

Laval théologique et philosophique



HASLER, August B., *How the Pope Became Infallible : Pius IX and the Politics or Persuasion*

Margaret O'Gara

Volume 39, Number 1, février 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400022ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/400022ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (print)

1703-8804 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

O'Gara, M. (1983). Review of [HASLER, August B., *How the Pope Became Infallible : Pius IX and the Politics or Persuasion*]. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 39(1), 120–121. <https://doi.org/10.7202/400022ar>

lorsqu'on est en situation de majorité et de domination (p. 97, cf. pp. 81, 105-106)? Peut-on accepter qu'une communauté religieuse revendique sa propre liberté, si elle ne s'engage pas à respecter réellement la foi et les droits fondamentaux des autres (p. 141)? En quels termes poser le problème de la liberté religieuse « pour qu'il soit universalisable, et non pas pour que des gens, entre l'Europe de l'Est et celle de l'Ouest, l'utilisent lorsqu'ils ont à régler des problèmes de suprématie ou d'équilibre » (p. 151)? Un État religieux peut-il garantir la liberté religieuse (p. 155)? Peut-on séparer la liberté religieuse des autres libertés (p. 156)? Le concept de liberté religieuse s'étend-il à certaines sectes qui paraissent néfastes en raison de leurs méthodes de prosélytisme et d'endoctrinement (p. 161, cf. pp. 170-171)? Suffit-il que chacun justifie ses bonnes intentions en tirant d'un immense thesaurus traditionnel des textes confirmant cette liberté religieuse, quand on sait que l'on peut y trouver de tout pour justifier des positions allant en des sens contraires (p. 262)?

On notera tout au long de ces discussions la largeur de vue de Mohammed Arkoun et la perspicacité d'Émile Poulat. C'est en bonne partie leurs interventions qui, à mon sens, rehaussent le ton du dialogue et lui donne une profondeur qui donne à réfléchir.

André COUTURE
Université de Moncton

August B. HASLER, **How the Pope Became Infallible: Pius IX and the Politics of Persuasion.**

Translated by Peter Heinegg. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981. 400 pages.

Written in a popular style, this book allows the reader to focus easily on themes that the author argued in a more scholarly manner in his *Pius IX. (1846-1878), Päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit und 1. Vatikanisches Konzil* (2 vols., Stuttgart, 1977). Hence, both the strengths and the weaknesses of the author's project stand out more clearly here.

The book has two sections, mixed together somewhat randomly.

The historical section sweeps from Jesus through the Constantinian era into the Nineteenth Century. It then recounts in detail the manipulative tactics used by Pius IX and a small number

of majority bishops at the First Vatican Council to ensure the passage and reception of the teaching on papal infallibility. Hasler presents a series of pictures to show the systematic plotting for the definition's passage, the harassment of the minority bishops before and after the Council, the control of newspapers and conciliar commissions by Pius IX and majority bishops, and the authoritarian and mentally unbalanced personality structure of the Pope. (He goes on to link these pictures with what he believes is a continuing tendency to the authoritarian exercise of papal primacy, exemplified for him in the Modernist crisis, the insistence on the proclamation of the Assumption of Mary, the readiness of Catholics for a fascist political system, and the treatment of Hans Küng.) From his historical analysis, Hasler concludes that the Council was not free.

In his theological section, Hasler studies the arguments proffered by the minority bishops in their stand against the definition of papal infallibility. Drawing on modern biblical exegesis and modern recognition of historical consciousness, the author finds in the minority's thought a fidelity to history that contrasts strongly with the method used by the majority bishops and by *Pastor aeternus*. He concludes that the definition was the dethronement of history by ideology, a doctrine with no adequate basis, a doctrine that shields the magisterium and the doctrinal teaching of the Roman Catholic Church from all further criticism.

What can be said of this book, which raises so many difficult and controversial issues in an engaging but somewhat simplistic manner?

One strength of Hasler's presentation is the sympathetic and generally accurate picture he paints of the minority bishops and the treatment that they received. His book, by listening to the voices of the losers, forces us to take seriously some of the unanswered questions that still surround the First Vatican Council. While individual points are sometimes misrepresented or misread, nevertheless the sheer volume of detail showing the shadier side of the conciliar proceedings must make for sober reading. Here the book is important and cannot be ignored.

In addition, suggestive links are often drawn between the definition and an overly authoritarian and centralized exercise of papal primacy in the last century and a half.

In several areas, however, Hasler's study is weak.

Frist, his polemical stance leads him to argue positions without sufficient evidence. In Hasler's eyes, the actors in the drama of the First Vatican Council were all flawed. Some, such as Pius IX and his small circle of ardent supporters, are portrayed as fanatics. Others, the minority bishops who all accepted *Pastor aeternus* after they had argued against a definition throughout the Council, Hasler sees as cowards. The rest of the majority bishops are presented as a herd of sheep who mindlessly followed the fanatical leadership of the Pope and his supporters. Fanatics, cowards, and sheep: Hasler's treatment of Council members tends to analyze their motives rather than their thoughts. Despite his sympathy for the minority, then, he ends by suspecting them of bad faith in places where he might more correctly have found simply bad theology — a bad theology that led them to substitute obedience for critical reception of the definition after its passage.

This misreading of the actors in the drama may be caused, however, by a more central misunderstanding, which lies at the core of the book. Hasler operates with a faulty understanding of the definition of papal infallibility; his univocal understanding of its meaning reveals his perceptualist epistemology that denies the need for any interpretation of dogma. Hasler himself seems to ridicule the effort at interpretation that the minority bishops undertook and that today's theologians continue. This univocal understanding of the definition is linked with an understanding of history that manifests what Bernard Lonergan has called the ocular model of human knowing, in which facts are thought to speak for themselves. Hasler raises the question of history and dogma that has troubled the Church since the Nineteenth Century, but he plays the two off against each other, ignoring the role that interpretation plays even in historical study. For him, the definition is simple and clear in its meaning, a meaning that denies historical facts and hence can have no function other than ideology. The Council, he concludes, was only a particularly vivid example of the tension between faith and free scientific research. With this reading of the problem, the author is not equipped with tools fine enough to analyze the events and arguments at the Council with sufficient nuance.

Nevertheless, this book is useful and important. Sympathy for the concerns of the author will allow readers to draw on his historical work

in a way useful for the ongoing discussion of infallibility.

Margaret O'GARA
St. Michael's College
Toronto

Michel COUSIN, *Vivre la laïcité*. Essai de Méthodologie de la Philosophie et de la Morale Laïques. Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles. 1981.

Tout en voulant reprendre en son fondement la question de l'éducation, ce petit ouvrage vise surtout à apporter une aide à l'enseignant qui dispense le cours de morale « laïque » dans le cadre des programmes officiels de l'enseignement public belge. Il est donc lié à un contexte culturel différent du nôtre, mais il pose des diagnostics susceptibles de nous interpeller, surtout à un moment où l'on s'interroge ici sur l'élaboration d'une morale purement « humaine », « non religieuse ».

Une triple préoccupation anime l'A.

D'abord une préoccupation que l'on pourrait qualifier « d'humaniste » et qu'on ne peut manquer de partager. « Ce que nous dénonçons, écrit-il, c'est... la priorité donnée à la vision technicienne des choses, l'inflation technocratique qui noie la perspective humaniste et le chantage à la rentabilité immédiate qui en fait s'inscrire davantage dans le projet d'une société de gaspillage que dans celui d'une éducation véritable » (p. 11). Et l'A. affirme avec vigueur la nécessité de mettre l'éducation à l'écoute et au service de l'humain dans l'homme, et donc, « de s'interroger sur l'être, sur l'homme et sur le sens souhaitable d'une meilleure humanisation » (p. 9). On ne pourra y arriver sans une véritable réflexion philosophique. On l'oublie trop aujourd'hui.

La deuxième préoccupation de l'A. est résolument « laïque », au sens engagé et militant du terme. « Comment rendre les cours de morale et de philosophie vraiment *laïques*? » Telle est la question qui ouvre le second chapitre intitulé « Laïcité des cours de morale et de la philosophie » (p. 21). Il est intéressant de voir ici comment l'A. conçoit le laïcisme et envisage de le traduire dans l'enseignement. Bien des notations pourraient être endossées par un moraliste chrétien suffisamment sensible à la mutabilité et à la contingence de la matière orale. Bien des attitudes pourraient être adoptées par l'enseignant chrétien respectueux de tout ce qu'il y a dans l'homme et soucieux de son