thoughts published elsewhere. See, for example, Jordan L. Steffaniak, [Classical Theism: A Christian Introduction](#) (Lexham Academic, 2026); Jordan L. Steffaniak, “Retrieving Reformed Philosophy of Mind: Herman Bavinck’s Eclectic Harmonism as Gateway to Neo-Aristotelianism,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 94 (2023): 1–25; Jordan L. Steffaniak, “Everything in Nature Speaks of God: Understanding Sola Scriptura Aright,” *Modern Reformation* 31, no. 3 (2022); Jordan L. Steffaniak, “Plundering the Moderns: A Classical Defense of the Eclecticism of the Christian Tradition,” *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 33, no. 1 (September 12, 2025).

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called to be leaders ourselves, shepherding those who once watched over us. But our parents in the faith remain worthy of honor, nonetheless.

Just because our earthly parents fail (unlike our heavenly Father), this does not mean we are not obligated to honor them. Likewise, just because the church fails (unlike Holy Scripture), this does not mean we are not obligated to honor it. In contemporary theological jargon, we call this “theological retrieval.” It is a way of theologizing that receives the wisdom of the church, past and present.

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You won’t find the terminology of “retrieval” in centuries past. Nor will you find the phrase in Scripture. But that doesn’t mean the idea isn’t both in the Bible and the life of the church. In fact, it’s fundamental to any truly Christian mode of theologizing. John Webster used to speak of “theological theology,” since too many can lose the theological element of theology itself. Likewise, doing theology without a proper posture of retrieval is doing theology without the “theological” element of the church!

Theological retrieval is a way of theologizing that receives the wisdom of the church, past and present.

But it’s not always clear to everyone just what is meant by “retrieval.” So, in what follows I give a summary of the nature of retrieval along with its promise for the future. Honoring one’s theological parents, as retrieval seeks to do, is a matter of reverence and reception, community and growth. Each of these aspects will be explored.

RETRIEVAL AS A SENSIBILITY

Theological retrieval is fundamentally a disposition or mode. It is a sensibility for how to read and interpret Scripture. In short, it is a *way* of [doing theology](#). It’s not something “extra” that we do alongside theology. It’s *how* we do theology.

Retrieval is not something we only need to do when we’ve lost something. It’s a generative and receptive posture toward the Lord’s people. It’s not a theological formula that ensures the proper result. It does not stand in contrast to other more formulaic methods, with rigid rules, like the grammatical-historical approach to reading the Bible. Nor is it necessarily opposed to such a method! Its scope is different.

Retrieval is more about adopting a posture toward others, specifically our spiritual mothers and fathers, as we utilize a varied toolkit for thinking about God and our world. It heeds various scriptural commands, such as Hebrews 13:8: “Remember your leaders,

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those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Therefore, theological retrieval is about emphasizing the role of the Spirit’s work in his people across time and space. It is an expansion of the fifth commandment to honor one’s parents. But this is not merely an exhortation to act, *but it holds a promise*. Just as the Apostle Paul encourages children to honor their parents as “this is the first commandment with a promise” (Eph 6:2–3), we too honor our spiritual parents and receive a promise. Those who revere their spiritual heirs will see their days prolonged in the land that the Lord has given. Those who dwell in the life of the church will be richly blessed. It is through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is made known (Eph 3:10). Those who humbly and faithfully seek to retrieve the wisdom from the past will be handsomely rewarded.

3

3 MODES OF DOING THEOLOGY: RETRIEVAL, REPRISTINATION & RECLUSION

Talk of the necessity of the church for theology can sometimes cause concern for those reared in [American evangelical contexts](#).² But the necessary role of the church should not cause us to equate retrieval with Roman Catholicism or any other specific tradition. Doing so betrays the fundamental place of retrieval in theology.

It’s helpful to think of doing theology in three broad ways:

1. Repristination
2. Seclusion
3. Retrieval

No single way of doing theology is purely within one of these modes, but it is helpful to consider it like a spectrum. On one extreme, the theologian values things like individuality and innovation (seclusion); on the other, rote repetition and subservience (repristination). These are slightly negative portrayals, and they don’t always apply. Even so, stark distinctions help us survey the land better.

² I use that sociological term specifically because the anxiety seems to cut across denominational boundaries while being especially localized in North American contexts, lacking support in more traditional forms of Protestantism—such as those found in the older Protestants like Francis Turretin, William Ames, Gisbertus Voetius, Herman Bavinck, and the like.

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1. Repristination

On one end is repristination. Theologies of repristination cherish the ancient simply because it is ancient. While it's true that there is beauty in the past and we should naturally be drawn to it as such, it is not age alone that should draw us. Theologies of repristination due to their narrow focus on the ancient calcify doctrinal discoveries of ages past in stone. They make these ancient discoveries immovable, as if they emerged from a golden age of doctrinal development that is final.³ They often canonize and lionize certain figures, such as Thomas Aquinas.⁴ This approach is one of imitation. It seeks to be *like* the model (which is not a wholly wrong motive! It is one lacking proper depth). But theologies of retrieval seek to emulate the model and thus *surpass* them.⁵ Retrieval is not about pure [historical theology](#) but about constructive theology for today.

Take the example of [Thomas Aquinas](#). He, in my opinion, is largely viewed as an immovable touchstone of theology for many Roman Catholics. This is understandable given Pope Leo XIII's initiative in 1879 to reinvigorate Thomism in the Roman Catholic Church, followed by Pope Pius X's direction for Catholic professors to teach Thomism in 1914, and the subsequent reception of his thought in the twentieth century. Thomism during this period became "indispensable" for the mission of the church, according to Roman Catholics. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical in 1879 made Thomas the philosopher of choice. He cut off Catholic philosophy, according to Tom Ward, "from the constructive pluralism of the scholastic method."⁶ The result from these decisions was that philosophy and theology supposedly progressed until Thomas Aquinas and then regressed afterward. Therefore, any disagreement with Thomas, even in the slightest respect, is construed not as progress but as regression.⁷ But as great a theologian as Thomas was (and he truly was!), this mode of theology is like witnessing a nineteenth-century Gothic Revival in architecture that revived not the Gothic *style* but one particular Gothic *building*.⁸

Retrieval theology, on the other hand, is not founded on any one specific theologian or philosophical school. It is not *per se* hostile to any theologian or philosophical system, but

³ Gavin Ortlund, [Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future](#) (Crossway, 2019), 74.

⁴ E.g., Matthew Barrett, [The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church](#) (Zondervan, 2023), 114–204.

⁵ Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 116–19.

⁶ Thomas M. Ward, *Ordered by Love: An Introduction to John Duns Scotus* (Angelico Press, 2022), 10.

⁷ Trent Pomplun, "John Duns Scotus in the History of Medieval Philosophy from the Sixteenth Century to Étienne Gilson (1978)," *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 58 (2016): 426.

⁸ Ward, *Ordered by Love*, 5–9.

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it does not, *a priori* and uncritically, give priority to any one theology or philosophy, whether of Thomas or Scotus, of Plato or Kant, or of anyone else. Wise retrieval theology brings along its own criteria, tests all theology and philosophy by them, and takes over what it deems true and useful. What it needs is theology and philosophy in general, though in practice it often finds all sorts of specific theologians and philosophies useful.⁹

2. Seclusion

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Whereas theologies of repristination glorify the past, theologies of seclusion glorify the present (and/or the future). Seclusion emphasizes the independence of the interpreter of Scripture to an improper degree. It ultimately cuts off Scripture from [the dwelling place for God by the Spirit—the church](#). It imagines the task of theology is a solitary affair, one that would become tarnished if other means of knowing were invited to the table—or invited preemptively. Sometimes this approach goes by the terminology of “biblicism,” though this term can sometimes be contested.¹⁰

Take an example from the kind-hearted theologian Bruce Ware to understand what this can look like (though there are certainly *much* more radical forms that one can find! Simply look at the Arians and Socinians of the past—but Ware is clearly *not* an Arian or Socinian, though there remains a shared methodology of sorts.):

No conception may rightly be applied to God if conceived independent of God’s self-revelation, and, equally important for the present discussion, no single conception of God should be given such a status of primacy and dominance over all other conceptions such that God’s clear self-revelation ends up reduced in its intended meaning.¹¹

Many evangelicals may sympathize with elements of this quote. But the key point to highlight is the *independence* expected in the task of theology. No other element is allowed to exercise authority. Theology is something to be done with Scripture and Scripture alone. If Scripture and theological development were not secluded, the entire

⁹ Herman Bavinck, [Reformed Dogmatics](#), ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Baker Academic, 2003), 1:609.

¹⁰ “Biblicism” is a modern term that has generally been identified with an improper reverence of Scripture to the point of cutting itself off from various other resources and subservient authorities. Some today seek to link it back to older pejoratives like “biblist” that were sometimes applied to Protestants by Roman Catholics for their doctrine of [sola scriptura](#). However, if one researches the advent and usage of “biblicism,” it is conceptually distinct from the brief and differing usage of terms like “biblist.” Therefore, I do not identify the two terms. Shared word roots alone do not dictate meaning. More importantly, debates over words in this way often breed quarrels more than understanding. Therefore, it’s usually wise to simply discuss ideas rather than specific words.

¹¹ Bruce A. Ware, “An Evangelical Reexamination of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God” (PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984), 387.

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undertaking would be contaminated. Theological straitjackets would be wrapped around exegesis and lead one to faulty conclusions. But this is a misunderstanding of the classic “sola” — *sola scriptura*. It improperly concludes that since Scripture *alone* is necessary for salvation, then Scripture comes *alone*.

But theologies of retrieval view theology as a task that no one person can accomplish alone. Scripture requires the church to understand in its fullness. Just like how we cannot understand a single verse outside the context of the whole book, indeed the whole canon, “the living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account.”¹² This does *not* require any one view of the nature and authority of tradition. It doesn’t require us to think tradition is “to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.”¹³ Nor does it require that any means outside of Scripture is necessary for salvation. [Holy Scripture may remain the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.](#) However, the light of nature and Christian prudence likewise exert a level of wisdom and understanding that should always be observed according to the general rules of the Word.¹⁴

6

THE SOUL OF RETRIEVAL THEOLOGY AS RECEPTIVE REVERENCE

In its essence, theological retrieval is a disposition and project that values the past for the benefit of the present and future. It is a task of honoring our theological parents. If we are honest, there is a sense in which we are all practicing theological retrieval as we engage with Scripture and the Christian tradition. Some are more critical, while others are more constructive or reparative of well-worn paths.¹⁵ But the general view that we must grow while seeking to conserve remains. Political philosopher Roger Scruton said it well, “We adapt to change in the name of continuity, in order to conserve what we are and what we have.”¹⁶ The best of theological retrieval simply seeks to read Scripture *with* the church.

¹² Vatican Council, “Dei Verbum: De Divina Revelatione: The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican Council, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1965,” III.12, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

¹³ Vatican Council, “Dei Verbum,” II.9.

¹⁴ It is crucial to examine all of chapter 1 on Scripture from the classic Reformed confessions like Westminster, Savoy, and London to understand the interplay between Scripture and the light of nature. See Jordan L. Steffaniak, “What Does Scriptural Sufficiency Mean?,” *The Gospel Coalition Canada*, May 3, 2022, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-does-scriptural-sufficiency-mean/>.

¹⁵ Simeon Zahl, “Tradition and Its ‘Use’: The Ethics of Theological Retrieval,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71, no. 3 (2018): 308.

¹⁶ Roger Scruton, *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (All Points, 2018), 3.

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It carefully fellowships with the church now and in the past as it reappropriates the insights gleaned for each unique context.¹⁷

Therefore, retrieval is first a receptive posture that sees the task of theology as fundamentally *given* rather than *generative*. The content of theology is not a singular moment of grace. The entire context of theology is marked by grace—waiting and receiving from the Lord, the giver of every good thing.¹⁸ As the Baptist John C. Ryland (1723–1792) explained, theology is “marked by its religious responsibility to God as an act of worshipful gratitude ... what follows for theology is not further divinely inspired teaching but rather hearing, receptivity, and confession of that which has been given ‘once for all’ (Jude 3).”¹⁹ Thus, it gives priority to the self-description of the Christian community throughout the ages, but is conscious of its own social location, seeking to advance theology for *today*.

7

Projects of repristination lead us to be captive to the past, whereas projects of seclusion lead us to be captive to the present.

A posture of retrieval doesn’t entail an approach to theology that would force Christianity to be subservient to any era of theology, whether modern, premodern, or otherwise.²⁰ Projects of repristination lead us to be captive to the past, whereas projects of seclusion lead us to be captive to the present. For retrieval, the past, rather than being dead, gone, and immovable, speaks to us today and provides both a conceptual grammar for healthy theology and imaginative resources for further theological work.²¹ The past is seen as our inheritance from our parents that we, as faithful sons and daughters, must receive and make something of.²² It is not merely a series of footnotes or proof texts, but rather provides actual source material for today with living relevance.²³ This requires that any proper retrieval of the past do more than “mine” (or google) for quotes that agree with the conclusion. It is more than an archeological activity. It requires the patience to read thinkers of the past in their full context, understanding their overall argument along

¹⁷ Cory C. Brock, [Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck’s Use of Friedrich Schleiermacher](#) (Lexham, 2020), 54.

¹⁸ Michael Allen, [The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method](#) (T&T Clark, 2022), 180.

¹⁹ Tyler Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 9.

²⁰ David F. Ford, “Introduction,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, The Great Theologians, 3rd ed. (Blackwell, 2005), 2–3.

²¹ David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (Yale University Press, 2013), 13.

²² Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69.

²³ Brian E. Daley, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

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with competing thinkers who differ in sometimes significant ways. It then requires the imagination and courage to invest our inheritance into today.

Therefore, theologies of retrieval listen and learn from the Christian tradition while at the same time building upon that tradition in creative and faithful ways. The past functions as both a resource to receive and to inspire. As such, there is no one monolithic path to retrieval,²⁴ though there is a shared heritage, posture, and community of authoritative texts and friends.²⁵ The past is a *community* that leads us to think well, as [Herman Bavinck](#) has explained:

The dogmatic theologian no less than the ordinary believer is obliged to confess the communion of the saints. How wide and long, how high and deep the love of Christ is. A love that surpasses all knowledge can only be grasped with all the saints in communion. It is first of all in and by means of their fellowship that a theologian learns to understand the dogmas of the church that articulate the Christian faith. Above everything else, the communion of the saints provides empowering strength and superb comfort.²⁶

Therefore, the end goal in hearing from the Christian tradition is *not* revolution or restoration. *The end goal is a serious and creative use of the past for the present.*²⁷ We find resources from the past and present—the Christology of Maximus the Confessor, the sacramentology of John Calvin, the ecclesiology of John Owen—and we exegete Scripture alongside them. Repeating where faithful, expositing where unclear, and rejecting where false. Attempting to surpass our models and not merely imitate them. Honoring them as our parents in the faith. *That's* theological retrieval.

Unfortunately, there is always a temptation to revolt from or restore and repristinate the past, but we must be resolute in our commitment to the living faith through which the Spirit continues to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

²⁴ Khaled Anatolios, [Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine](#) (Baker Academic, 2018), 281.

²⁵ The precise nature of this authority is often debated among differing segments of Christianity. Roman Catholics and Protestants will have differing answers to certain questions, such as who these authorities are and how absolute or relative their authority is. I will not attempt to explain this in so short an essay! Suffice to say, the past matters for the present and exerts some influence on our understanding. On the question of authority in general, see Avery Dulles, who reminds us that rejecting authority is not a mark of adulthood but a sign of adolescence: Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Doubleday, 1977), 94–96.

²⁶ Herman Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck, ‘Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the Gereformeerde Dogmatiek,’” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 9.

²⁷ See Ortland, [Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals](#), 17–18, 25, 45, 71.

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As such, the Christian task of retrieval understands tradition as a living reality, refusing to exalt the past (or future) as fundamentally different than our own existence. The past bears no more promise than our own age. And yet the Lord works in each age, and we ought to critically appropriate each age as such. The Almighty has brought the Christian tradition from darkness to light, but has yet to glorify it.²⁸

RETRIEVAL AS COMMUNAL DOGMATICS

9

Wise theological retrieval should also be understood as a species of dogmatic theology. [Dogmatic theology](#) is chiefly an ecclesial theology.²⁹ It lives and breathes the life of the church, which nurtures, guides, and guards sound doctrine. There is no cold detachment from the worship of the church or the authority of the community. Dogmatic theology, instead, is the activity of ordering our thoughts and directing the attention of the church to the realities of the God of the gospel.³⁰ As such, retrieval should follow the patterns and pathways of responsible dogmatic theology. Retrieval theology should likewise be an ecclesial theology that inhabits the classrooms of the church across generations, believing that Christ speaks through his Spirit and dwells richly in us through ecclesial teaching, admonishing, and singing (Col 3:16–17).³¹ While dogmatic theology goes a step further than retrieval must by articulating *defenses* of various doctrines, all retrieval theology should likewise receive from and participate in the life of the church.

But neither dogmatic nor retrieval theology should improperly emphasize the resources of the church. Holy Scripture remains the font for all faithful theological reflection. It remains the norm and limit upon which ecclesiastical reception is built.³² The sacred page is the primary resource for theological reflection, shaping and inspiring theological priorities. The true retrieval theologian is not only attentive to the church catholic, but chiefly to Scripture in all its depth, listening to its repetitions, connections, and emphases, allowing our theology to be continually reshaped by Scripture's own set of values.³³

²⁸ Allen, [Fear of the Lord](#), 181–82.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, [God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office](#), ed. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding, trans. Henry Taylor (Ignatius, 2020), 61.

³⁰ John Webster, *Holiness* (Eerdmans, 2003), 8.

³¹ Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, "Introduction," in [Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic](#), ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Baker Academic, 2016), 4.

³² The traditional "order of knowing" for Protestant dogmatics is seen in most works in the Reformed tradition, beginning with exegesis before moving to other authorities and modes of discourse. Allen, [Fear of the Lord](#), 143.

³³ Michael Allen, [The Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church](#) (T&T Clark, 2022), 53.

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Retrieval theology, then, requires an artful dance between the material content of Scripture and the ecclesial reflection of the church.

RETRIEVAL AS VISIONARY

It is crucial to remember that while retrieval is an emphasis on the past and its relevance for us today, retrieval should never be about staying in the past. It is not honoring to our parents to be exact replicas of them. We are called to model ourselves after them, but to exceed them. We seek to stand on their shoulders as we labor to peer ever closer to the wonders of God and his works. Therefore, a faithful retrieval theology requires more than restating the past. It requires a “going forward.” Every age must receive, retrieve, and rearticulate doctrine afresh. And while the mystery of God and his gospel have been clarified once for all, it is never fully comprehensible. Furthermore, while all things necessary to be known and believed for salvation are clearly opened for all, not all of the Scriptures are alike plain in themselves, but must be labored to be understood for years, decades, and even centuries.³⁴ So, we should always be open to further doctrinal development and clarification. We should not accept alien development that is foreign from its origin. We must only accept organic and faithful growth.³⁵

10

Retrieval remains both backward- and forward-looking. As it looks to the future, it responsibly seeks to extend beyond our past models in the church in at least three ways.

1. Those involved in the work of retrieval seek to work like their models instead of merely copying the results of their models' work.
2. They display greater sensitivity to context by seeking to think like their exemplars would in our current context.
3. Retrieval allows novel expressions of form. Theologians engaged in retrieval allow themselves to shape their mode of presentation and style in their own excellent ways.³⁶ Such an approach is like a habit of mind that is fundamentally contemplative, considering how one might expand and innovate but always as an apprentice to a wise set of masters.³⁷

Therefore, retrieval is a form of *participation* in the whole of the Christian tradition. When we seek to inhabit the world of our exemplars and explore their ancient wisdom for

³⁴ E.g., The Second London Confession of Faith 1.7.

³⁵ Steffaniak, “Plundering the Moderns,” 16.

³⁶ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 116–17.

³⁷ Justus H. Hunter, *Postmodernity and Univocity* | Syndicate, n.d., accessed April 20, 2023, <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/postmodernity-and-univocity/>.

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today, we find them beautiful and inspiring.³⁸ As Henri Blocher has well argued: “We treasure tradition not by servile adherence to it, but by, as it were, sitting on the shoulders of fathers and elder brothers who were giants indeed, and thus do we hope to be granted the grace of seeing even further and even more clearly.”³⁹

TRADITIONED RETRIEVAL

11

While retrieval is naturally reverent of the tradition of the church, this doesn't mean one must be a member of any one tradition of the Christian church to adequately do retrieval theology. One need not be Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox to care for, revere, and utilize the past. No one tradition has a monopoly on God's people. Therefore, one can faithfully and honestly do retrieval as a Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Roman Catholic, or [any other Christian tradition](#).

Each tradition will have its own shape and sensibilities, molding retrieval to different tunes or presuppositions. But none of this will make retrieval become something else. It remains retrieval but will simply prioritize various aspects of the Christian tradition in unique ways. This is good for the ultimate unity and edification of the church as we are built up by the various gifts God has given each form of his church.

Therefore, Protestants and Roman Catholics alike can share in projects of Thomistic retrieval, though with different aims and aspirations. Likewise, Roman Catholics may join Protestants in retrieving fruits of the Protestant tradition, with its reflections on God, Christ, and morality. No one theologian or school is locked from the other.

CONCLUSION

In some ways, retrieval theology is better caught than taught. You know it when you see it. That's because retrieval is most importantly a disposition. It implores us to read Scripture with the church, both past and present, amongst faithful departed saints as well as our own local church elders and members. The Spirit works through his entire body to rebuke, exhort, and edify us. Retrieval needn't be anxiety inducing or tradition altering. Instead, it brings richness and depth to our own traditions, as well as other traditions, and our shared Christian faith as we labor together towards the celestial city.

³⁸ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 119.

³⁹ Henri Blocher, [Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle](#), New Studies in Biblical Theology 5 (InterVarsity, 2004), 13.

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Jordan L. Steffaniak (PhD, University of Birmingham) is president of the London Lyceum, publisher for Hanover Press, and founder/owner of Professor Lending, a residential mortgage company based in North Carolina. He is married with three sons. He teaches at several institutions and is the author of *Classical Theism: A Christian Introduction* (Lexham Academic, 2026) and *Moral Apologetics* (B&H Academic, 2026). He has published in academic journals such as *Pro Ecclesia*, *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, *Journal of Reformed Theology*, *The Hanover Review*, and *Philosophia Christi*.

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