

# ADVICE

Lorenzo de Medici (1449–1492)

to Giovanni de Medici (1475–1521), Cardinal (1489–1513)

c. 1492

You, and all of us who are interested in your welfare, ought to esteem ourselves highly favored by Providence, not only for the many honors and benefits bestowed upon our house, but more particularly for having conferred upon us, in your person, the greatest dignity we have ever enjoyed. This favor, in itself so important, is rendered still more so by the circumstances with which it is accompanied, and especially by the consideration of your youth and of our situation in the world.

The first that I would therefore suggest to you is that you ought to be grateful to God, and continually to recollect that it is not through your merits, your prudence, or your solicitude that this event has taken place, but through His favor, which you can only repay by a pious, chaste, and exemplary life; and that your obligations to the performance of these duties are so much the greater as in your early years you have given some reasonable expectations that your riper age may produce such fruits. It would indeed be highly disgraceful, and as contrary to your duty as to my hopes, if, at a time when others display a greater share of reason and adopt a better mode of life, you should forget the precepts of your youth, and forsake the path in which you have hitherto trodden. Endeavor, therefore, to alleviate the burden of your early dignity by the regularity of your life and by your perseverance in those studies which are suitable to your profession. It gave me great satisfaction to learn that, in the course of the past year, you had frequently, of your own accord, gone to communion and confession; nor do I conceive that there is any better way of obtaining the favor of Heaven than by habituating yourself to a performance of these and similar duties. This appears to me to be the most suitable and useful advice which, in the first instance, I can possibly give you.

I well know that as you are now to reside in Rome, that sink of all iniquity, the difficulty of conducting yourself by these admonitions will be increased. The influence of example is itself prevalent; but you will probably meet with those who will particularly endeavor to corrupt and incite you to vice; because, as you may yourself perceive, your early attainment to so great a dignity is not observed without envy, and those who could not prevent your receiving that honor will secretly endeavor to diminish it by inducing you to forfeit the good estimation of the public; thereby precipitating you into that gulf into which they had themselves fallen; in which attempt the consideration of your youth will give them a confidence of success. To these difficulties you ought to oppose yourself with the greater firmness, as there is at present less virtue amongst your brethren of the College. I acknowledge indeed that several of them are good and learned men, whose lives are exemplary and whom I would recommend to you as patterns of your conduct. By emulating them you will be so much the more known and esteemed in proportion as your age and the peculiarity of your situation will distinguish you from your colleagues. Avoid, however, as you would Scylla or Charybdis the imputation of hypocrisy; guard against all ostentation, either in your conduct or your discourse; affect not austerity, nor ever appear too serious. This advice you will, I hope, in time understand and practice better than I can express it.

Yet you are not un-acquainted with the great importance of the character which you have to sustain, for you well know that all the Christian world would prosper if the cardinals were what they ought to be; because in such a case there would always be a good Pope, upon which the tranquility of Christendom so materially depends. Endeavor then to render yourself such that if all the rest resembled you, we might expect this universal blessing.

To give you particular directions as to your behavior and conversation would be a matter of no small difficulty. I shall, therefore, only recommend that in your intercourse with the cardinals and other men of rank, your language be unassuming and respectful, guiding yourself, however, by your own reason, and not submitting to

be impelled by the passions of others, who, actuated by improper motives, may pervert the use of their reasons. Let it satisfy your conscience that your conversation is without intentional offense; and if, through impetuosity of temper, anyone should be offended, as his enmity is without just cause, so it will not be very lasting. On this your first visit to Rome, it will, however, be more advisable for you to listen to others than to speak much yourself.

You are now devoted to God and the Church; on which account you ought to aim at being a good ecclesiastic, and to show that you prefer the honor and state of the Church and of the Apostolic See to every other consideration. Nor, while you keep this in view, will it be difficult for you to favor your family and your native place. On the contrary, you should be the link to bind this city closer to the Church, and our family with the city; and although it be impossible to foresee what accidents may happen, yet I doubt not but this may be done with equal advantage to all. Observing, however, that you are always to prefer the interests of the Church.

You are not only the youngest cardinal in the College, but the youngest person that ever was raised to that rank; and you ought, therefore, to be the most vigilant and unassuming, not giving others occasion to wait for you, either in the chapel, the consistory, or upon deputations. You will soon get a sufficient insight into the manners of your brethren. With those of less respectable character converse not with too much intimacy; not merely on account of the circumstance in itself, but for the sake of public opinion. Converse on general topics with all. On public occasions, let your equipage and address be rather below than above mediocrity.

A handsome house and a well-ordered family will be preferable to a great retinue and a splendid residence. Endeavor to live with regularity, and gradually to bring your expenses within those bounds which in a new establishment cannot perhaps be expected. Silk and jewels are not suitable for persons in your station. Your taste will be better shown in the acquisition of a few elegant remains of antiquity, or in the collecting of handsome books, and by your attendants being learned and well-bred rather than numerous. Invite others to your house oftener than you receive invitations. Practice neither too frequently. Let your own food be plain, and take sufficient exercise, for those who wear your habit are soon liable, without great caution, to contract infirmities.

The station of a cardinal is not less secure than elevated; on which account those who arrive at it too frequently become negligent; conceiving their object is attained and that they can preserve it with little trouble. This idea is often injurious to the life and character of those who entertain it. Be attentive, therefore, to your conduct, and confide in others too little rather than too much.

There is one rule which I would recommend to your attention in preference to all others. Rise early in the morning. This will not only contribute to your health, but will enable you to arrange and expedite the business of the day; and as there are various duties incident to your station, such as the performance of divine service, studying, giving audience, and so forth, you will find the observance of this admonition productive of the greatest utility.

Another very necessary precaution, particularly on your entrance into public life, is to deliberate every evening on what you may have to perform the following day, that you may not be unprepared for whatever may happen. With respect to your speaking in the consistory, it will be most becoming for you at present to refer the matters in debate to the judgment of His Holiness<sup>1</sup> alleging as a reason your own youth and inexperience. You will probably be desired to intercede for the favors of the Pope on particular occasions. Be cautious, however, that you trouble him not too often; for his temper leads him to be most liberal to those who weary him least with their solicitations. This you must observe, lest you should give him offense, remembering also at times to converse with him on more agreeable topics; and if you should be obliged to request some kindness from him, let it be done with that modesty and humility which are so pleasing to his disposition. Farewell.

Merrick Whitcomb, *Source-Book of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1903):82–86.

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<sup>1</sup> Innocent VIII (1432–1492), Pope (1484–1492)