



Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions.

by Terrance L. Tiessen
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How will God judge those, before and after Christ, who throughout their lives and through no fault of their own never heard the divine revelation God has entrusted to his covenant people? In this exciting new book, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (InterVarsity Press, 2004, 500 pages), Reformed theologian and gracEmail subscriber Terrance L. Tiessen counters head-on this question which always seems to surface among thoughtful and sensitive believers who consider deeply the implications of the gospel and of Christian witness.

As a Reformed Christian, Tiessen believes that all of Adam's descendants (except Jesus Christ the second Adam) sinned by Adam's representation as their federal head, were by nature constituted "sinners" predisposed to sin, came under condemnation as part of fallen humankind and, had Jesus not come as second Adam and federal head of a new humankind, would finally be lost. Infants and small children thus also are "saved" rather than "safe" as Arminians or Wesleyans traditionally describe the matter.

In addition to the response each person makes to the divine revelation they encounter during this life, Tiessen also believes that every person actually encounters Jesus Christ personally at the moment of death, and that each individual then responds to Christ in a manner consistent with the response they had been giving to God and his known revelation during their lifetime. Going beyond his Calvinist tradition, Tiessen affirms what he calls "accessibilism." God's saving grace is not only universally sufficient, Tiessen says; it is also universally accessible.

On at least one occasion during this life, God enables every person to respond to himself with a faith response adequate as a means of justification. This includes those who die

before birth and in infancy, those born mentally incompetent, but also those who died B.C. and those who die A.D. who, through no fault of their own, never hear the gospel news of the atonement Jesus has accomplished for sinners. Although Scripture is silent about the final numbers of the saved, Tiessen urges that we have reason to be very hopeful concerning the proportion of the human race that will enjoy eternal life with God.

All formalized religions and individual religious commitments are ambiguous responses to divine revelation, Tiessen says. In the end, no religion saves people -- only God does. Although world religions cannot save, they can (like Old Testament religion for the Jews) prepare hearts to accept Christ when they do hear of him. World religions contain some remnants of earlier-revealed general truth, though not saving truth, and Christians can engage in interfaith dialogue with others while maintaining their own unique and exclusive truth claims regarding Jesus Christ and salvation. The desirable goal is accommodation and contextualization without syncretism, in order to share the gospel resulting in saving faith and the full experience of salvation by those who hear and believe.

This is a heavy theological work but one which will reward the labors of serious readers willing to work through it. Because Tiessen is both Reformed yet willing to think outside the Reformed box, *Who Can Be Saved?* removes certain offenses of traditional Calvinism and also challenges those outside the Reformed tradition to consider seriously other elements of Reformed soteriology which perhaps they have too quickly rejected. Most of all, however, *Who Can Be Saved?* magnifies the grace of God our Father and glorifies his Son, the only Savior of humankind.