

# No past - no progress: Uses of history as a prerequisite of progress in the reinauguration of The Luther Church Helsinki

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## Abstract

This quotation, ascribed to the architect Zaha Hadid: “There cannot be progress without facing the unknown” - which also serves as the caption for this conference - depicts progress almost as a (foolhardy) step into the unfamiliar, a leap of faith that, with any luck, might result in an improvement or development of a previous condition.

Although this statement may be true to some extent, it does, however, fail to acknowledge another equally, or perhaps an even more important aspect and prerequisite of progress, namely knowledge of and reference to the past. This reverse side of the coin is perhaps most poignantly expressed in common phrases such as “learning from the past” or “learning from history”. Whether or not we actually learn something from the past might well be disputed, but what stands unchallenged is that the past has a great deal to say with regard to the present and the future.

In this article, I will try to illustrate and discuss the significance of using the past when aiming at some sort of progress. I will do this by looking at how the ‘relaunch’ of an old church building in Helsinki, Finland, was staged, narrated, and subsequently promoted to the general public. As I will demonstrate, the history of the church came to play a crucial role in this story and, I would suggest, the uses of history probably supported the church’s progress.

Keywords: Uses of history, memory politics, church building, historical narrative, progress.