



# Christianity and its Competitors

James Edward McGoldrick



**CHRISTIAN FOCUS**



Quotations from the Bible are taken from the New King  
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## Preface

No author is without debtors, so I am pleased to acknowledge the help of the many others who have contributed to my development as a scholar and a writer. Special thanks are due to Dr Alan Lair, who first suggested this project, and to Dr David Ludwick, who read the manuscript and made helpful suggestions of improvement. Dr Joel Beeke too rendered valuable assistance in this regard. The staff at Christian Focus Publications, of course, deserves my gratitude for accepting my work and editing it with much care.

**James Edward McGoldrick**  
**Taylors, South Carolina**  
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## Introduction

Although Christianity in its numerous expressions comprises the most populous religion on earth, its competitors are many, and some of them have displayed terrific energy in recent years. Among the millions of people who claim allegiance to the Christian faith, there is a bewildering diversity of belief and practice, and the lack of fundamental agreement among them has encouraged the growth of competing systems of belief. Like many other terms, the word *Christian* requires careful definition, lest an indistinct use of the designation leads to misunderstanding. In the religious climate of the early twenty-first century, there is a tendency to regard as Christian any school of thought which professes allegiance to the teachings of Christ, no matter how vaguely it may do so. Such allegiance is often only traditional or perfunctory and does not indicate fidelity and devotion to Jesus Christ as the New Testament describes his person,





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his doctrines, and his work. Since this is so, the competitors of Christianity are not only those religions which reject the claims of Christ, but those which assume the prerogative of diluting his teachings or choosing from among them the ones which to them appear attractive.

The Apostle Paul, as he closed his ministry in Ephesus, told the elders of the church there, “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). That commitment to affirm and assert the message of Christ in its entirety has motivated the writing of *Christianity and its Competitors*. This book is not a dispassionate examination of various opinions regarding the Christian faith. It is rather a vigorous assertion and defense of Christian belief by an author whose confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible is without reservations.

The procedure in this study is to examine some of the major challenges to biblical belief which appeared in early Christian centuries and then to relate how such teachings gained acceptance and have continued to confront the faith in modern times, even though modifications have occurred and groups which espouse them no longer bear the names of the ones which promoted them during the era of the ancient church. A careful comparison of ancient heresies with the major doctrines of the current competitors will show that to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) remains a matter of urgency for the Church of Jesus Christ.

In dealing with matters of controversy, as this book does, it is appropriate for the author to identify his doctrinal position at the outset. It is well to affirm allegiance to the authority of Scripture, but because disagreements about the meaning of Scripture are common an exact statement is in





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order. My persuasion is that of historic Reformed theology, as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. This subscription includes my endorsement of such ancient declarations of faith as the Apostles' Creed and the Creed of Nicea. While the supreme authority of the Bible must take precedence over every ecclesiastical effort to summarize and publish Christian doctrines, I believe that the creeds of the ancient church and the confessions of the Protestant Reformation have done so accurately and are therefore reliable subordinate expressions of God's revealed truth. This being so, references to these documents will appear throughout this study.

In evaluating challenges to historic, orthodox teachings which comprise the subject matter of this book, two principal considerations have formed the analysis and determined the judgments rendered. The critical examination of each ancient heresy and its modern counterpart addresses first, the question of the authority for faith, and second, the teaching of a particular religious body with regard to the person of Christ. In those cases where a sect denies the sole authority of Scripture and the eternal essential deity of Christ, this study considers it a pseudo-Christian cult. Some of the religious movements under consideration here have committed only one of these errors, and in those cases the judgment is less assertive. In this frame of reference, it is necessary to distinguish between errant Christians and cults which have no legitimate claim to being Christian. This should avoid unfair and needlessly divisive assessments, and to the best of my ability I have observed this caution. If I have failed to do justice to a particular religious group, I apologize and entreat correction. Although many scholars have contributed to my understanding and have influenced my views, the verdicts I





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have rendered are entirely my own, for which I alone must bear responsibility. May the Triune God, who is the Author of all Holy Scripture, use this volume for the instruction and edification of all who read it.

