

# Michelangelo Florio and the famous sentence:

*“Venetia Who sees not Venice cannot esteeme  
it, but he that sees it, payes well for it”<sup>1</sup>*

*With an introduction of biographical notes on Michelangelo and John  
Florio*

[*The purpose of this study*: this paper will try to demonstrate how the second part of the “sentence” in question had pregnant significance for Michelangelo Florio, in connection with the indignant and irrefutably documented invective that was hurled against Venice by the most famous Italian preacher of the Protestant Reformation, Bernardino Ochino, during Lent of 1542]

*Wide summary of the 2017 Italian study, with a Documentary Appendix, which contains a letter dated January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1552, in Latin, addressed by Michelangelo to W. Cecil (with translation into English and notes by Massimo Oro Nobili); it is absolutely striking to note how concepts and words, written in Latin by Michelangelo (who asked Cecil for mercy for an act of uncleanness), are literally reproduced in English by the Dramatist in Portia’s fundamental speech on praise of mercy in “The Merchant of Venice”.*

**Summary: Chapter 1. Introduction: some biographical details concerning Michelangelo and John Florio’s life.**

**1.1** Michelangelo Florio’s parents. **1.2** Michelangelo Florio’s origins. **1.3** Michelangelo’s birth date, to be determined, in my view, in 1518 - on the basis of the indication provided by Michelangelo himself in his *Apologia* (p.34 a) - by retroactively calculating 32 years from the date when he “divested” himself of his “Franciscan habit” (on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1550, according to Michelangelo’s *Apologia*, p. 77 a), being such a “divestment” the deeply symbolic act that formally sanctioned the irrevocable discharge of a friar from the Catholic Church - His abjuration, his release from prison and his escape from Rome and Italy, *religionis causa*. **1.4** Michelangelo Florio Fiorentino was a Franciscan monk of Minor Conventual Friars and Father Guardian of the Monastery of S. Croce in Florence, one of the most prestigious centers of the European culture, equipped with one of the most important libraries at that time, and whose “*Studium*” was frequented by Dante. “*Michelangelus Bonar[r]otus Florentinus*” family chapel was in Santa Croce. **1.5** The painful and dramatic testimony given by Michelangelo Florio, in the inquisitorial trial in Venice against the Augustinian friar Giulio da Milano, a disciple of the Augustinian friar Agostino Mainardo, of which Michelangelo speaks with affection

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<sup>1</sup> The sentence that is the subject of this study, was reported (together with its Italian version) by John Florio in his “First Fruits”, in his “Second Fruits” and in his “Giardino di Riecreatione”, as well as partially quoted, in Italian language, in “Love’s Labor’s Lost” by Shakespeare (Act IV, Scene II, 73-75 ).

and esteem in his *Apologia* (1557), calling him “the most learned and faithful minister of the Gospel, Master Agostino Mainardo from Piedmont.” **1.6** The Italian origins of Michelangelo Florio’s wife. The precise meaning of the Latin epigraph “*Italus ore, Anglus pectore, uterque opere*” that appears in John’s portrait published in his Dictionary of 1611; while John had a clear and perceptible ‘foreign’ (Italian) inflection and cadence in orally expressing himself in English (“*Italus ore*”), he was “both” (“*uterque*”) “*Italus [et] Anglus*”, Italian and English, i.e. perfectly bilingual, as for his written work (“*opere*”); nobody, if John had not affixed his signature, could have doubted that his works in English were not written by a “true”, “mother-tongue” English writer; “in 1603, English men and women ...had John Florio to thank, for in that year [through Florio’s translation of the Essays] *Montaigne spake English.*” **1.7** His son John’s birth in June / July 1552. Michelangelo’s Latin letter to Cecil on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1552 (in the *Documentary Appendix, with a translation into Italian*). The insufficient information on his portrait of 1611, a real “*mental trap.*” **1.8** Michelangelo’s imprisonment in Tor di Nona. The affectionate letter to Michelangelo by Pietro Aretino (April 1548), who was one of Michelangelo’s most esteemed friend, who had, in his library, most of Aretino’s books. Michelangelo’s release, after his abjuration. His escape from Rome and Italy and his exile *religionis causae*. **1.9** London, Soglio and Michelangelo’s last years. “*Michael Angelo had begun in ...[his] generation the work which his son was to continue in the next.*”

**Chapter 2. A tentative research effort aimed at understanding the meaning of the whole famous phrase: “Venetia, chi non ti vede non ti pretia, ma chi ti vede ben gli costa” (reported in “First Fruits”, “Second Fruits – “Who sees not Venice cannot esteeme it, but he that sees it, payes well for it”- and in “Giardino di Riconoscimento” by John Florio, as well as, partially quoted, in Italian, in “Love’s Labor’s Lost” by Shakespeare).**

**2.1** The sentence reported in the “*Fruits*” and in the “*Giardino di Riconoscimento*” by John, partially quoted in Italian, in “*Love’s Labor’s Lost*”: the authoritative opinion of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition*, under “*Shakespeare*”. **2.2** Analysis of the “sentence” reported in “*First Fruits*”, in “*Second Fruits*”, in “*Giardino di Riconoscimento*” and partially quoted in Italian, in “*Love’s Labor’s Lost.*” Venice was, together with Naples, one of the main early centres of the Reformation in Italy and one of the places where Michelangelo (by his own admission in his *Apologia*, p. 13 v and p. 73 v) had preached, as well as it was the residence of his close friend Pietro Aretino (who had an important influence, through the Florios, also on *Volpone* by Ben Jonson, set in Venice); and Aretino formed a great friendship with Titian (whose paintings appear to be strongly correlated with the Playwright’s works) and with Giulio Romano (the only Renaissance artist ever named by the Playwright, in *The Winter’s Tale*). **2.3** In search of the genesis of the second part of the sentence: “*Venetia, ... he that sees you, payes well for it.*” Michelangelo Florio’s painful experience in the inquisitorial process, in Venice, against the Augustinian friar Giulio da Milano. The tremendous invective hurled during Lent of 1542, by Bernardino Ochino against Venice and in favor of Giulio da Milano (“*O Venetia, who tells you the truth thou imprison him*”), imprisoned by the Venetian Inquisition, for having preached the ‘truth’ of the Gospel (after which, Ochino himself would be prosecuted and forced to ‘*religionis causa*’ exile, outside of Italy). **2.4** The meaning of the “second” part of the “sentence” in question, regarding Venice. **2.5** Conclusion. For Michelangelo Florio - painfully witness against Giulio da Milano and future martyr of the Reformation in Italy (imprisoned for 27 months in Rome until May 1550) - the second part of “sentence” regarding Venice was full of very important meanings. The invective that Ochino hurled against Venice during Lent of 1542, happened at a time immediately prodromal with respect to the “turning point” for the Christian world, the year 1542, which culminated in the convening of the Council of Trent (22 May 1542) and the establishment (21 July 1542) of the supreme tribunal of the Roman Holy Office, with responsibility for management and coordination of local Inquisitions (including the Venetian Inquisition). The consequential flights from Italy, *religionis causa*, of the Italian Protestant reformers (first, Ochino). The transfer, through these exiles (including Michelangelo Florio), not only of important theological expertise, but also of the classical, humanistic and Renaissance culture from Italy to England. The Playwright’s “*coded messages*”: the Playwright’s sentence in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, which connects with and refers to that wider one contained in the dialogic Florio’s manuals.

## DOCUMENTARY APPENDIX

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**The letter, in Latin, dated 23 January 1552, sent by Michelangelo Florio to William Cecil<sup>2</sup> . Translation into English and notes by Massimo Oro Nobili - Copyright © by Massimo Oro Nobili, November 2018- All rights reserved**

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As John Strype reports, “in the year 1550, or 1551, there was ... a church of Italians constituted in London, by the influence and care of our Archbishop [Thomas Cranmer] and Sir William Cecil, under [the Polish] John à Lasco’s superintendency. This church consisted of divers Italian nations, as Florentines, Genoezes, Milanois, Venetians, and others ... One Michael Angelo Florio, a Florentine by birth<sup>3</sup>, was appointed their preacher”<sup>4</sup>.

The same Strype refers (in another of his works) that “It was commendable practice of this church of strangers, that good discipline was preserved in it, to bring scandalous sinners to open shame, whatever their outward qualities or respects were. To this church, at this time, belonged a scholar and preacher, named Michael Angelo Florio, an Italian; who preached to a congregation of Italians, and had the countenance of the Archbishop [Thomas Cranmer] and the Secretary [Sir Cecil]”<sup>5</sup>.

In 1552 Michelangelo Florio - as John Strype refers- was “guilty of an act of uncleanness: for which Sir William Cecil, Secretary of State, who had been his good friend, was exceedingly displeased with him ... and intending to inflict some severe punishment upon him; which seemed to be banishment out of the nation ...[Michael] Angelo wrote him a very pertinent letter, minding him of the frailty of human nature, and of the mercy of God to Moses, Aaron, David, Jonas, Peter, after their falls: and that if he were forced to depart the kingdom, he must either be compelled to renounce the truth of the Gospel, or have his blood shed by the enemies thereof... In fine, he [Michelangelo] got over this brunt, and recovered mild Cecil’s favour: for I find, a year after, our Archbishop wrote to him to further a certain business of Michael Angelo at court, as

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<sup>2</sup> The letter, in Latin, is reproduced in the work by John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God Thomas Cranmer, some time Lord Archbishop of Canterbury wherein the history of the Church and the Rformation of it, during the Primacy of the said Archbishop, are greatly illustrated; Ans many singular Matters relating thereunto, now first published (1694) In Three Books collected chiefly from records, registres, authentic letters, and other original manuscripts, by John Strype, M.A., A New Edition, with Additions, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1812, Vol II, Num. LIII, pp. 883-885. This letter is also readable in the following link at pp. 883-885 <https://books.google.it/books?id=ikQJAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>*

<sup>3</sup> Strype believes that Michelangelo was a Florentine by birth.

<sup>4</sup> John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God Thomas Cranmer, sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury wherein the history of the Church and the Rformation of it, during the Primacy of the said Archbishop, are greatly illustrated; Ans many singular Matters relating thereunto, now first published (1694) In Three Books collected chiefly from records, registres, authentic letters, and other original manuscripts, by John Strype, M.A., A New Edition, with Additions, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1812, Vol I, p. 343. The volume can be read in the following link, at p. 343, <https://books.google.it/books?id=U1s4AQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>*

<sup>5</sup> John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials Relating Chiefly to Religion and the Reformation of It, and the Emergencies of the Church of England Under King Henry VIII., King Edward VI., and Queen Mary I., with Large Appendices Containing Original Papers, Records &c., Vol. II, Part I, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1822, p. 377. The volume can be read in the following link, at p. 377, <https://books.google.it/books?id=S88QAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>*

*much as he could*<sup>6</sup>. The same Strype refers that Michelangelo Florio “*having been found guilty of an act of fornication, he underwent the censures of the Church, and was deposed from his ministry. Afterwards enjoined penance, which he performed. But some time after seemed to have been restored again*”<sup>7</sup>.

The above mentioned Michelangelo’s “*very pertinent letter is correctly dated by Luigi Firpo*”<sup>8</sup>, according to whom, Michelangelo in the letter “*to Cecil of 23 January 1552 ... touches all the strings of supplicating contrition: guilt is not disputed, but human frailty is invoked to make it excusable : the guilty invokes pity and above all fears a threatened decree of expulsion from the kingdom: returning to the continent would mean certain death for him, a penalty too disproportionate to the fault committed*”. Frances Yates also said that “*This letter was written early in 1552*”<sup>9</sup>. In this letter, unlike a previous letter to Cecil<sup>10</sup>, Michelangelo can no longer bear the title of “*Italorum Concionator*” “*Preacher of Italians*”, having been deposed by that office; nor does it bear any more his epithet of Fiorentino.

It is highly likely that Michelangelo had entertained, without the prior sacred bond of marriage, a mutually agreed sexual relationship with a woman, who became pregnant (the son of sin would have been John Florio). The expression “*act of fornication*” (used by Strype in this regard) clearly indicates a “*consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other*”<sup>11</sup>. Yates seems to strongly support this hypothesis, since she explains that, with regard to Michelangelo’s “*moral ‘lapse’, it seems highly probable that one of the conditions upon which forgiveness was granted would be the regularization by marriage of his connection with the woman*”<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, in the first paragraph of his letter (where, we have highlighted in grey the relevant words), Michelangelo mentions that some malicious voices have incorrectly reported the fact and, obviously,

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<sup>6</sup> John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God Thomas Cranmer, sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury wherein the history of the Church and the Rformation of it, during the Primacy of the said Archbishop, are greatly illustrated; Ans many singular Matters relating thereunto, now first published (1694) In Three Books collected chiefly from records, registres, authentic letters, and other original manuscripts, by John Strype, M.A., A New Edition, with Additions, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1812, Vol I, p. 345. This letter is also readable in the following link, at p. 345, <https://books.google.it/books?id=U1s4AQAAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>*

<sup>7</sup> John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials Relating Chiefly to Religion and the Reformation of It, and the Emergencies of the Church of England Under King Henry VIII., King Edward VI., and Queen Mary I., with Large Appendices Containing Original Papers, Records &c., Vol. II, Part I, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1822, p. 378. The volume can be read in the following link, at p. 378, <https://books.google.it/books?id=S88QAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>*

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Firpo, *Opera di Giorgio Agricola de l'Arte de' metalli partita in XII libri ... tradotti in lingua toscana da M. Michelangelo Florio fiorentino* (Basilea, 1563); reprint in facsimile (Turin 1969), p. XIII.

<sup>9</sup> Frances A. Yates, *John Florio, The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge University Press, 1934, p. 6. You can read this sentence, in the preview of such volume, available in the link <https://books.google.it/books?id=Qi8wAbnw4aIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>

<sup>10</sup> You can read such letter (in Latin, with its translation into Italian), probably sent at the end of 1551, in our recent study, Massimo Oro Nobili, *Michelangelo Florio e la celebre frase: “Venetia, chi non ti vede non ti pretia, ma chi ti vede ben gli costa”*, *Con un'introduzione di cenni biografici su Michelangelo e John Florio*, 2017, pp. 44-47, in [http://www.shakespeareandflorio.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=17&Itemid=35](http://www.shakespeareandflorio.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=17&Itemid=35) sub “*Michelangelo Florio e Venezia*”.

<sup>11</sup> This is the usual definition of “*fornication*”, which is provided in dictionaries; you can read it, for example, in the Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, in <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fornication>

<sup>12</sup> Frances A. Yates, *John Florio, The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge University Press, 1934, p. 6. You can read this sentence, in the preview of such volume, available in the link <https://books.google.it/books?id=Qi8wAbnw4aIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>

exaggerating Michelangelo's fault. Indeed, Michelangelo himself affirms that the "*affair, as it really is*", is "*not like the unclean mouths of any impudent dared to throw up*".

To confirm our view, we find a letter, in Latin, dated October 12, 1568, addressed by Edmund Grindal, bishop of London, to Jean Cousin, minister of the French Church<sup>13</sup>, in which Grindal (evidently influenced by the malicious voices that had spread), refers to Michelangelo's rape of a maiden ("*constupratam ancillam*"). Grindal was not, at all, aware of how the facts actually took place and he had only heard rumors about the affair; he was completely uninformed about that affair, so *he was neither a direct witness nor a reliable source*; in fact *he wished to receive accurate information corresponding to the truth on the matter* (that *he merely knew by hearsay*). In particular, he was interested in knowing some details on the "*publica poenitentia*" (public penance), which Michelangelo had eventually suffered and on the number of witnesses that were present to it.

Yates further supports the thesis of a mere "*act of fornication*"<sup>14</sup>, pointing out that, already in the summer of 1552, Michelangelo Florio lived in the house of the Duke of Suffolk and dedicated his manuscript *Institutioni della Lingua Thoscana* to his pupil Jane Gray (daughter of the Duke)<sup>15</sup>. Yates adds that Michelangelo's "*recent disgrace was no bar to service in that strict household*"<sup>16</sup>. If Michelangelo had indeed been a rapist of a maiden, he would certainly not have been allowed to live in an aristocratic house and to give lessons to a young aristocratic maiden, like Lady Jane Gray (who will become Queen of England, for nine days, in July 1553). *Michelangelo had the mere fault of having entertained a mutually agreed sexual relationship without the prior blessing of the sacred marriage bond.*

Coming now to talk about the contents of the letter, it is really impressive to compare some passages taken from Michelangelo's letter to Cecil and the famous and *fundamental piece* of "*The Merchant of Venice*", concerning *Portia's praise of mercy*: it is not excessive to say that *Michelangelo had already substantially written in Latin* (in his famous letter on 23 January 1552) the same *identical concepts and words, that the Dramatist will draw into his English text* of his "*Merchant of Venice*"!

In order to demonstrate the above, we report herein below two excerpts that are taken from (i) some sentences, contained in the below reported Michelangelo's letter on 23 January 1552 and (ii) from *Portia's speech on praise of mercy*, taken from the "*Merchant of Venice*" (Act IV, Scene i, 180 ss.):

- (i) "*Perhaps considering the king's power, the sword's strength of the law-defender, the force of the executioner's torture instrument, the weapons of the soldier, the rules of the one who governs and the severity of the good father: were all these things established in vain? No doubt, but all of the above has its measures, causes, reasons and usefulness. In fact, forgiveness does not contrast with these institutions of the human governments, nor is indulgence opposed to them. If this were to happen [that indulgence is opposed to the institutions of the human governments], Christ would not have offered us the sweetness of his grace, nor would he have witnessed such clemency by virtuous*

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<sup>13</sup> Such information is reported by Luigi Firpo, *Opera di Giorgio Agricola de l'Arte de' metalli partita in XII libri ... tradotti in lingua toscana da M. Michelangelo Florio fiorentino* (Basilea, 1563); reprint in facsimile (Turin 1969), footnote 21 at p. XIII.

<sup>14</sup> Frances A. Yates, op. cit., p.6. Yates points out that Michelangelo was living (in Summer 1552) in the Duke of Suffolk's house, since Michelangelo says, in the dedication of his manuscript, "*that he holds in reverence 'the lowest servants of his [the duke's] well-nourished and well addressed family*".

<sup>15</sup> Frances A. Yates, op. cit., pp. 7-8, and footnote 2 at p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Frances A. Yates, op. cit., p.8.

decisions, but he would have merely confirmed the most severe principle of revenge of the Old Testament.

[and a few lines before] *Who intends to hate all those who make mistakes, certainly does not love himself. And if he claims that all those who err, are to be condemned to death, he will not tolerate anyone living. [...] And, just as God's mercy is necessary for each one because of his own faults, so it is appropriate for everyone to be merciful towards all those who err.*"

- (ii) *"The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes: 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes The throned monarch better than his crown; His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; But mercy is above this sceptred sway; It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself; And earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew, Though justice be thy plea, consider this, That, in the course of justice, none of us Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy; And that same prayer doth teach us all to render The deeds of mercy."*

Michelangelo emphasized *"the king's power, the sword's strength of the law-defender"*.

Similarly Portia emphasized *"the force of temporal power"*.

According to Michelangelo, *"forgiveness does not contrast with these institutions of the human governments"*.

Similarly, according to Portia, *"earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice"*.

According to Michelangelo, he, who *"claims that all those who err, are to be condemned to death, he will not tolerate anyone living"*.

Similarly, according to Portia, *"in the course of justice, none of us Should see salvation"*.

Michelangelo says: *"And, just as God's mercy is necessary for each one because of his own faults, so it is appropriate for everyone to be merciful towards all those who err."*

Portia similarly, finally, says: *"we do pray for mercy; And that same prayer [the Our Father prayer] doth teach us all to render The deeds of mercy."*

We believe that Portia's praise of mercy may well derive from Michelangelo Florio's praise of mercy, which was (similarly to Portia's one) all permeated with *Christian accents*.

Shakespeare has been rightly called the *"true dramatist of forgiveness"*<sup>17</sup>.

This letter is a *true masterpiece*, a *"skillfully argued letter"*, as Frances Amelia Yates defined it<sup>18</sup>!

*This letter contains many important parallels with the Dramatist's works, especially with regard to Portia's speech on praise of mercy in "The Merchant of Venice", as above briefly illustrated.*

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<sup>17</sup> Hansurs Von Balthasar, *Introduzione al dramma*, vol. 1, di *Teodrammatica*, trad. it. by Guido Somnavilla, ed. Jaca Book, Milan, 2012, p. 451. The Author dedicates 15 pages to a paragraph entitled *"Excursus: Shakespeare and the Forgiveness"* (pp. 450-464).

<sup>18</sup> Frances A. Yates, *John Florio, The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge University Press, 1934, p. 6. You can read this sentence, reading the preview of such volume, available in the link <https://books.google.it/books?id=Qi8wAbnw4aIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>

In this study, which concerns the relationship between Michelangelo and Venice, we have limited ourselves to highlighting the said important correlation with the play of the Dramatist, “*The merchant of Venice*”.

You find highlighted in yellow the sentences of the letter considered above, that we have compared to the famous Portia’s speech on praise of mercy in *The Merchant of Venice*.

<p>NUM.[BER] LIII. <i>Michael Angelo endeavours to appease the Secretary, greatly offended with him for a gross miscarriage.</i></p> <p>Clarissimo Viro, ordinis equestris, Domino Gulielmo Sycilio, Serenissimi Regis Angliæ, &amp;c. a Secretis, Michael Angelus Florius, S. P. D. [Salutem Plurimam Dicit]</p> <p>SUBODORATUS hisce diebus elapsis miram illam tuam charitatem, qua me piè complecti solebas, magnitudine Labis, qua nunc me commaculati contingit, victam fuisse; téque adversus me ita excanduisse, ut me scelerosis omnibus indignitate excellere judicares. Quæ cum animo mecum volutare cepissem, arbitrabar consultum fore, si ad te scriberem, rémque omnem, ut se habet, non ut quorumque impudentium lutulenta ora evomere ausa sunt, panderem. Sed pendebat animus, et in diversa trahebatur.</p> <p>Nam verebar nè vehementius in me se vires, audito meo nomine, quod tam pæminosum apud te factum est. Verum cum rem altius mecum perpenderim, prorsus mutavi Sententiam, tum quia misantropos non es, tum etiam quia ea opinio, quam de tua pietate, prudentia, doctrina et mansuetudine concepi hactenus, falsa non me Lactavit spe.</p> <p>Iccirco his meis ad te litteris provolare audeo, faterique te non injuria me scelerosum vocitasse, quia exsurgentibus quibusdam nebulis de limosa concupiscentia carnis meæ, et obnubilantibus cor meum, per abrupta cupiditatum cecidi, ac præceps cecidi in cænum, voraginem et gurgitem libidinis et immunditiæ carnis, relicto Deo, cujus ira invaluit super me.</p>	<p>NUMERO LIII. <i>Michael Angelo endeavours to appease the Secretary, greatly offended with him for a gross miscarriage.</i></p> <p>To the Most Illustrious Man, of the Equestrian Order, Lord William Cecil, Personal Secretary of the Most Serene King of England, etc., Michael Angelo Florio, sending many greetings.</p> <p>HAVING HAD SENSED that in these past days your marvelous charity had been annihilated, with which you used to dress me with filial piety, because of the gravity of my Fall, for which now it happens to me to be stained; and that you were so angry at that point, to judge me that I had overcome all criminals by unworthiness. Since I had begun to consider such things between myself, I thought that a decision was required, whether to write to you and explain the whole affair, as it really is, and not like the unclean mouths of any impudent dared to throw up. But my mind was doubtful, and it was dragged towards different solutions.<sup>20</sup></p> <p>In fact, I feared that you, with greater vehemence against me, would have thrown you, if you had only heard of my name, which for you has become a name so chapped by cracks [editor’s note: a name that is, muddled, discredited, wounded]. Indeed, as I carefully considered the matter more deeply, I changed the Decision altogether, both because you are not a grumpy person, and because that opinion (I have perceived so far about your indulgence, wisdom, culture, and clemency) did not Feed me with a false hope.</p> <p>For this reason, I dare to address you with this letter of mine, and to recognize that you have rightly attributed me the epithet of sacrilege, because, owing to certain darkening that originated from the murky lust of my flesh and which obscured my mind, through the depths of the cupid senses I fell, and I fell headlong into the mud, into the chasm and the whirlwind of lust and the impurity of the flesh, departing from the precepts of</p>
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<sup>2020</sup> Michelangelo Florio appears as a deeply doubtful person, not very different from Shakespearean Hamlet.

<p>Sed ut memineris, obsecro, Amplissime Domine, me ex eodem Adamo genitum, ex quo David, ac plerique electi Dei, qui ejusdem criminibus obnoxij fuere.</p> <p>Ex humo, non ex suamet substantia, ut quidam falso opinati sunt, Deus hominem condidit, non ex durissimo Lapide aut chalybe. Quod quidem si perspectabis illum proclivorem aptioremque ad malum reddidit.</p> <p>Si enim naturam nostram humanam sic Deus condidisset (quod impossibile est) ut nunquam peccasset, melior ipso Deo fuisset, (quod absit:), quia natura quæ potest peccare, sicut et non peccare, si semper vinceret, illi naturæ præponenda esset, quæ ideo non peccat, quia impassibilis est.</p> <p>Age dic, ex terræ limo conditus quis non peccat ? Et si bonos omnes suos esse velit Deus, non tamen illis potestatem peccandi adimit. Et quisquis naturam nostram quam diligentissime inspexerit, cum Christo filio Dei fatebitur, <i>Neminem præter unum Deum bonum.</i></p> <p>In me igitur in hujus criminis faciem prolapso naturam, Amplissime Domine, attende, in te vero, et in alijs ab hac peccati sorde mundis, gratiam Dei, non naturæ virtutem, Laudato. Qui peccantes omnes odisse quaerit, neque profecto seipsum diligit. Et si quoscunque reos mortis damnari contendit, neminem vivere patietur.</p> <p>Quis unquam electorum dei tam mundus ab omni Labecula criminis fuit, cui non opus fuerit quotidie rogare patrem, ut illi sua remittat debita? Nonne omnes habent, quod plangent, et reprehensione conscientia, et mobilitate peccatricis naturæ? Et sicut unicuique propter sua peccata Dei misericordia est necessaria, ita uniuscujusque proprium est errantium omnium misereri.</p>	<p>God, whose anger took hold of me above me.</p> <p>But, as you have thought, O most illustrious Lord, I beg you for me, who was begotten by the same Adam, from whom David [was born] and many people chosen by God, who were guilty of the sins of that same [Adam].</p> <p>From the earth, not from his very substance, as some falsely believe, God created man, not by a very hard Marble or steel. For without doubt, if you will carefully evaluate, God made that [man] more inclined and ready to evil.</p> <p>If, in fact, God had created our human nature in such a way that no one ever fell into sin (what is impossible), this would have been better for God himself (that which is far from the truth); because it would be preferable a nature that can sin, as well as not to sin (even if it could always win [over evil]), compared to that nature which indeed never sins, because it is insensitive to passions.</p> <p>Now then, tell me: who, created with the mud of the earth, does not sin? And if God wants all men to be good, it does not preclude them from sinning. And whoever would consider our nature as carefully as possible, will recognize with Christ, the son of God, that <i>No one is good except one, God.</i><sup>21</sup></p> <p>O Most illustrious Lord, pay attention to me, that let me go in the mud of this sacrilege; therefore Praise the nature in me [editor's note: that makes men susceptible to sin], while in you and in other people without the turpitude of sin, [Praise] the grace of God, not the virtue of [editor's note: human] nature. <b>Who intends to hate all those who make mistakes, certainly does not love himself. And if he claims that all those who err, are to be condemned to death, he will not tolerate anyone living.</b></p> <p>Who ever, among those people who are chosen by God, was so free from any small Stain of guilt, for which it was not necessary to invoke the father every day, so that he could forgive his debts? Is it not true that everyone has [some spots], because they are beating their chests both for the reproach of their own conscience and for the fickleness of their sinful nature? <b>And, just as God's mercy is necessary for each one because of his own</b></p>
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<sup>21</sup> The sentence is taken from the Gospels of Mark (10:18) and Luke (18:19).

<p>Hæc perspicua comperies in unigeniti filij dei illo recto sanctoque iudicio, ab eo a Phariseis petito adversus mulierem in adulterio deprehensam ; qui et legem adulteram damnantem comprobavit, et iudices cæterósque omnes terrendo ad misericordiam revocavit.</p> <p>Quærit Deus Opt. Max., ut regna subvertantur erroris, non errantes ipsi, et eos ubique jubet spiritu mansuetudinis instaurendos esse, non odio et persecutione perdendos.</p> <p>Qui igitur vehementi errantes prosequitur odio, eos perdere, non sanare conatur. Sed video hic te corrugare frontem, audióque dicere, Num frustra instituta sunt potestas regis, vis gladij cognitoris, ungu læ carnificis, arma militis, disciplina dominantis, et severitas boni patris ?</p> <p>Non utique, sed habent ista omnia modos suos causas, rationes, et utilitates. Non enim ordinationibus hisce humanarum rerum adversatur remissio, nec contrariatur indulgentia.</p> <p>Quod si fieri contingeret, nobis non attulisset Christus suæ dulcedinem gratiæ, nec tam pijs elogijs mansuetudinem commendasset, sed veteris Testamenti severiorem legis vindictam comprobasset.</p>	<p>faults, so it is appropriate for everyone to be merciful towards all those who err.</p> <p>You will discover how this reasoning is evident in that righteous and holy judgment of the only son of God, who was requested of this by the Pharisees against a woman recognized in adultery; and he confirmed the law that condemns the adulteress, and, however, at the same time, he persuaded them to mercy, by terrifying the judges and all other [people present].<sup>22</sup></p> <p>Maximus Great God wants that the kingdoms are to be destroyed because of their mistakes, but not that such destiny may involve people who makes mistakes, and commands that they should be everywhere encouraged to new life with a spirit of mercy and not to damnation with hatred and persecution.</p> <p>Whoever punishes those who err with vehement hatred, ends up striving so that they may be among the damned people and not among the saved people. But on this occasion I see you wrinkling your forehead and I hear you say: “Perhaps considering the king’s power, the sword’s strength of the law-defender, the force of the executioner’s torture instrument, the weapons of the soldier, the rules of the one who governs and the severity of the good father: were all these things established in vain?”</p> <p>No doubt, but all of the above has its measures, causes, reasons and usefulness. In fact, forgiveness does not contrast with these institutions of the human governments, nor is indulgence opposed to them.</p> <p>If this were to happen [that indulgence is opposed to the institutions of the human governments], Christ would not have offered us the sweetness of his grace, nor would he have witnessed such clemency by virtuous decisions, but he would have merely confirmed the most severe principle of revenge of the Old Testament.</p>
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<sup>22</sup> See the Gospel of John, 8: 1-11. “Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst. They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”.

<p>Sed quid audeo docere Minervam, et noctuas ferre Athenas?</p> <p>Nonne hæc omnia in sacris didicisti literis? Nonne fides, nonne pietas, non hæc tandem ipse te deus edocuit, cum te viti, quæ est vita nostra, Christo Jesu Servatori nostro inseruit?</p> <p>Moses, cui legitur facie ad faciem Dominus esse locutus, missus ad gentes, et ad fratres suos, ire nolebat, et ad aquas contradictionis quam graviter Deum offenderit, Dei ipsius testimonio, novimus omnes.</p> <p>Aaron, Dei Altissimi Sacerdos idololatriæ Israelitarum consentiens, ex auro et monilibus fæminarum eorum vitulum fabricavit; illi aram extruxit, ac holocausta immolavit: cui sane facinori simile nec oculus mortalium vidit, nec auris audivit.</p> <p>Jonas propheta præceptum sibi, ut Ninivitis prædicaret, irrupit, ut ad alium locum pergeret, quo missus non fuerat.</p>	<p>But why dare I give teachings to Minerva [goddess of wisdom] and bring owls to Athens?<sup>23</sup></p> <p>Is not it true that you have already learned from the holy scriptures all these my biblical quotes? Is not it true that faith, piety, all these feelings finally God himself taught you, when he grafted you [like a branch] into the vine, which is our life, our Jesus Christ the Savior?<sup>24</sup></p> <p>Moses, to whom, as we read [in the scriptures], the Lord ordered, face to face, that he was the guide of his people and his brothers, but he was hesitant to accept the task and to go, and we all knew how seriously has offended God, as evidenced by the testimony of God himself, near [the place which was, thereafter, known as] the “waters of contradiction”.<sup>25</sup></p> <p>Aaron, High Priest of God, consenting to the idolatry of the Israelites, built a calf made of gold and the jewelry of their women; he raised up an altar to this [calf] and offered sacrifices: indeed, neither mortal eye saw, nor ear heard anything like that misdeed.</p> <p>The prophet Jonah, though he had been commanded [by the Lord] to preach to the inhabitants of Nineveh, disobeyed, going to another place [Tarsis], where he had not been sent [by the Lord].</p>
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<sup>23</sup> The sentence “to bring owls to Athens” means “*To do or undertake something redundant, pointless, or futile. It refers to the city of Athens in the time of Ancient Greece, where silver coins were minted with the image of an owl (which were abundant in the city). Thus, to bring either owls or silver to Athens would be a useless venture* (see in <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/bring+owls+to+Athens>). Cecil (who is compared to the goddess Minerva) well knows biblical texts and it is useless for Michelangelo to explain these texts to him!

<sup>24</sup> Michelangelo recalls one of the most beautiful parallels in the Gospels, when Jesus says (Gospel of John, 15:5): “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”. “The vine ... is ... Jesus. The disciples, to the extent, and only to the extent that they are united to Him, are the branches ... the absolute necessity of ‘remaining united’ is affirmed ...” (Bruno Maggioni, *Il racconto di Giovanni*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2006, pp. 288-289). Both the branches (branches) that depart from the stem of the vine and the stem of the vine itself are intimately connected and in them the same sap flows.

<sup>25</sup> And here Michelangelo points out the two hesitations of Moses: (i) when God told him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses said to God (Exodus 3:11): “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?*”; (ii) when the “*Jews, disheartened by the scarcity of water in the desert, entered into a heavy contrast (“contradictio”) with Moses and irritated him at a place that was later called ‘the waters of the contradiction’; then Moses was afflicted for such disputes with his people and, precisely for this affliction, although inspired by God to strike the stone, hesitated somewhat with some diffidence to do it, but then he beat it and the water came out in great copy; nevertheless God, angry with Moses for his hesitation, punished him with making him die in the journey before reaching the promised land*”. See Alphonse de Liguori, Traduzione de’ salmi e de’ cantici, 1805, p.287, [http://books.google.it/books?id=Y5s7sH3Hk5wC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbv\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.it/books?id=Y5s7sH3Hk5wC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbv_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<p>David rex et propheta, vir utique secundum cor Dei, plus æquo Veneri indulgens, uxorem rapuit alienam, et virum illius interfici curavit.</p> <p>Simon Petrus, cui Dominus pollicitus erat claves regni cœlorum, cum juramento ipsum Dominum suum negavit. Nec tamen ille pijssimus Deus terræ chasmata aperiri jussit, ut vivi absorberentur hi qui legem suam violaverunt: ut suo exemplo doceret omnes, rigorem judicij pietate et clementia frangere.</p> <p>Defervescat igitur minax tua illa indignatio et formidabilis ira ad versus me, demitte furorem. Vir integerrime, misericorditer me prolapsus corripe, et cum dilectione salutis meæ consule, et prospice.</p> <p>Cujus auxilio, consilio, et favore nitar, si tu, qui omnium sacra anchora es, (et numinis loco te habent omnes), me prorsus tuo destituas auxilio?</p> <p>Quo fugiam extra regnum istud, ut vitare possim, quia aut carne mea et sanguine meo satientur hostium evangelij dentes et ora, aut veritatem illius ipse negare cogar?</p> <p>Non veluti primi parentis Adami est hoc peccatum meum, ut non vetustate, prudentia et pietate sanctorum Dei deleri possit.</p> <p>Cave, obsecro, ne Satanas, per imaginem quasi justæ severitatis, crudelem hanc tibi adversus me suadeat sævitiam.</p>	<p>David, king and prophet, a man absolutely close to the heart of God, more lenient in justice than Venus, appropriated another man's wife and arranged for her husband to be killed.</p> <p>Simon Peter, to whom the Lord had promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven, even denied his Lord with oath. Nor, however, that very lenient God ordered that the chasms of the earth be opened, so that those who violated his law were devoured alive; this, to teach everyone, by his example, to mitigate the severity of judgment with piety and mercy.</p> <p>Therefore, calm your threatening indignation and your terrible anger against me; quench your fury. O Man, of the utmost integrity, in a merciful manner, blame me that I have fallen into error and decide with predilection for my salvation, and take care.</p> <p>On whose help, advice and favor, can I rely if you, who are the sacred anchor of all (and all people hold you in high esteem, because of your protection, almost as a tutelary deity), completely deprive me of your help?</p> <p>Where shall I go into exile out of this kingdom, in order to be able to avoid either that the teeth and mouths of the enemies of the Gospel become full of my flesh and blood, or that I myself must deny the truth of that [i.e. the truth of the Gospel]?<sup>26</sup></p> <p>This sin of mine is not like that of the first parent Adam, who cannot be erased on the basis of the ancient friendship, wisdom and mercy of God's holy wills.</p> <p>Be cautious, I adjure you, because Satan, through the image of only one apparent rigor, does not persuade you to adopt such ruthless severity [exile!] against me.</p>
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<sup>26</sup> Michelangelo does nothing but change, in a different situation, the same concepts expressed by Ochino in his letter of 22 August 1542 to Vittoria Colonna (a letter well known among the Italian Evangelicals, just like Michelangelo); Ochino had decided not to go to Rome, for fear of being incarcerated and “because [in Rome] I could not but deny Christ or be crucified”. The entire text of this letter is reported by Ugo Rozzo, *I dialogi sette e altri scritti del tempo della fuga, di Bernardino Ochino*, Turin, Claudiana, 1985, p. 123.

The equation exile and death (here expressed by Michelangelo) also characterizes a famous piece in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Romeo strongly proclaims, addressing Friar Laurence: “Hence banished is banished from the world, And world's exile is death. Then ‘banished’ is death [Act III, scene I, v. 20-21] ...Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel [v. 65]”. It seems as if the Dramatist (just like Michelangelo) personally felt, on his skin, the terror of exile, perceived as death!

Clamabis fortassis, me indignum esse hoc tuo favore et auxilio.	You may feel that I am unworthy of your favor and help.
Fateor [ <i>n.d.r.</i> , <i>peccavisse</i> ], sed recorderis, rogo, Deum indignos justificare et servare.	I acknowledge [that I have sinned], but I beg you to remember that God forgives and saves the unworthy people.
Pietas igitur commoveat te, ut velis mihi famulo tuo pereunti opitulari, cujus salus tibi in manu est.	Therefore, mercy inspires you, so that you may want to help me, your servant who has fallen into disgrace, whose salvation is in your hands.
Vale, et bene fortunet Christus opt. Max. quod in manibus est,	Take care of you and [I hope] that Christ, the excellent Maximus, blesses in a favorable way [the decision] that is in [your] hands.
10 Kal. Februarij <sup>19</sup> .	January 23 [1552].

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<sup>19</sup> “The letter is dated ‘x Kal. Februarii’ with no year. A contemporary endorsement is ‘January, 1551’; i.e. 1552 according to the modern reckoning” (Frances A. Yates, *John Florio, The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare’s England*, Cambridge University Press, 1934, footnote 2 at p. 6).

You can read this footnote in the preview of such volume, available in the link <https://books.google.it/books?id=Qi8wAbnw4aIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>