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### **"Concio CXV"**

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

Colossians 3:16, KJV

During the worldly lives of people, there is no shortage of tasks—whether private or professional in nature. Yet, no matter how industrious and spry somebody might be, it is not possible for every single one of those tasks to be accomplished. Our life is brief; distractions and unexpected problems may take us away from those tasks. And then again, those tasks are innumerable. For that reason, the smarter ones among us stop doing the tasks that are unnecessary or the tasks that can be abandoned without causing harm, and we work on the task that is truly the most important. What could be the most important task in our lives? Our Lord Christ explains it in the Gospel of Luke 10 (Luke 10:38), when he said to a woman busily working in the kitchen: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But only one thing is needed." That one thing comes to light when we see the example of Mary, who is sitting idly and listening to the teaching of Christ, as Christ said: "Mary has chosen the good part which will not be taken away from her." On another occasion, our Lord Christ said: "Seek first

the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Paul talks about this in our Bible quote where he explains what ought to be the main concern for Christians and what they should possess in abundance. If we want to tell the weeds and other unnecessary things apart from the essential and act to separate them, then we need to examine and understand the preaching of the Apostle. Christ our Lord, said that the quintessential thing is to seek the Kingdom of God, and the Apostle speaks about three conditions that ensure we gain entry into it. The first is to have an abundant knowledge of the words of Christ; the second is to educate and teach each other; the third is that we acclaim God’s glory with praises and spiritual singing.

## I.

As the Apostle said: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” The words of Christ are none other than His teachings and His wisdom. The wisdom of Christ is none other than the wisdom of the Holy Father from John 7 (John 7:16): “My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me.” Yet all that wisdom is said to be the wisdom of Christ, as he was talking about and explaining the hidden advice and meanings from God. John says this in John 1 (John 1:18): “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” The Father himself said: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I’m well pleased.” Similarly, our Lord Christ is called the prophecy of God in Revelation 19 (Rev 19:10), as he had been proclaiming God’s words and God’s will, as Peter stated in Acts 10 (Acts 10:36). How could we receive the wisdom and words of Christ, now that he is no longer walking among us? When Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, Christ wasn’t around and wasn’t teaching, as Christ had ascended to Heaven. So it was that Christ’s disciples continued to proclaim the wisdom and the teaching they received from Christ himself. Thus, their words and teachings are called the words of Christ, just as we call the words of Christ the words of God, since he was speaking the words God provided to Him. What could we do in our time when neither Christ nor his disciples are among us? Where can we find the word and teachings of Christ? We find them in no other place than in the Scriptures, as the Apostles wrote them accurately and truthfully. If anyone reads them, they might as well be reading and hearing the words of Christ. It is similar to when Abraham said in Luke 16 (Luke 16:29): “They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.” When Abraham said those words, no one could hear Moses, as he died hundreds of years before. By those words, the venerable Abraham meant the writings and books of Moses. As anyone receives the words of Moses from his writings, that person is hearing the words of Moses himself. Similarly, when we read or hear the words of the Apostles or saints, we are hearing the words of Christ, and Paul beckons all Christians to hear and to study their words. Such is the foremost task of all true Christians—to hear and study the teachings of Christ and the words of God, the two being identical. This is why, in Luke 11 (Luke 11:27–28), Christ replied in a particular way to a woman who cried out: “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast

which nursed you.” Christ replied: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” David declared in Psalms 1 (Psalms 1:2): “Blessed are those people who meditate day and night in the statutes of the Lord.” From all these, we can learn that those who aren’t hearing God’s words, and those who remain indifferent upon hearing God’s words, do not merit being called Christian.

Those who are not listening to God’s words are acting against God’s commands, and also against their own nature. Each person has a natural desire for knowledge and is ready to inquire and receive more. There cannot be any more important and more beautiful knowledge in all things than the awe of God; that much is acknowledged even by pagan wise men. Those who are not hearing God’s words are not learning, as no one is born into this world with wisdom. Rather, they all learn by listening. Thus, the ones who don’t learn will not know anything. Those who are not learning from God’s words will not know God’s attributes. The ones who know nothing about God are no different from cattle; moreover, such people are inferior to cattle, as even those witless animals at least follow their natural predisposition. Such people have extinguished their inner natural curiosity, as God created man so man can learn about Him, so he can be saved. That is why God gave man the posture to raise his sight to the heavens, while no animal can accomplish that.

There are three types of people among us who listen to God’s words with reluctance and trepidation. The first type is people who are arrogant. They convince themselves they are already learned and wise, and they don’t need to rely on anyone else’s teachings because they already comprehend everything. However, those people demonstrate their folly and ignorance by their very beliefs, as God’s wisdom is different from learning a trade, such as a tailor or a blacksmith, which might be learned in a few years. Those who mastered a craft would especially agree that there is always more to learn about things they haven’t yet worked on. The wisdom of God is like a deep ocean, and it cannot be learned in its entirety, no matter how smart a person might be, no matter how much time is spent on it, no matter how long the person lives. Granted, people of all backgrounds may learn from it, but it is not possible to exhaust the troves of its treasures. In addition, the more one learns, the more questions appear and beg us to seek answers. That is why a learned man stated that the Scriptures is so wide that not only can cattle walk around in it but an elephant can even swim in it. If it was a light task to master the Scriptures, as those arrogant people maintain, David would not have suggested the blessed faithful meditate “all day and all night” over God’s statutes.

The second type of people reluctant to hear God’s words is the stingy; they believe that they will lose out on something if they spend even a half hour listening to God’s words. Instead, they would rather check their ledgers, file grievances, work in their vineyards, visit their kinfolk, organize and clean their houses, or find similar chores. Now, these folks failed to learn from Christ our Lord just what is the most important task, that everlasting gift that will never be taken away from them. They failed to hear, or they don’t believe, that true riches don’t come from our industriousness, but they come from

the blessings of God. Eventually, they will learn their mistake the hard way that this task is not a waste of their time; on the contrary, gains and treasures come from listening to God's words.

The third type of people reluctant to listen to the word of God are the condescending and those who would rather satisfy the needs of their bodies with sleeping or feasting instead of going to church. They often say, "We would go to church, except we are bored because the sermons and arguments are always about the same topics." Now, these folks ought to be reminded that it's not only the body that needs nourishment, but the soul needs nourishing even more. That nourishment for the soul must be provided, and not in a way that seeks only the satisfaction of the ears through a variety of entertaining sermons. There is more to this nourishment, as we ought to contemplate and digest God's words. All that doesn't happen by a one-time listening, but by frequent meditation about those words. Even the pagan sages state that meaningful topics must be discussed two or three times. What would those condescending people say if we were to follow the directives of those long-dead Popes who picked out a few stories and teachings from the Gospels and other Scriptures, and ordered those to be preached every particular day of the year? They acted like the remaining parts of the Gospels weren't necessary. In those houses of worship, they preach only those selected stories, and when the year is over, they start the same list over again. In those places where believe God's words and the Gospels are limited to texts they are preaching year after year, now, there you would be bored by listening to God's words. However, Paul knew there are demanding people who always want to hear something new, and that is why he admonished the faithful, calling on them not only to hear the words of God, but to allow those words to dwell in them richly. When he says that, he means we are not supposed to hear God's words only to delight one ear, and then let them go out the other ear. Rather, we are supposed to allow God's words to enter our hearts, and we are to keep those words there, allow them to nest in there, and to dwell there. Wouldn't you agree that if something dwells in a place, then it is always there, or entering frequently? That is how God's words ought to reside in a Christian heart. And that will not happen by hearing them once or twice, but by hearing them frequently and unceasingly. Don't mind, then, if you are hearing the same words, because you'll remember them better. Don't be bored when they preach about the same topic because that is how God's words will soak into you.

This is why the Apostle says in his letter to Philippians 3 (Phil 3:1): "My Brethren, to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." Then, Paul goes further by saying that God's words shouldn't only reside inside us, but they should dwell in us richly. By that he means we ought not be lethargic like those who don't make an effort to continue learning once they have received a little of the true knowledge. When they are satisfied, they don't inquire about more knowledge, they don't discuss it, they don't meditate over it.

The true Christian grows continually in that true knowledge as Paul wrote in his letter to Ephesians 4 (Eph. 4:15), that such growth needs to continue through adulthood and old age until it reaches the knowledge of Christ in his full stature. This is how we can learn why statements from the Papists are false and reprehensive. As those statements declare it is undesirable to have workers and peasants understand everything that's in the Scriptures, because for them it is sufficient to listen to the mass—otherwise they may become heretics. That was the reasoning behind the ban on translating the Bible to common languages. But all that is refuted when you hear the Apostle addressing his directives to all Christians as he wasn't writing only to the teachers of the faith, but to all common people, directing them to allow God's words to dwell in them richly. The people at the seat of power in Rome understand well that their deeds, their idolatry, would be revealed when common people read the Bible. Any aspects of their life and knowledge that defies God's laws and statutes would also be revealed. That is why they forbade the reading of the Bible, so they can falsify, or leave unmentioned, the teachings of the Apostles. Praise our merciful God, as He shed light onto all the ungodliness, and He ensured that through the works of godly men, everyone may read in their own language the words of God, which are the source of salvation, the words that destroy all falsehoods. Let us, then, resolve that we will not be lethargic, that we will not damage ourselves, but, as long as our Lord allows us, we will diligently study the words of God, and we will become more knowledgeable every day in our understanding of the true God. That way, the words of God shall dwell in us richly, and that is what Apostle Paul requests first from Christians.

## II.

Secondly, the Apostle beseeches us that the learned and the knowledgeable teach the others: "In all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another."

Naturally, all people want to learn to better themselves. However, even pagan wisemen stated that we are not born to serve just ourselves. Christians ought to meditate over this as well. Now, God commands that we like our neighbors as we like ourselves, and if the Lord has blessed us with substantial knowledge, it follows that we ought to pass that on to others. Therefore, if we are knowledgeable about something, let us not be selfish, but, rather, let us teach the others who lack that knowledge.

The Apostle said: "In all wisdom." What he means by wisdom is the knowledge of God's statutes and God's words, as he talked about God's words just before, as he encouraged us to hear it and to study them. Because that is the true wisdom, as Moses explained in Deuteronomy 4 (Deut 4:7): "For this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people." And Solomon said: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." And: "For to know thee is perfect righteousness: yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality." (Book of Wisdom 15:3)

Anyone who gained such wisdom is expected to teach others. As Paul states in another passage of II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

He also said: "Teaching and admonishing each other." Teaching suits the uninformed, while admonishment suits the ones with loose morals. Just as teaching the uninformed is our obligation, so is the admonishment of the ones with low morals. The wisdom of the Scriptures is applicable not only for teaching but also for admonishment and reprimanding. That's what the Apostle conveys in our opening verse. When he says "each other," he suggests that the faithful ought to be considerate, so they are caring and humble when teaching or admonishing each other. In turn, anyone who teaches and admonishes others ought to receive teaching and admonishment from others with the same humbleness. It happens frequently that one person knows more about a particular topic, and another person knows more about another topic. Similarly, someone may deserve reprimand, yet, the person who is doing the reprimanding may himself deserves admonishment another time. So, it is the duty of all Christians to teach and admonish each other—to build up, to improve, and to educate our neighbors, each according to his God-given talent.

While our Lord God didn't give all His gifts to any single person, He didn't leave anyone without a gift, either. If one person didn't receive one particular gift, then he did receive another gift. For this reason, if one person is lacking in some skill, he may learn it from someone else, and, in turn, that person ought to share his gift with another. This is why our Lord God has gathered us into a community, so we can improve on each other's weaknesses. The wealthy wouldn't be around if the poor didn't exist; the poor would be listless and helpless without the wealthy. The knowledge of learned men would have no purpose without the uneducated who can now be taught. The uneducated would be at a loss without educators and teachers. God has connected all of that together; if we break that link, we cannot be irreproachable before God. But, if we help each other, then all our prayers will go to Him in good standing, and we will have a blessed and untroubled state of mind. All that is well illustrated by the story of the two beggars. One of them was blind, and the other had a serious limp, so neither of them could go very far. Eventually, they decided the blind man would carry the limping one on his shoulders. Now, the blind beggar would be the legs for the limping one; the limping beggar would be the eyes for the blind one. From then on, there were no obstacles they couldn't overcome. Our task is very similar. Some of us are blessed with a strong body and power; let them do manual labor. Some of us are blessed with knowledge and a sharp mind, let them become judges who will uphold laws, teach, and take care of the doings of the community. If we act in such manner, all our shortcomings will be shored up, and our lives will be untroubled.

### III.

Thirdly, the Apostle beseeches us that Christian men praise our Lord God with: “spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts.” It is naturally given that we are not always in the same mood. Sometimes our mind is tranquil; sometimes our mind is cheerful and our heart is jubilant. When we are cheerful, we may freely burst into a song, we may hum, or we may listen to someone else’s singing. That is such a natural human temperament and common habit, it cannot be extinguished. The Apostle commands we use it to praise God’s righteousness.

When he says: “spiritual songs and singing with grace,” he includes all types of religious singing. With that, he is saying we ought not use the clamorous and reveling types, even though they might be called psalms, hymns, or chants. We see many songs that have been written about unworthy subjects, about lies, mischiefs, about shameful and filthy things. Those topics bring wicked emotions into any unclean heart and seduce the ones with godly morals. In addition, the Apostle describes what topics a Christian man ought to sing about. When he says “spiritual songs,” he means praising God, who is Himself spirit, and His magnificent works, and not about worthless and mortal topics. Rather, we should sing about His immortal spirit, about godly morals, about God’s statutes, about those who appear in the Scriptures, or about the ones who are teaching us the Scriptures.

When the Apostle says, “singing with grace,” he means that we praise God with affection and a joyous heart, not just as a chore or as an ordinary task. We ought to praise God with a joyful heart because our Lord expects our adoration to come from a free will and from a cheerful spirit.

When the Apostle says, “sing with grace in our hearts,” he admonishes us that we ought to praise our Lord God from the heart and not just using our lips and tongues—not the way some people do it when their lips are singing, but their hearts and minds have wandered far afield. Many times, they don’t even know what they are saying. That is not how the Christian man ought to sing. Rather, the thought ought to precede the singing; the love toward God ought to bubble up to excite the heart. Let the mouth express such inner emotions and love when we sing that heavenly verse.

Lastly, he states to whom and for what purpose a Christian man ought to sing: to God and about God. As we are the sheep, the servants created by God, we must lift our gaze upon Him and consider Him in all our acts. That is necessary because we are respectful and grateful, and we are concerned about our own well-being. When our Lord sees that we praise Him in our joy and at all other times as well, He will, in turn, bless us and care for us all the time. Let us then not sing to appease or to entertain another person, or to make a name or a profit for ourselves, but, rather, to express our adoration for the Lord. That was the third matter the Apostle commands for Christians.

From all that, let us retain a few thoughts in our minds. First, those who condemn moral and solemn singing in churches and in other gatherings, are acting incorrectly. Singing

was the custom from the beginning among the believers of God. The Jewish rabbi wrote that Adam sang to God and that Psalm 91 was written and sang by him the very day he was created. We can't have any doubt about Moses, who wrote Psalm 89. When God drowned Pharaoh in the sea, the entire nation of Israel was singing praises to God. Similarly, Miriam, the sister of Moses, sang and praised God together with other women. When Deborah and Baruk defeated Sisara. Should we add here King David, who praised God with countless hymns and musical instruments whether he was joyful or mournful, or whether he experienced victory or defeat? When his wife, Michal, daughter of Saul, teased and mocked him for dancing and hopping in front of the dowry chest, David disagreed with her and said that he didn't worry about others judging him—he would continue to show his happiness before the Lord. We see similar events in the New Testament when Luke writes about Zacharias, Simeon, and Mary singing to the Lord in their joy. Even Christ our Lord sang with the Apostles, according to Matthew 26 (Matthew 26:30). He also beckons the faithful to follow suit. Not only people, but angels are singing and praising God, as we can read in Job 38 (Job 38:7), Luke 2 (Luke 2:13–14), and in Revelation (Rev. 15:1–4). Therefore, singing hymns to God, praising Him, is not embarrassing, but it is commendable and righteous.

In all that, there is a lesson for those condescending and arrogant people in the congregation who find it embarrassing to open their mouths and to move their tongues to praise God. It is not embarrassing, but it is righteous; it is also part of serving God. In many towns, men and women, children, young girls, students sing together in church to praise God and ask for His help. You are not holier than the angels, you are not greater ruler than King David, you are not wiser than Moses. If they weren't embarrassed when singing to the Lord, you ought not to be embarrassed either. Now, a book printer printed a few of the hymns together with prayers, the ones we are using. There are many in the audience who can read, so don't frown on spending some money. Buy one and sing and praise the Lord together with us. This ought to be happening in other districts as well; Christians ought not be embarrassed to learn and to follow good example. However, no one ought to conclude from this that without singing it is not possible to serve the Lord, or that everybody must sing. Some people are incapable of singing, some don't have the right words, and some are very, very shy. Those Christians may remain silent and sing in their hearts, as long as they don't loathe the singers and their singing out of jealousy.

The second thought points out the misconceptions of the Papists with regard to singing. They believe that singing is such an essential way of serving God that they play an organ and chant day and night. That is a false belief because, while praising God is admirable, it is even more desirable to listen to and to study God's words, as during preaching. Singing is necessary only when we feel in our own heart the upwelling of affection to praise God. Additionally, the Papists sing in a foreign language, and the common folk don't understand it. Apostle Paul says everything in God's house ought to be uplifting. How could anyone be lifted up by something they don't understand? Moreover, the same Apostle in I Corinthians 14 (I Corinthians 14:1–14) forbids the



speaking in tongues in a congregation. Or, if someone speaks in tongues, the meaning of the words must be explained. The singing ought to be about gratitude, praying, and praises, but who could pray for something in a foreign language they don't speak? In that same passage, the Apostle explicitly states that a true Christian ought to sing with his tongue as well as with his mind. Therefore, the Papists disobey the command of the Apostle, and it is silly and laughable that they sing in Latin. Their third misunderstanding about singing is that they play flutes and an organ in church. In the Book of Psalms, we read how flutes, drums, violins, and trumpets may be used to praise God, but those instances were different in that they sang praises while those instruments played, and anyone could understand and join that singing. Granted, neither the Old Testament or the New Testament commands we can sing only by mouth. However, the Papists don't do it to praise God, but to please their ears and their listeners. King Hezekiah kept a bronze serpent to commemorate Moses, yet when he saw it was used for false beliefs and idolatry, he destroyed it, and the Scripture praised him. Similarly, the playing of an organ or flute has gone so far to please the ears of the Papists, and many believed it was holy. Godly and wise people justifiably removed all that from Christian churches to prevent any false or unclear thoughts, while, no doubt, those thoughts still exist among Papists. Let us be satisfied with the praises we can say with our mouths to adore God.

Our final lesson from these words of Scripture ought to be that when we are in a tranquil mindset, we ought to occupy ourselves with teaching and admonishing others, as we heard in the second part of our Scripture quote. Now, when we feel joy in our soul, let us use that to serve God as we feel the upwelling of affection in our hearts. Let us sing with our own mouths and hearts to adore and praise our Lord God. Let us continue in such a way to prepare ourselves for the joy that comes after our lives, when we sing with the angels to praise our Father through eternity. Amen.