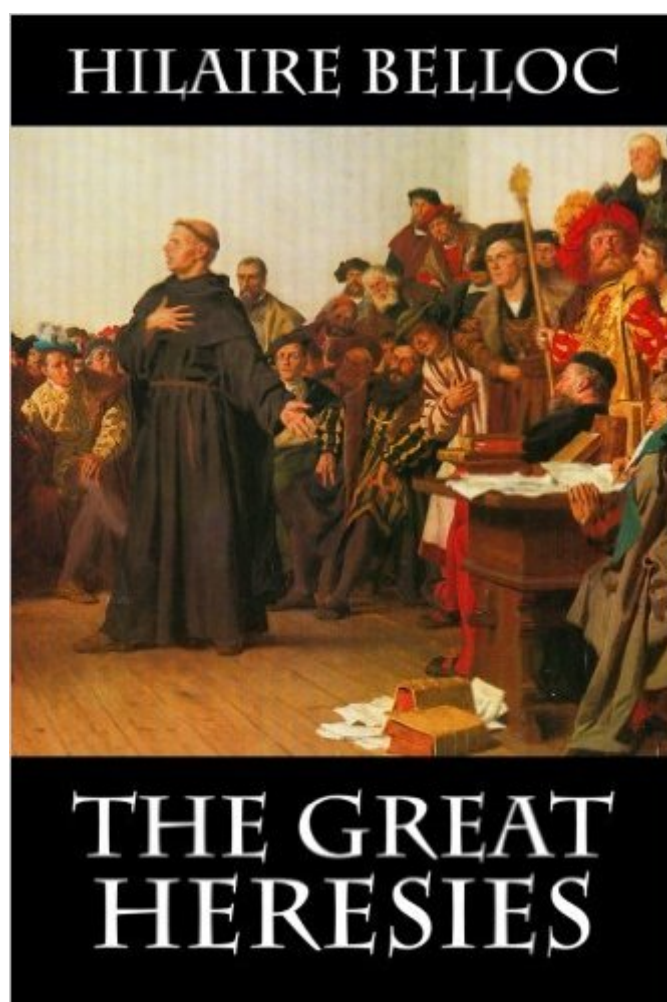


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# The Great Heresies



## Synopsis

Hilaire Belloc examines the five most destructive heretical movements to have affected Christian Civilization: Arianism, Mohammedanism (Islam), Albigensianism (Cathar), The Reformation (Protestant), and "The Modern Phase." • Belloc describes how these movements began, how they spread, and how they continued to influence the world up until the time of his writing (1936). The Chapter on Islam is especially relevant in light of current events; in it Belloc accurately predicts the renewal of Jihadist aggression towards Western Civilization.

## Book Information

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Belloc has an amazing ability to discern general principles from a complex set of facts. He puts it to good use in analyzing the five major heresies that have thwarted the Catholic Church—all of which are socially, politically, and theologically complicated matters spanning centuries. Conciseness is another of his writing attributes. In a scant 160 pages, Belloc manages to fully probe Arianism, Islam, Albigensianism, the Reformation, and what he calls the "modern" heresy, which at that time had no name but contains elements of what today we might call scientific determinism, humanism, secular humanism, skepticism, or moral relativism. I found the discussion of Islam particularly valuable. Prior to reading this, I had no idea how Islam spread so quickly, why so enduringly, and how it differed theologically from Christianity. I was struck by how similar the phenomenon of Islam was to the Reformation: both movements liberated converts from oppressive taxation and other financial obligations; both involved a simplification of doctrine that appealed to the masses; both were a reaction against clericalism. Obviously, the movements differed in that Islam attacked

Catholicism from the outside, while the Reformation struck from the inside. In Belloc's view, this existence on the fringe of Western culture explains why Islam has endured culturally and spiritually. Ominously, Belloc closes this chapter by asking whether Islam will rise up once more to challenge the West. Prophetically, he answers, "yes". Islam, he maintains, has the virtue of spiritual solidarity, whereas in the West, religion, the very glue of civilization, is dissolving, leaving us irresolute, aimless and vulnerable.

The Great Heresies by the notable Catholic historian Hilaire Belloc is an outstanding introduction on what constitutes a "heresy" and the threats they have posed to the unity of Christendom. Belloc introduces his subject by defining what a heresy is. A heresy is a worldview that affirms certain aspects of Catholicism (and "Catholicism" can be understood as "traditional Christianity" in its Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms) but denies certain absolutely crucial doctrines of the Catholic Christian faith. The cover features a portrait of John Calvin, one of Christendom's chief heresiarchs in a characteristically Mephistophelian light. Belloc examines five of the largest, broadest and most influential heresies that have confronted the Church: Arianism, Mohammedanism (Islam), Albigensianism, Protestantism and what Belloc terms the "Modern Attack" which may in fact be, or is the precursor to, the Spirit of Antichrist. Arianism arose during the power politics of the Roman Empire and was generally supported by the upper-class elements in the Roman Army and the Imperial governing bureaucracy. It was easier more appealing on a philosophic level because the preacher Arius exalted Jesus as the greatest creature of God yet denied the actual Divinity of Christ. Belloc speculates that varying strains of Arianism provided a catalyst for the Nestorian and Monophysite schisms in the Church during the 5th century in the context of anti-Imperial political causes among the Christians of the East. The Arian heresy eventually died out at the same time Islam threatened both Eastern and Western boundaries of Christian Europe. Islam began, according to Belloc, as a heretical doctrine preached to its originally pagan Arab audience rather than as a new religion in itself.

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