

GEOFFROY VALLÉE, THE BEATITUDE OF CHRISTIANS, OR THE SCOURGE OF FAITH (1573)

Born to a wealthy family between 1535-40 in Orléans, south of Paris, Geoffroy Vallée spent a period working for the court as a notary-secretary. Otherwise, he led a rather solitary life, and was thought eccentric, even somewhat crazy, by those of his hometown. His family made several attempts to have him placed in care, on the basis of “‘insapience’ and mental weakness”.

At this time, he wrote, published, and distributed the pamphlet contained here. The work was quickly denounced to the Faculty of Theology, which accused him before the Provost of Paris of “deny[ing] God and tend[ing] to introduce a new opinion into the kingdom”. In 1573, he was arrested and tried for blasphemy. Early the next year, his sentence was pronounced: he was to be taken from prison:

To the front door of Church of Paris, & there, barefoot, bare-headed, in his shirt & on his knees, with a rope around his neck, with a torch of burning wax in his hands, weighing two pounds, saying & declaring that, boldly, maliciously, & ill-advisedly, he had made, composed, published, & sold a book entitled The Beatitude of Christians, or the Scourge of Faith, by Geoffroy Vallée, native of Orléans; uttered, said, & maintained blasphemies & erroneous words... against the honor of God & our Holy Mother Church, of which he repents, & begs God, the King, & the authorities of justice for forgiveness & mercy...

Here, several “scandalous and erroneous books” found in his home would be burned before the church. Then he was to be taken to the Place de Grève, where he would be “hanged and strangled on a scaffold”, after which he would be “burned and reduced to ashes” and his property confiscated. He appealed against the sentence, but in vain: he was executed in due course, and burnt along with his book. But in a curious way, his lineage didn’t end here: his nephew, Jacques Vallée des Barreaux (1599-1673), later become a famous poet and libertine in both morals and belief, going far beyond his uncle’s metaphysical insurrection¹, and an associate of the poet Théophile de Viau, who was tried in 1623 and burnt in effigy before being imprisoned at the Conciergerie in Paris and dying from illness contracted there.

The book that cost Vallée his life was certainly radical. As Lachèvre puts it, it attacks “not the dogma, but the very principle of the Christian religion”². It was called atheistic by its critics, but it very openly attacks atheism. Instead, it argues for a “true Catholic or Universal” path to God, based on knowledge instead of fear or faith. As such, it has been referred to as “neo-Gnostic” and

¹ This introduction is largely taken from Frédéric Lachèvre, “L’Ancêtre des libertins du XVIIe siècle, Geoffroy Vallée et La Beatitude des Chrestiens ou le Fléo de la foi (1573)”. Published in his *Mélanges*, pp. 5-59 (Paris, E. Champion, 1920).

² Op. cit., p. 16.

possibly an heir to an underground Gnostic tradition preserved through the Middle Ages³. In 2002 it was brought to the modern reader with the title L'Art de ne croire en rien⁴ by the radical thinker Raoul Vaneigem.

³ Henri Busson, *op. cit.*, pp. 530ff.

⁴ "The Art of Believing in Nothing"

THE BEATITUDE OF CHRISTIANS,

OR,

THE FLAIL OF FAITH

THE TRUE CATHOLIC, OR UNIVERSAL

*I find my pleasure with God,
In God alone I have repose.*

Man can only find ease, repose, beatitude, consolation, & felicity in knowing (*savoir*), which comes from intelligence & knowledge (*connaissance*), & then belief is left over from this — whether we like it or not — when this knowing (*savoir*) precedes it. This kind of belief is called “begotten belief”, since it’s born in man from his knowing, & it can never be taken away. But he who believes by faith or by fear & terror which are instilled in him, can depart from his faith, change it, & turn aside from it if he considers something else better (unless this great fear holds him in this belief), & such belief is called the “Belief which is conceived” because one man begets it in another man, whether by presenting it as his own faith, or by frightening him into it. Such belief is very nasty & very miserable; from it come all the evils we’ve ever suffered, which ever have & ever will come; it is the wellspring of every abomination. And, by this kind of faith, man is forever maintained & sustained in ignorance, & thus becomes a vulgar sort of beast; he could live for a thousand years, relying on the greater & lesser *credos*, or on such belief, but he would never know anything.

THE PAPIST

*I feel only fear of God,
Of God I am terrified.*

The belief the Papist claims to hold is uttered & rattled off the way a parrot might say something; it makes him fearful & cowardly from the cradle, without his ever understanding or being made to understand what belief is, for his fear of being promptly burned & the fear of being damned post-mortem if he doesn't say that he believes in God (in the way his father & mother taught him to do), makes him think that the worst evil in the world is not to believe in God. Therefore, he lacks the leisure and courage to think through his faith, so possessed is he by fear & terror, forever living between these two devils & executioners. He cannot be more miserable or more damned than he already is, deprived as he is of intelligence, of reason, of justice, of truth, & of fraternity; & he might be called a perfect beast, & wholly ignorant, with his comprehension of God so subject to fear & terror, all the more as, through fear of God man loses his discernment & all he has left is this bestial, earthy comprehension which he shares with all animals, & which will keep him like them: ferocious, insane, evil, & unhappy.

THE HUGUENOT

*I do not only fear God,
From God I've got hope.*

The Huguenot's belief, which is conceived in him, proceeds from faith & fear; it doesn't make him as beastly as the Papist, insofar as he is instructed by some demonstration & by false discernment, with this fear & this punishment that, if he doesn't believe, he cannot be saved. If he knew only very little about God, he might be led back, he might know & understand what He is, he would then realize that his belief & his faith damn him instead of saving him, — which is truly hard to comprehend if the boldness & zeal for knowing don't accompany the man, — & then he would recognize all the blasphemies, poisons, pestilence, abominations, & evil inherent in every religion which, instead of giving him the true knowledge of God, make him lose it entirely. And it can be said that man is in Hell on Earth, insofar as there is no damnation other than the deprivation of this knowledge (*savoir*) & this discernment; however, he who believes & has faith can never have this knowledge & this discernment, if he stops at his belief & his faith, but only if he tends, by all paths & all sciences, toward this knowledge, since all the sciences only exist for the sake of this knowledge (*connaissance*), & that science which is called Wisdom (*sapience*), which cannot be gained by fear & by faith. As it's said that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God & belief in Him, to this it should have been added: the zeal & desire to know, since we aspire to understand, know, & discern that which directly affects us. It's as if someone who owed us a considerable amount of money had said: "Your money's safe, believe me." To which we would respond: "I want to know & see for myself", because there is only repose & happiness in knowledge & discernment, & not in belief or in faith. Or rather, if someone to whom we had paid off a large debt came & asked us for it again, which of the two responses would come to mind: "I believe I've already paid it"? Or: "I know I've paid it"? I'm certain that nobody is such a good believer that they wouldn't gladly trade their "I believe" for "I know": which should lead us to recognize that all those who preach to us & tie us to this "I believe" are only shameless impostors, since understanding & knowing comprise the whole of human consolation, happiness, & repose, not this belief or this faith, which they all want us to keep for our whole lives, & even at death they intone the *credo* to us.

THE ANABAPTIST

*I'm afraid of God,
In God I have hope.*

The belief of the Anabaptist is quite close to that of the Huguenot, with the difference that he has less fear of God. Thus, he's neither as insane nor as ignorant as the Huguenot. The Anabaptists have less love for money or bodily goods, they're more liberal with each other; & they're happier in their religion than the Papists & Huguenots. And, just as the Huguenot can unfetter the Papist from his religion, the Anabaptist can unfetter the Huguenot from his, since graces & virtues greatly support the understanding that each of them wants to attain, such as fraternity, liberality, reason, justice, all the while not being as ignorant of any of the sciences & arts, for God would have all things & be recognized in all; He who is so great is recognized by the great sciences. O! How far the ignorant are from God if they fail to recognize their ignorance, since ignorance, by subjugating man, brings him this misfortune that, the less he knows, the more he thinks he knows, when he lacks this zeal & desire to know, & to love nothing as much as the sciences.

THE LIBERTINE

*I'm doubtful of God,
Without God I'm tormented.*

The Libertine neither believes nor denies, he neither trusts nor doubts completely, which always makes him a skeptic; he can dock, if he's well educated or thoughtful, at a happier port than all those who believe (provided he has already been a Huguenot), insofar as he raises himself higher in discernment than the Papist. Likewise, he sinks fast unless he withdraws (from libertinism), & is liable to shipwreck on the shores of atheism (it's true that man can never be an atheist, since he is so created by God), but he can fall into a worse state than all those mentioned above (Papists, Huguenots, Anabaptists), except for the Papist, who is entirely bestial (as has already been said), for the Papist is so bestial that he says & believes that good is evil, & evil good, which the Libertine doesn't do, for he frees himself to possess the good, but he wants it only for himself, being unable to find it in God because he doubts Him. Thus, all religions have tended to steal corporeal felicity from man & place it in God, to make man ever more miserable, & so that the best of life would be for those who invented the religions, or those who maintain them.

THE ATHEIST

*I have my pleasure without God,
In God I only have torment.*

The Atheist, or he who calls himself such (since it isn't possible for man to be without God) is, in his belief, contrary to the others (Papists, Huguenots, Anabaptists) & yet he has also a belief, which is that there is no God. This is why the Atheist only finds torment & affliction in God when he thinks about Him, inasmuch as he has abandoned Him in favor of the pleasures of the body & to satisfy all his passions. He will always be in perpetual torment, until he truly knows (and doesn't merely believe) whether there is a God or not, for he doesn't have this knowledge, & yet his mouth utters that there is no God, but his conscience accuses him; this man never finds repose, nor can he possess any rest without God, for, just like those named above (Papists, Huguenots, Anabaptists) claim that there is a God, the Atheist says that there isn't one. And all of them, for better or worse, know nothing about it, they only believe it; this is what they call knowing, but it would be better to call it stammering. But the true man who has this wisdom is among them, he sees & realizes their error & their imperfection, he knows that the belief that has been conceived in them proceeds from their ignorance & their fear of God, while knowing (*savoir*) has such an influence on men that the belief in God stays with him willy-nilly, as has already been mentioned. He who would have us understand that belief is between science & ignorance can never explain what he means, since there's a belief conceived in us by knowing (*savoir*) & another which is produced in us by our ignorance, by faith & terror, or the fear that we are given of God, since faith is only a lack of knowledge, because, where knowledge is, faith is dead & cannot exist. Therefore, the poor Christian can indeed be called the most miserable of all men on Earth, since his salvation, his paradise, his repose, his happiness, his beatitude, & his felicity are all based on ignorance & error: his belief & his faith. And yet, the Christians are always saying that they know & understand, but this is only the knowledge of a beast or a parrot: they only utter & repeat words without understanding them, with the fear that always accompanies them & sustains them.

HE WHO LIVES IN FEAR, NO MATTER WHAT KIND, CANNOT BE HAPPY

But happy will he be who, as David prophesied in his first psalm, will not have heeded the advice of wicked kings or tyrants, & who will not been halted, in the way, at the end, & in the path of the common ignoramus, believing & having faith, & who also has not received any charge, degree, or benefit in the houses of pestilence, blasphemy, & abomination.

But instead of such ambitions or ignorance, he meditates day & night in contemplation of God & man. For man is the understanding, the commandments or the Law, & he will find that he is this Law himself, once he has recovered reason, justice, truth, & fraternity which have been taken from him from his mother's bosom onward, through fear & terror of God, on which he has been sustained, which deprive him of discernment. He is fed with the *Credo* & faith, two fine samples, to spend one's whole life as a doctor of Dame Ignorance or of Faith, instead of giving him wisdom & knowledge of the truth, by which he might realize how far he has been erroneously misled, by inspiring fear & dread of God in him, & also virtue & nobility if he is intended for the army. But let him bring virtue & nobility to this learning, this knowledge, & this discernment in matters divine & human, & fear & terror in the taking & wielding of weapons, & he will then have a beginning of wisdom & he will persevere, with rationality in his head, without seeking it by his side where his sword hangs. And that fraternity, or justice & equity, which men naturally owe each other, & which is in their hearts, will be proved by their deeds, instead of being only in their wallet & their mouths.