

Inadequate Images of God

To err is human, to forgive divine.

– Proverb

Down through the centuries inadequate images and descriptions of God have emerged. When such an inadequate understanding is obstinately held it will eventually be declared a *heresy*. Below are listed some of the more well-known heresies that have emerged over the centuries. In the space provided summarise what truth, revealed by God, is denied or contradicted by each heresy.

Docetism: The name of this heresy is derived from the Greek word *dokesis* which means ‘appearance’ or ‘semblance’. Followers of Docetism taught that Jesus only appeared to be human – his body was an illusion!

Arianism: Arius (c. 250–336), a priest of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt. He denied that Jesus was fully divine. The First Council of Nicaea (present-day Izink in north-western Turkey) in 325 was convened to deal with Arianism.

Gnosticism: The name of this heresy is derived from the Greek word *gnostikos* which means ‘learned’. Followers of Gnosticism taught that their knowledge constituted them a superior class of being. Salvation is connected to the possession of esoteric knowledge.

Nestorianism: Nestorius was the Patriarch of Constantinople from 428–431. Nestorianism is basically the doctrine that Jesus existed as two persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God, rather than as a unified person.

Monophysitism: The name of this heresy is derived from two Greek words – *monos* meaning ‘only single’ and *physis* meaning ‘nature’. This heresy teaches that Christ has only one nature, his humanity being absorbed by his deity.

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Donatism: Named after Bishop Donatus Magnus. The Donatists were rigorists, holding that the church must be a church of 'saints', not 'sinners'.

Jansenism: Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) was a professor in the University of Louvain. Jansenism was a heretical doctrine of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries denying freedom of will, accepting absolute predestination for part of mankind and condemnation to hell for the others, and emphasising puritanical moral attitudes.
