

Day 1, Story 1



Ser Cepparello deceives a holy friar with a false confession and dies, and although he was one of the worst of men during his life, he is reputed after his death to be a saint and is called Saint Ciappelletto.¹

Dearest ladies, it is fitting that everything man does should take as its origin the wonderful and holy name of Him who was the maker of all things. Thus, since I am the first and must begin our storytelling, I intend to start off with one of His marvelous works so that, once you have heard it, our hope in Him, as in that which is immutable, will be strengthened, and we will forever praise His name. Now, it is clear that the things of this world are all transitory and fading, so that both in themselves and in what they give rise to, they are filled with suffering, anguish, and toil, as well as being subject to countless dangers. We, who live in the midst of these things and are a part of them, would certainly not be able to resist and defend ourselves against them, if the special grace of God did not lend us strength and discernment. It is wrong to believe that this grace descends to us and enters us because of any merit of our own. Rather, it is sent by His loving kindness and is obtained through the prayers of those who, though mortal like us, truly followed His will while they were alive and now enjoy eternal bliss with Him. To them, as to advocates informed by experience of our frailty, we offer up prayers about our concerns, perhaps because we do not dare to present them personally before the sight of so great a judge. And yet in Him, who is generous and filled with pity for us, we perceive something more. Although human sight is not sharp enough to penetrate the secrets of the divine mind in any way, it sometimes happens that we are deceived by popular opinion into making someone

our advocate before Him in all His majesty whom He has cast into eternal exile. And yet He, from whom nothing is hidden, pays more attention to the purity of the supplicant than to his ignorance or to the damned state of his intercessor, listening to those who pray as if their advocate were actually blessed in His sight. All of this will appear clearly in the tale I intend to tell—clearly, I say, not in keeping with the judgment of God, but with that of men.

The story is told that Musciatto Franzesi, an extremely rich and celebrated merchant in France, who had been made a knight, was once supposed to move to Tuscany with Lord Charles Sans Terre, the King of France's brother, whom Pope Boniface had sent for and was encouraging to come.² Musciatto recognized that his affairs, as those of merchants often are, were tangled up here and there and could not be put right quickly and easily, but he thought of a number of different people to whom he could entrust them and thus found a way to take care of everything. There was, however, one exception. He was unsure whom he could leave behind to recover the loans he had made to quite a few people in Burgundy. The reason for his uncertainty was that he had heard the Burgundians were a quarrelsome lot, evil by nature and untrustworthy, and he could think of no one he could rely on who would be sufficiently wicked that his wickedness would match theirs. After he had given the matter a great deal of thought, there came to mind a certain Ser Cepparello da Prato, who was often a guest in his house in Paris.³ Because the man was small of stature and dressed like a dandy, the French, not knowing what "Cepparello" signified and thinking it meant "hat," that is, "garland," in their language, called him, because he was small as we have said, not Ciappello, but Ciappelletto. And so, he was called Ciappelletto everywhere, while only a select few knew he was really Ser Cepparello.*

* Cepparello's first name is the diminutive (-ello) of Ciapo, short for Jacopo (James), although Boccaccio plays with the fact that *ceppo* meant "log" or "stump." "Cepparello" could thus be translated as "Little Log." The French-speaking Burgundians mistake his name, thinking it sounds like their word for hat or garland, *chapelet*, and transform it into the half-French, half-Italian Ciappelletto, "Little Garland." In the course of the fourteenth century, *chapelet* also acquired the meaning of "rosary," so his name could also mean "Little Rosary."

Let me tell you about the kind of life this Ciappelletto led. A notary, he would feel the greatest shame if even one of the very few legal documents he drew up was found to be other than false. He had composed as many of these phony ones as people requested, and he did so for free more willingly than someone else would have done for a sizable payment. Furthermore, he supplied false testimony with the greatest delight, whether it was asked for or not, and since people in France in those days placed the greatest trust in oaths, and since he did not care if his were false, he won a great many law cases through his wickedness whenever he was asked to swear upon his oath to tell the truth. Because it gave him real pleasure, he went to great lengths to stir up bad feelings, hatred, and scandals among friends and relations and everyone else, and the greater the evils he saw arise as a result, the greater his happiness. Invited to be an accomplice in a murder or some other criminal act, he would never refuse to go. Indeed, he would do so with a ready will and often found himself happily wounding or killing men with his own hands. He was the greatest blasphemer of God and the Saints, and since he would do so at the slightest provocation, he came off as the most irascible man alive. He never went to church and used abominable words to mock all its sacraments as being beneath contempt. On the other hand, he happily spent time in taverns and frequented other places of ill repute. Of women, he was as fond as dogs are of being beaten with a stick, and he took more delight in their opposite than any degenerate ever did. He would rob and steal with a conscience like that of a holy man giving alms. He was a total glutton and a great drinker, so much so that sometimes it would make him disgustingly ill. Plus, he was a devout cardsharp and gambled with loaded dice. But why do I lavish so many words on him? He was perhaps the worst man who had ever been born. For a long time his wickedness had preserved the wealth and rank of Messer Musciatto who often protected him from both private persons, who were frequently the victims of his abuse, and from the courts, which always were.

Thus, when this Ser Cepparello crossed the mind of Messer Musciatto, who was well acquainted with his life, he thought to himself that this would be just the man he needed to deal with the wickedness

of the Burgundians. He therefore had Ciappelletto sent for and spoke to him as follows:

“Ser Ciappelletto, as you know, I am about to leave here for good, and since, among others, I have to deal with the Burgundians, who are full of tricks, I know of no one more qualified than you to recover my money from them. Since you’re not doing anything at present, if you take care of this business for me, I intend to obtain the favor of the court for you here and to award you a fair portion of what you recover.”

Ser Ciappelletto, who was indeed unemployed and in short supply of worldly goods, saw the man who had long been his refuge and defense about to depart, and so, without a moment’s hesitation, constrained, as it were, by necessity, he made up his mind and said he would be more than willing to do what Musciatto wanted. The two of them then worked out the details of their agreement, and Ser Ciappelletto received Musciatto’s power of attorney as well as letters of introduction from the King. Soon after Messer Musciatto’s departure, Ciappelletto went off to Burgundy, where almost no one knew him. There, in a kind and gentle manner quite beyond his nature, as though he were holding back his wrath till the end, he began recovering Musciatto’s money and taking care of what he had been sent to do.

Before long, while he was lodging in the house of two Florentine brothers who lent money at interest and who treated him with great respect out of love for Messer Musciatto, he happened to fall ill. The two brothers immediately sent for doctors and servants to take care of him and to provide him with everything he might need to recover his health. All their help was in vain, however, for, in the opinion of the doctors, the good man, who was already old and had lived a disorderly life, was going from bad to worse every day, as people did who had a fatal illness. The two brothers were very upset about this, and one day, right next to the bedroom in which Ser Ciappelletto lay sick, they began talking together.

“What are we going to do about this guy?” said the one of them to the other. “We’ve got a terrible mess on our hands on account of him, because if we kick him out of our house, as sick as he is, people would condemn us for doing it. Plus, they’d really think we’re stupid since

we didn't just take him in at first, but also went to great lengths to find servants and doctors for him, and now, although he couldn't have done anything to offend us, they see him suddenly kicked out of our house when he's deathly ill. On the other hand, he's been such a bad man that he won't want to make his confession or receive any of the sacraments of the Church, and if he dies without confession, no church will want to receive his body, and they'll wind up tossing him into some garbage pit like a dog.⁴ But if he goes ahead and makes his confession, the same thing will happen. Since his sins are so many and so horrible, no friar or priest will be willing or able to absolve him, and so, without absolution, he'll be tossed into a garbage pit just the same. And when that happens, the people of this town—both because of our profession, which they think is truly wicked and which they bad-mouth all day long, and because of their desire to rob us—well, they'll rise up and riot when they see it. And as they come running to our house, they'll be screaming, "These Lombard dogs that the Church refuses to accept, we won't put up with them any longer!" And maybe they won't just steal our stuff, but on top of that, they'll take our lives. So, no matter how things work out, it'll be bad for us if this guy dies."

Ser Ciappelletto, who, as we said, was lying close to where they were talking, and whose hearing was sharp, as it often is in those who are sick, caught every word they were saying about him and reacted by sending for them to come to him.

"I don't want you to fear anything on my account," he told them, "or to be afraid you'll be harmed because of me. I heard what you were saying about me, and I'm very sure that the outcome will be exactly what you've predicted if things happen the way you've been imagining them. However, it's all going to turn out differently. I've done the Lord God so many injuries during my lifetime that doing Him one more at the hour of my death won't make a difference to Him one way or the other. So go and arrange for the holiest and worthiest friar you can find to come to me—if such a one exists—and leave everything to me, for I'm sure I can set both your affairs and my own in order so that all will be well and you'll be satisfied with the result."

Although the two brothers didn't derive much hope from this, they nevertheless went off to a monastery and asked for a wise and holy man to hear the confession of a Lombard who was sick in their house. They were assigned an elderly friar, a grand master of the Scriptures, who had lived a good and holy life and was a very venerable figure toward whom all the townspeople felt an immense special devotion, and they took this man back home with them.

When the friar reached the bedroom where Ser Ciappelletto was lying, he seated himself beside the sick man, and after speaking some words of comfort, asked him how much time had passed since he had made his last confession. Ser Ciappelletto, who had never been to confession, replied to him: "Father, it used to be my custom to go to confession at least once a week, without counting the many weeks in which I went more often. Since I've been sick for about a week now, the truth is that the suffering I've endured from my illness has been so great that it has prevented me from going to confession."

"My son," said the friar, "you've done well, and you should continue that practice in the future. Considering how often you've made your confession, I don't think it will be a lot of trouble for me to hear it and to examine you."

"Messer Friar," said Ser Ciappelletto, "don't speak like that. Although I've gone to confession many, many times, I've always had a longing to make a general confession of all the sins I could remember, starting from the day of my birth and coming right down to the present. Therefore, my good father, I beg you to examine me point by point about everything just as if I'd never been to confession. And don't be concerned about me because I'm sick, for I would much rather mortify this flesh of mine than indulge it by doing something that might lead to the perdition of my soul, which my Savior redeemed with His precious blood."⁵

These words pleased the holy man immensely and seemed to him to argue a well-disposed mind. Consequently, after commending Ser Ciappelletto warmly for making frequent confessions, he began by asking him if he had ever committed the sin of lust with a woman.⁶

"Father," Ser Ciappelletto replied with a sigh, "I'm ashamed to tell you the truth on this subject for fear I might be committing the sin of pride."

"Don't be afraid to speak," said the holy friar. "Telling the truth was never a sin either in confession or anywhere else."

"Since you give me such reassurance," said Ser Ciappelletto, "I'll go ahead and tell you: I'm as much a virgin today as when I came forth from my mama's body."

"Oh, God's blessings on you!" said the friar. "What a good man you've been! In fact, by acting as you have, you are all the more meritorious, because, if you had wanted to, you had more freedom to do the opposite than we and others like us do, since we are bound by the vows of religion."

Next, he asked Ciappelletto if he had displeased God through the sin of gluttony. Breathing a heavy sigh, Ser Ciappelletto replied that he had done so many times. For although it was his habit to fast on bread and water at least three days a week, in addition to doing so during the periods of fasting that devout people observed on holy days throughout the year, he had nevertheless drunk that water with as much delight and gusto as any great wine drinker ever drank his wine, and especially if he was exhausted from performing acts of devotion or making a pilgrimage. Moreover, he was often filled with a longing to have those little salads of baby field greens that women fix when they go to the country, and sometimes, as he ate them, doing so seemed better to him than it should have seemed to someone, like himself, who fasted out of piety, which was the precise reason why he was fasting.

"My son," replied the friar, "these sins are natural and quite trivial, so I don't want you to burden your conscience with them any more than necessary. No matter how truly holy a man may be, eating after a long fast and drinking after hard work will always seem good to him."

"Oh, father," said Ser Ciappelletto, "don't say that just to console me. Surely you must realize that I know how every act we perform in the service of God has to be done wholeheartedly and with an unspotted soul, and how anybody who does otherwise is committing a sin."

Feeling quite content, the friar said: "I am overjoyed that you think

like this. It pleases me greatly that on this topic your conscience is pure and good. But tell me: have you committed the sin of avarice by desiring more than what was proper or by keeping what you should not have kept?"

"Father," said Ser Ciappelletto, "I don't want you to suspect me of this because I'm living in the house of these usurers. I'm not here to do business. On the contrary, I've come with the intention of admonishing and chastising them and of leading them away from their abominable moneymaking. What is more, I think I would have succeeded if God had not visited this tribulation upon me. Now, you should know that although my father left me a rich man, I gave away the greater part of what he had to charity after his death. Then, however, in order to sustain my life and to be able to aid Christ's poor, I've done a little bit of trading, and in doing so, I did indeed desire to make money. But I've always divided what I earned down the middle with God's poor, devoting my half to my needs, and giving the other half to them, and my Creator has aided me so well in this that my business has continually gotten better and better."

"Well done," said the friar. "But say, how often have you gotten angry?"

"Oh," said Ser Ciappelletto, "that's something, just let me tell you, that's happened to me a lot. For who could restrain himself, seeing the disgusting things men do all day long, neither observing God's commandments, nor fearing His chastisement? There've been many days when I would have preferred to die rather than live to listen to young people swearing and forswearing themselves, and to watch them pursuing vanities, frequenting taverns rather than going to church, and following the ways of the world rather than those of God."

"My son," said the friar, "this is righteous anger, and for my part, I cannot impose any penance on account of it. But was there ever a case in which your anger led you to commit murder or to hurl abuse at anyone or to do them any other sort of injury?"

Ser Ciappelletto answered him: "Alas, sir, how can you, who appear to be a man of God, speak such words? If I'd had even the teeniest little thought about doing any one of the things you've mentioned, do

you think I'd believe that God would have shown me so much favor? Those are things that thugs and criminals would do, and whenever I've come upon a person of that sort, I've always said, 'Be gone! And may God convert you.'

"God bless you, my son!" said the friar. "Now tell me: have you ever borne false witness against anyone or spoken ill of others or taken things from them without their permission?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "I really have spoken ill of others. Because once I had a neighbor who, without the least justification, was forever beating his wife, and so one time, I criticized him to his wife's family because of the great pity I felt for the wretched creature. Whenever he'd had too much to drink, God alone could tell you how he used to smack her around."

"Well, then," said the friar, "you tell me you've been a merchant. Have you ever deceived anyone, as merchants do?"

"Yes, sir, by gosh," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "but I don't know who he was, except that he was a man who brought me money he owed me for some cloth I'd sold him, and I put it in a box without counting it. Then, a good month later, I discovered that there were four more pennies in it than there should have been. Well, I kept them for an entire year with the intention of returning them to him, but when I never saw him again, I gave them away to charity."

"That was a trifle," said the friar, "and you did well to have acted as you did."

On top of this, the holy friar went on to ask him about many other things and got the same kind of reply in each case. But then, just as he was about to proceed to absolution, Ser Ciappelletto said: "I still have a sin or two more, sir, that I haven't told you about."

The friar asked him what they were, and Ciappelletto replied: "I remember how one Saturday I didn't show proper reverence for the Holy Sabbath because after nones I had my servant sweep the house."

"Oh, my son," said the friar, "that's a trifle."

"No," said Ser Ciappelletto, "don't call it a trifle, for the Sabbath cannot be honored too much, seeing that it was on just such a day our Savior came back to life from the dead."

Then the friar asked: "Have you done anything else?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ser Ciappelletto. "Once, not thinking about what I was doing, I spat in the house of God."

The friar smiled and said: "My son, that's nothing to worry about. We, who are in holy orders, spit there all day long."

"And what you're doing is vile," said Ser Ciappelletto, "for nothing should be kept as clean as the Holy Temple in which we offer sacrifice to God."

In brief, he told the holy friar many things of this sort, until he finally began sighing and then burst into tears—for he was someone who knew only too well how to do this when he wanted to.

"My son," said the holy friar, "what's wrong?"

"Alas, sir," Ser Ciappelletto replied, "there's still one sin of mine remaining that I've never confessed because I feel so much shame in speaking about it. As you can see, every time I remember it, it makes me weep, and I think there can be no doubt that God will never have mercy on me because of it."

"Come on now, son," said the holy friar, "what are you talking about? If all the sins that have ever been committed by all of humanity, or that will be committed by them as long as the world lasts, were united in one single man, and yet he were as penitent and contrite as I see you are, then truly the benignity and mercy of God are so great that if that man were to confess them, he would be forgiven willingly. Therefore, don't be afraid to speak."

Ser Ciappelletto continued to weep violently as he replied: "Alas, father, my sin is so great that I can hardly believe God will ever pardon it unless you use your prayers on my behalf."

"Speak freely," said the friar, "for I promise I'll pray to God for you."

Ser Ciappelletto just kept on crying and refusing to talk about it, and the friar went on encouraging him to speak. Then, after Ser Ciappelletto had kept the friar in suspense with his weeping for a very long time, he heaved a great sigh and said: "Father, since you've promised to pray to God for me, I will tell you about it. You should know that when I was a little boy, I once cursed my mama." And having said this, he started weeping violently all over again.

"Oh, my son," said the friar, "does this seem such a great sin to you? Why, men curse God all day long, and yet He freely pardons anyone who repents of having cursed Him. And you don't think that He will pardon you for this? Don't weep and don't worry, for surely, even if you had been one of those who placed Him on the cross, He would pardon you because of the contrition I see in you."

"Alas, father," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "what are you saying? My sweet mama, who carried me in her body, day and night, for nine months, and who held me in her arms more than a hundred times—I was too wicked when I cursed her! My sin is too great! And if you don't pray to God for me, it will not be forgiven."

When the friar saw that there was nothing left to say to Ser Ciappelletto, he absolved him and gave him his blessing, taking him to be a very holy man, for he fully believed that what Ser Ciappelletto had said was true—and who would not have believed it, seeing a man at the point of death speak like that?

Then, after all this, the friar said to him: "Ser Ciappelletto, with the help of God you'll soon be well, but if it should happen that God calls that blessed, well-disposed soul of yours to Him, would you like to have your body buried at our monastery?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ser Ciappelletto. "In fact, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, since you've promised to pray to God for me, not to mention the fact that I have always been especially devoted to your order. Therefore, when you return to your monastery, I beg you to have them send me that most true body of Christ that you consecrate upon the altar every morning, for, although I'm unworthy of it, I would like, with your permission, to partake of it, and afterward, to receive Holy Extreme Unction so that if I have lived a sinner, at least I may die a Christian."*

The holy man said he was greatly pleased that Ser Ciappelletto had spoken so well, and told him that he would arrange for the Host to be brought to him right away. And so it was.

*The "body of Christ" is the Host, the bread that is eaten during Communion. Extreme Unction is a sacrament of the Catholic Church administered to those who are on their deathbed.

The two brothers, who were afraid that Ser Ciappelletto was going to deceive them, had placed themselves near a partition that divided the room where he was lying from the one they were in, and as they eavesdropped, they were able to understand everything he said to the friar. Upon hearing him confess the things he had done, they sometimes had such a desire to laugh that they almost burst, and from time to time they would say to one another: "What kind of man is this, whom neither old age, nor sickness, nor the fear of death, which is imminent, nor the fear of God, before whose judgment he must stand in just a short while, could induce him to give up his wickedness and want to die any differently than he lived?" But, seeing as how he had spoken in such a way that he would be received for burial in a church, everything else was of no consequence to them.

A little later Ser Ciappelletto took Communion, and as his condition was rapidly deteriorating, he received Extreme Unction and then died just a little after vespers of the day on which he had made his good confession. Using Ser Ciappelletto's own money, the two brothers took care of all the arrangements necessary for him to be given an honorable burial, and sent word to the friars' house that they should come in the evening to perform the customary wake and take away the body in the morning.

The holy friar who had confessed Ser Ciappelletto, having heard that he had passed away, came to an understanding with the Prior of the monastery, and after the chapterhouse bell had been rung and the friars were gathered together, he explained to them how Ser Ciappelletto had been a holy man, according to what he had deduced from the confession he had heard. And in the hope that the Lord God was going to perform many miracles through Ser Ciappelletto, he persuaded the others to receive the body with the greatest reverence and devotion. The credulous Prior and the other friars agreed to this plan, and in the evening they all went to the room where Ser Ciappelletto's body was laid and held a great and solemn vigil over it. Then, in the morning, they got dressed in their surplices and copes, and with their books in their hands and the cross before them, they went for the body, chanting along the way, after which they carried it to their church with the

greatest ceremony and solemnity, followed by almost all the people of the city, men and women alike. Once the body had been placed in the church, the holy friar who had confessed Ser Ciappelletto mounted the pulpit and began to preach marvelous things about him, about his life, his fasts, his virginity, his simplicity and innocence and sanctity, recounting, among other things, what he had confessed to him in tears as his greatest sin, and how he had scarcely been able to get it into his head that God would forgive him for it. After this, the holy friar took the opportunity to reprimand the people who were listening. "And you, wretched sinners," he said, "for every blade of straw your feet trip over, you blaspheme against God and His Mother and all the Saints in Paradise."

Besides this, the holy friar said many other things about Ser Ciappelletto's faith and purity, so that in short, by means of his words, which the people of the countryside believed absolutely, he managed to plant the image of Ser Ciappelletto so deeply inside the minds and hearts of everyone present that when the service was over, there was a huge stampede as the people rushed forward to kiss Ser Ciappelletto's hands and feet. They tore off all the clothing he had on, each one thinking himself blessed if he just got a little piece of it. Furthermore, the body had to be kept there all day long so that everyone could come to see him. Finally, when night fell, he was given an honorable burial in a marble tomb located in one of the chapels. The next day people immediately began going there to light candles and pray to him, and later they made vows to him and hung up *ex-votos* of wax in fulfillment of the promises they had made.* So great did the fame of Ciappelletto's holiness and the people's devotion to him grow that there was almost no one in some sort of difficulty who did not make a vow to him rather than to some other saint. In the end, they called him Saint Ciappelletto, as they still do, and claim that God has performed many miracles through him and will perform them every day for those who devoutly entrust themselves to him.

* An *ex-voto* is a votive offering (the phrase means "out of or because of a vow" in Latin).

Thus lived and died Ser Cepparello da Prato who, as you have heard, became a saint.⁸ Nor do I wish to deny the possibility that he sits among the Blessed in the presence of God. For although his life was wicked and depraved, it is possible that at the very point of death he became so contrite that God took pity on him and accepted him into His kingdom. However, since this is hidden from us, what I will say in this case, on the basis of appearances, is that he is more likely in the hands of the Devil down in Hell than up there in Paradise. And if that is so, then we may recognize how very great God's loving kindness is toward us, in that He does not consider our sinfulness, but the purity of our faith, and even though we make our intercessor one of His enemies, thinking him His friend, God still grants our prayers as if we were asking a true saint to obtain His grace for us. And therefore, so that all of us in this merry company may, by His grace, be kept safe and sound during our present troubles, let us praise His name, which is what we began with, and venerate Him, commending ourselves to Him in our need, in the certain knowledge that we will be heard.

And at this point he fell silent.⁹

Day 1, Story 2



Abraham the Jew, urged on by Giannotto di Civignì, goes to the court of Rome, and after having seen the wickedness of the clergy, returns to Paris and becomes a Christian.¹

The ladies laughed at parts of Panfilo's story while praising it in its entirety. They had given it their full attention, and once it came to an end, the Queen commanded Neifile, who was sitting next to Panfilo, to continue the order of the entertainment they had begun by telling a story of her own. Being no less endowed with courtly manners than beauty, Neifile replied gaily that she would do so with pleasure and began in this fashion:

In his storytelling Panfilo has shown us how the benevolence of God disregards our errors when they result from something we cannot understand, and in mine, I intend to show you how this same benevolence gives proof of its infallible truth by patiently enduring the faults of those who, although they ought to serve as true witnesses to it in both word and deed, do just the opposite. And I tell it in the hope that we will all put what we believe into practice with greater conviction.

I have heard it said, gracious ladies, that in Paris there once lived a great merchant, a good man named Giannotto di Civignì. Extremely honest and upright, he ran a flourishing cloth business and had the greatest friendship with a very rich Jew named Abraham who was likewise a merchant and an extremely upright and honest man.² Recognizing Abraham's honesty and upright character, Giannotto began to feel deep regret that the soul of such a worthy man, who was as good as he was wise, should go to perdition because of his lack of faith. And so, he started pleading with Abraham in an amiable manner to

leave behind the errors of the Jewish faith and convert to the Christian truth, which, as something good and holy, was always prospering and increasing, as Abraham could see for himself, whereas clearly his own religion, by contrast, was on the decline and would come to nothing.

The Jew replied that he believed no faith to be either good or holy except the Jewish one, that having been born into it, he intended to live and die in it, and that nothing would ever make him abandon it. Nevertheless, Giannotto did not give up, and a few days later he addressed similar words to Abraham, speaking to him bluntly, as most merchants know how to do, and demonstrating to him how our faith is better than the Jewish one. Although the Jew was a grand master of the Jewish law, he actually began to find Giannotto's arguments compelling, either because he was moved by his great friendship with Giannotto, or perhaps because of the words that the Holy Spirit put into the mouth of that simple man. Still, however, the Jew clung stubbornly to his faith and would not allow himself to be converted.

The more obstinate he remained, the more Giannotto continued to entreat him, until the Jew was finally overcome by his continual insistence. "Look here, Giannotto," he said, "you'd like me to become a Christian. Well, I'm willing to do so, but on one condition: first, I want to go to Rome to see the man who you say is the Vicar of God on earth and to observe his life and habits, and likewise those of his brothers, the cardinals.³ Then, if they seem to me to be such men that, between what you've said and what I'm able to observe about them for myself, I can see that your faith is better than mine—which is what you've been trying so hard to show me—I'll do what I've promised you. But if things should turn out differently, I'll remain the Jew that I am."

When Giannotto heard this, he was stricken with a deep sadness. "I've lost all the pains that I thought were so well taken," he said to himself. "I think I've converted him, and yet, if he goes to the court of Rome and sees the wicked and filthy lives of the clergy, not only won't he change from a Jew into a Christian, but if he had already become a Christian, he would, without fail, go back to being a Jew again."

Then, turning to Abraham, he said: "Come on, my friend, why do you want to go to all the trouble and expense you'll have in traveling

from here to Rome? Not to mention the fact that both by sea and by land, the journey is filled with dangers for a rich man like you. Don't you think you'll find someone here to baptize you? And if, perhaps, you have doubts about the faith that I've explained to you, where are there more teachers and more learned men than right here who can answer your questions and tell you what you want to know?"⁴ Therefore, in my opinion, your trip is unnecessary. Remember that the prelates there are just like the ones you've seen here over the years, although those there are admittedly better insofar as they are closer to the Chief Shepherd. So, my counsel is that you should save your energy now, and at some other time you should go on a pilgrimage to seek an indulgence, when I, perhaps, will be able to keep you company."

"Giannotto," the Jew replied, "I do believe everything you've been saying is true, but to sum it all up in a word: if you want me to do what you've begged me to do so often, I absolutely must go there. Otherwise, I shall do nothing about it."

Seeing his determination, Giannotto said: "Go, then, and good luck to you!" Meanwhile, he thought to himself that Abraham would never want to become a Christian once he had seen the court of Rome, but since there was nothing to be lost if he went there, Giannotto stopped arguing.⁵

Mounting his horse, the Jew set off as quickly as he could for the court of Rome, where, upon his arrival, he was given an honorable reception by his Jewish friends. He settled in, and without telling anyone why he had come, he began carefully scrutinizing the behavior of the Pope, the cardinals, the other prelates, and all their courtiers. Between what he himself observed—for he was a keenly perceptive man—and the information he obtained from others, he discovered that from the highest to the lowest, all of the clergy, unrestrained by any sense of shame or remorse, committed the sin of lust in great wickedness, and not just the natural variety, but also the sodomitical, such that the influence of whores and boys was of no little importance in obtaining great favors from them. Besides this, he saw clearly that the clergy were all gluttons, drunks, and sots, who, like brute beasts, served their bellies more than anything else except for their lust. On

closer inspection, he also discovered that they were all so avaricious and moneygrubbing that they would as readily buy and sell human blood, that is to say the blood of Christians, as they would sacred objects, whether the sacraments or benefices were involved. In these matters they did more business and employed more middlemen than could be found in any Paris market, including that of the cloth trade. They gave the name of "procurement" to their buying and selling of Church offices, and of "daily rations" to their gluttony, as if, no matter what their words actually referred to, God could not understand the intentions in their wicked hearts, and would allow Himself to be deceived, just as men are, by the names that are given to things.⁶ These failings, together with many others it is best to pass over in silence, were highly displeasing to the Jew, who was a sober and temperate man. When he finally felt that he had seen enough, he decided to return to Paris, which is just what he did.

Upon learning that Abraham had returned, Giannotto came to see him, thinking nothing less likely than that he had turned Christian. The two men greeted one another with the greatest warmth, and then, after letting him have a few days to rest, Giannotto asked him what he thought about the Holy Father and the cardinals and the other courtiers.

"I think they're a curse—which is what I wish God would pronounce on all of them!" the Jew promptly replied. "I'm telling you this, because, if I'm any kind of judge, I saw no holiness there, no devotion, no good works or models of life—or of anything else—in any member of the clergy. Instead, it seemed to me that lust, avarice, gluttony, fraud, envy, pride, and the like, and worse, if anything worse is possible, had such power over everyone that I consider the place a forge of diabolical works rather than divine ones. The way it looks to me, your Shepherd, and all of the others, too, are only interested in reducing the Christian religion to nothing and use all their wits and all their skill to drive it from the world, just when they should be serving as its foundation and support. Still, since I see that what they are trying to do hasn't happened, and the fact is that your religion is constantly growing and becoming more resplendent and illustrious, I think I'm right to conclude that the Holy

Spirit must indeed be its foundation and support, for it is truer and holier than any other.⁷ Therefore, whereas I used to stand firm and unyielding against all your entreaties, refusing to become a Christian, now I tell you frankly that I wouldn't let anything get in the way of my becoming one. So, let's go to church, and there I'll have myself baptized according to the customary rites of your holy faith."

When Giannotto, who was expecting precisely the opposite conclusion, heard him say this, he was the happiest man there ever was, and off he went together with Abraham to Notre Dame de Paris where he asked the priests to baptize his friend. Once they learned that Abraham himself wanted it done, they performed the ceremony right away, and as Giannotto raised him from the sacred font, he named him Giovanni.* Giannotto then had the most learned men instruct him thoroughly about our faith, which he quickly mastered, and from that time on, Giovanni was not just a good and worthy man, but one who lived a holy life as well.

*By lifting Abraham up from the baptismal font and naming him Giovanni, Giannotto is acting as his godfather.