

Michael Asch, *On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada*, University of Toronto, Toronto, 2014. 217 pp. \$27.95. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1002-6.

In *On Being Here to Stay*, Michael Asch explores whether it may be possible to legitimate the permanent arrival of Settlers in what is now called Canada. A Settler himself, Asch takes a critical look at the history of the Treaties and examines the ways that these covenants have been broken by the descendants of the Settlers who made them. Indeed, many of us with immigrant ancestry have become increasingly aware of the ways in which Settlers have mistreated Indigenous peoples over the centuries. Canada's legacy of residential schools and assimilation policies, for example, is shameful. And yet Asch suggests that we may be missing a significant part of the story. Without downplaying the enormity of the atrocities committed, Asch argues that many of the Treaties were actually signed in good faith—by both parties. It was in the implementation, and not the intention, that Settlers failed to act with integrity.

This historical interpretation is not Asch's attempt to ease the Settler's guilty conscience. Rather, he offers his findings as an invitation to live into the very relationships that were promised. Asch contends that the meaning of Treaty can be much more transformative when we acknowledge that our ancestors meant what they said. Instead of viewing these agreements as archaic documents that were signed with the sole purpose of deceiving Indigenous peoples in order to acquire their land, what would happen if we understood Treaties as living commitments that were sealed in good faith and entrusted to our fulfillment?

This past spring, I participated in the Walk for Common Ground in Alberta. This 350-kilometer trek from Edmonton (Treaty 6) to Calgary (Treaty 7) brought Settler and Indigenous peoples together in conversation about Treaties. Over the course of two weeks, church members, health-care professionals, Indigenous elders, and students fell into step with one another, bridging differences, telling stories, sharing teachings, and building friendships. In the evenings, we facilitated sharing circles, watched a Treaty documentary (see [www.treatytalk.com](http://www.treatytalk.com)), and invited members from the community to join us. Together we explored what it might mean to honor the Treaties in our present contexts.

One of the most powerful things I have learned from both the Treaty Walk and Asch's book is that Treaties are an invitation to an incredibly beautiful and life-giving reality. Treaties call us to recover a vision of mutual respect and sharing that was present at the time of their signings. The "spirit and intent" of the Treaties upholds the dignity and rights of the other. Not only is the covenant made between peoples, it also accounts for the well-being of animals, plants, and every other aspect of creation. Indigenous peoples are calling on us to return to the roots of these sacred agreements. This is an invitation worth honoring, and even celebrating. As

Settlers, we have never been asked by the first inhabitants of this land to go back to where we came from. We have never been asked to assimilate into Indigenous politics or ways of life. The problem is not that Indigenous peoples do not want Settlers here. On the contrary, Indigenous peoples have been extending the invitation of Treaty relationship to us for centuries.

Another theme that connects Asch's book with my experience on the Walk is a willingness to dream big and envision radical, structural change. Throughout his chapters, Asch makes it clear that Canada still has a long way to go in acknowledging Indigenous rights. He describes how the federal government has done everything in its power to avoid granting Indigenous peoples self-determination and sovereignty. What we need, writes Asch, is a reconceptualization of relationship "that falls outside the range of possibilities offered to us in contemporary political thought" (115). What we need is a nation-to-nation relationship in which our interactions are defined on the basis of shared understandings rather than individual interest.

In many ways, the Walk for Common Ground was a microcosm of what we walkers longed for in the world. We were many people from many places who had agreed to respect each other's differences and make space for each other's perspectives. Together we dared to envision a reality that many in society would deem unachievable. We dared to imagine Indigenous and Settler peoples being treated with equity and respect. As we carried the Two Row wampum belt, we considered what it might mean for two peoples to travel along the same river without steering one another's vessels. These were radical, unsettling thoughts that challenged the status quo. And I could not help but think of Christ's upside-down kingdom, in which I imagine tables turned, systems challenged, and justice prevailing.

The Walk for Common Ground was an attempt to raise awareness and expand the conversation. I was continually amazed by the people who showed up to our walks and sharing circles: there was the young family we met at the splash park in Millet, the mayor of Airdrie, and the woman who ran to greet us with cookies as we passed by her house. We were spreading the word and building the movement, little by little, step by step.

Asch writes that the "government will be persuaded to act only when it is pressured to do so, and the best way I know to bring government to change its mind on an issue is to gain public support" (163). And so we walked, because the invitation was too beautiful to pass up, too critical to ignore, and too exciting not to share. We walked to honor the promises of our ancestors and to demand that our government do the same. And we walked to honor the Creator, who loves justice and longs for a reconciled world.

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**David W. Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR, 2016. 340 pp. \$51.75. ISBN: 978-1-6089-9827-2.**

The term *good news* as used in the ancient world was simply the news of an event that was assumed to be good in relation to those receiving it—news of a birth, wedding, victory, etcetera. In most Christian theology and church policies today, however, it seems we have traded the event for the message itself. With this shift, the church has historically positioned itself as the one who ultimately controls the script. Progressive, social, and critical theologians—wanting to dislodge the message from the hands of the church—have tended to relativize the role of the church in God’s mission, or render the message of salvation into fully material or social forms. Rather than try to wrest or rewrite the message, David Congdon’s ambitious *The God Who Saves* considers what it means to give primacy to the *event* of salvation, not its message. In charting this theological course, Congdon opens up neglected theological insights with far-reaching implications for the church and mission.

Congdon asserts that theology must be *soteriocentric*—God is known as the God who saves. That is, God is known in and through God’s saving action. Congdon then spends considerable energy describing what Christian theology *is not*; primarily, Christian theology is not metaphysical. Congdon uses the term metaphysics to refer to “any conceptual schema that secures the object of its inquiry . . . apart from and prior to the historical situation” (33). Jettisoned from authority are the eternal “essences” of God revealed in the “timeless” truths articulated theologically through Scripture, logic, or reason. With the theology of Rudolf Bultmann (and those influenced by and in conversation with him) as his guide, Congdon begins to work out a theology of salvation that is decidedly unfamiliar (and perhaps unacceptable) to most theological paradigms.

Salvation, according to Congdon, is neither defined by material expressions such as releasing the captives and feeding the hungry, nor by some notion of assurance of communion with God in heaven after one dies. Instead, “Salvation is an apocalyptic event” (64). What Congdon spends the rest of the book explaining is that the message of the gospel *spiritualized* the notion of salvation within its original Jewish context with Jewish salvation understood primarily in material and political terms. Yet, as mentioned, Congdon is not interested in “spiritual” as related to eternal life in heaven but in how the gospel works on any and every individual regardless of time or place. The gospel is an apocalyptic event, spiritualized and repeated within