

✦ THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

O Lord, my Maker and Protector, who hast graciously sent me into this world, to work out my salvation, enable me to drive from me all such unquiet and perplexing thoughts as may mislead or hinder me in the practice of those duties which thou hast required. When I behold the works of thy hands and consider the course of thy providence, give me Grace always to remember that thy thoughts are not my thoughts, nor thy ways my ways. And while it shall please Thee to continue me in this world where much is to be done and little to be known, teach me by thy Holy Spirit to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous enquiries, from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impossible to be solved. Let me rejoice in the light which thou hast imparted, let me serve thee with active zeal, and humble confidence, and wait with patient expectation for the time in which the soul which Thou receivest, shall be satisfied with knowledge. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

Health of Body and Mind

✦ RESTORATION OF SIGHT

ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast restored light to my eye, and enabled me to pursue again the studies which Thou has set before me; teach me, by the diminution of my sight to remember that whatever I possess is thy gift, and by its recovery, to hope for thy mercy; and, O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from me; but grant that I may use thy bounties according to thy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

✦ BODILY ENJOYMENTS

O GOD, grant that I may practise such temperance in Meat, Drink, and Sleep, and all bodily enjoyments, as may fit me for the duties to which thou shalt call me, and by thy blessing procure me freedom of thought and quietness of mind, that I may so serve Thee in this short and frail life, that I may be received by Thee at my death to everlasting happiness. Take not O Lord thy Holy Spirit from me, deliver me not up to vain fears, but have mercy on me, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

✦ PATIENCE AND SUBMISSION

ALMIGHTY GOD, Creator and Governor of the World, who sendest sickness and restorest health, enable me to consider, with a just sense of thy mercy, the deliverance which Thou hast lately granted me, and assist by thy Blessing, as is best for me, the means which I shall use for the cure of the disease with which I am now afflicted. Encrease my patience, teach me submission to thy will, and so rule my thoughts and direct my actions, that I may be finally received to everlasting happiness through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

✦ RECOVERY

ALMIGHTY GOD, our Creator and Preserver, from whom proceedeth all good, enable me to receive with humble acknowledgement of thy unbounded benignity, and with due consciousness of my own unworthiness, that recovery and continuance of health which thou hast granted me, and vouchsafe to accept the thanks which I now offer. Glory be to Thee, O Lord, for this and all thy mercies. Grant, I beseech Thee, that the health and life which thou shalt yet allow me, may conduce to my eternal happiness. Take not from me thy Holy Spirit, but so help and bless me, that when Thou shalt call me hence I may obtain pardon and salvation, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

✦ OLD AGE

O GOD, most merciful Father who by many diseases hast admonished me of my approach to the end of life, and by this gracious addition to my days hast given me an opportunity of appearing once more in thy presence to commemorate the sacrifice by which thy Son Jesus Christ has taken away the sins of the world, assist me in this commemoration by thy Holy Spirit that I may look back upon the sinfulness of my life past with pious sorrow, and efficacious Repentance, that my resolutions of amendment may be rightly formed and diligently exerted, that I may be freed from vain and useless scruples, and that I may serve thee with Faith, Hope, and Charity for the time which Thou shalt yet allow me, and finally be received to Everlasting Happiness for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

Family and Friends

✦ MOTHER

ALMIGHTY GOD, merciful Father, in whose hands are life and death, sanctify unto me the sorrow which I now feel. Forgive me whatever I have done unkindly to my Mother, and whatever I have omitted to do kindly. Make me to remember her good precepts, and good example, and to reform my life according to thy holy word, that I may lose no more opportunities of good; I am sorrowful, O Lord, let not my sorrow be without fruit. Let it be followed by holy resolutions, and lasting amendment, that when I shall die like my mother, I may be received to everlasting life.

I commend, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful, into thy hands, the soul of my departed Mother, beseeching Thee to grant her whatever is most beneficial to Her in her present state.

O Lord, grant me thy Holy Spirit and have mercy upon me for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

And, O Lord, grant unto me that am now about to return to the common comforts and business of the world, such moderation in all

enjoyments, such diligence in honest labour, and such purity of mind that amidst the changes, miseries, or pleasures of life, I may keep my mind fixed upon thee, and improve every day in grace till I shall be received into thy kingdom of eternal happiness.

+ CATHERINE CHAMBERS

ALmighty and most merciful Father, whose loving-kindness is over all thy works, behold, visit, and relieve this thy Servant, who is grieved with sickness. Grant that the sense of her weakness may add strength to her faith, and seriousness to her Repentance. And grant that by the help of thy Holy Spirit after the pains and labours of this short life, we may all obtain everlasting happiness through Jesus Christ our Lord, for whose sake hear our prayers. *Amen.*

+ HENRY THRALE

ALmighty God, who art the Giver of all good, enable me to remember with due thankfulness the comforts and advantages which I have enjoyed by the friendship of Henry Thrale, for whom, so far as is lawful, I humbly implore thy mercy in his present state. O Lord, since thou hast been pleased to call him from this world, look with mercy on those whom he has left, continue to succour me by such means as are best for me, and repay to his relations the kindness which I have received from him; protect them in this world from temptations and calamities and grant them happiness in the world to come, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

+ ILLNESS OF ANNA WILLIAMS

ALmighty God, who in thy late visitation hast shewn mercy to me, and now sendest to my companion disease and decay, grant me grace so to employ the life which thou hast prolonged, and the faculties which thou hast preserved, and so to receive the admonition which the sickness of my friend, by thy appointment, gives me, that I may be constant in all holy duties, and be received at last to eternal happiness.

Permit, O Lord, thy unworthy creature to offer up this prayer for Anna Williams now languishing upon her bed, and about to recommend herself to thy infinite mercy. O God, who desirest not the death of a sinner, look down with mercy upon her; forgive her sins and strengthen her faith. Be merciful, O Father of Mercy, to her and to me: guide us by thy holy spirit through the remaining part of life; support us in the hour of death and pardon us in the day of judgement, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

+ DEATH OF ANNA WILLIAMS

ALmighty and most merciful Father, who art the Lord of life and death, who givest and who takest away, teach me to adore thy providence, whatever Thou shalt allot me; make me to remember, with due thankfulness, the

comforts which I have received from my friendship with Anna Williams. Look upon her, O Lord, with mercy, and prepare me, by thy grace, to die with hope, and to pass by death to eternal happiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Birthdays

+ 1738

O God, the Creatour and Preserver of all Mankind, Father of all mercies, I thine unworthy servant do give Thee most humble thanks, for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to me. I bless Thee for my Creation, Preservation, and Redemption, for the knowledge of thy Son Jesus Christ, for the means of Grace and the Hope of Glory. In the days of Childhood and Youth, in the midst of weakness, blindness, and danger, Thou hast protected me; amidst Afflictions of Mind, Body, and Estate, Thou hast supported me; and amidst vanity and Wickedness Thou hast spared me. Grant, O merciful Father, that I may have a lively sense of thy mercies. Create in me a contrite Heart, that I may worthily lament my sins and acknowledge my wickedness, and obtain Remission and forgiveness, through the satisfaction of Jesus Christ. And, O Lord, enable me, by thy Grace, to redeem the time which I have spent in Sloth, Vanity, and wickedness; to make use of thy Gifts to the honour of thy Name; to lead a new life in thy Faith, Fear, and Love; and finally to obtain everlasting Life. Grant this, Almighty Lord, for the merits and through the mediation of our most holy and blessed Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and one God, be all honour and Glory, World without end. *Amen.*

+ 1784

ALmighty God, merciful Father, who art the giver of all good enable me to return Thee due thanks for the continuance of my life and for the great mercies of the last year, for relief from the diseases that afflicted me, and all the comforts and alleviations by which they were mitigated; and O my gracious God make me truly thankful for the call by which thou hast awakened my conscience, and summoned me to Repentance. Let not thy call, O Lord, be forgotten or thy summons neglected, but let the residue of my life, whatever it shall be, be passed in true contrition, and diligent obedience. Let me repent of the sins of my past years and so keep thy laws for the time to come, that when it shall be thy good pleasure to call me to another state, I may find mercy in thy sight. Let thy Holy Spirit support me in the hour of death, and O Lord grant me pardon in the day of Judgement, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

The Authorized Version of the Bible, The Book of Common Prayer, and Handel's Messiah

“**H**andel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope I shall persuade him to set another Scripture Collection I have made for him, & perform it for his own Benefit in Passion week. I hope he will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excel all his former Compositions, as the Subject excels every other Subject. The Subject is Messiah.”

The author of these words was Charles Jennens, here writing to a friend on July 10, 1741 on the subject of his new libretto which history would come to regard as one of the greatest of all time. Jennens was the grandson of a wealthy Birmingham ironmaster, educated at Balliol College, Oxford, who divided his time between London and the family estate in Leicestershire. He was a devoted and generous patron of George Frederic Handel from early in Handel's career in England. He subscribed to Handel's musical publications and concerts, provided lively criticism of his compositions, and masterminded the libretti of some of Handel's most successful oratorios, including *Messiah*, *Saul* and *Belshazzar*.

Besides his healthy love of literature and music, Jennens held two passionate loyalties that strongly under girded his life: namely his devotion to the deposed House of Stuart and his devotion to Anglican Christianity. The first loyalty meant that he refused to abjure his oath of allegiance to the House of Stuart in favor of the House of Hanover, even though it was considered in line with the prevailing wisdom of England at the time to do so. The second loyalty is more directly related to the subject of the *Messiah* libretto, because Jennens' immersion in the daily spiritual life of Anglican Christianity through the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible is what made this remarkable creation possible.

Perhaps he was a man born at odds with the world during his time of English history, for not only was he set against popular opinion by refusing to abjure his oath of allegiance to the House of Stuart, but also by his opposition to a religious movement that was fashionable among English intelligentsia of the time, known as Deism. Deism is a system of natural religion developed in England in the late 17th and 18th centuries that maintains a belief in one Supreme Creator Being (The

Deity), but which unlike Christianity, denies that God ever became directly involved in the history of the world apart from His role as its Creator. Jennens, a devout Churchman, was convinced that God had become Incarnate as Man in Jesus Christ. As the libretto of *Messiah* clearly shows, he was not afraid to interpret the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, to show that Jesus is the Messiah whose coming the ancient heroes of faith had eagerly anticipated. The words of St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy which were printed as a preface to the original libretto of *Messiah* sum up Jennens' position on the true significance of Jesus Christ: *And without Controversy, great is the Mystery of Godliness: God was manifested in the*

Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the World, received up in Glory.

Whether or not *Messiah* was intended as the Anglican rebuttal to Deism, it could only have been created by a believer who also happened to be saturated in the liturgy of the Church. Jennens demonstrated remarkable familiarity with the 1611 Authorized “King James” Version of Holy Scripture. His depth of understanding of the Bible could only have been shaped by the yearly cycle of the Book of Common Prayer through the Holy Communion and the Daily Office (Mattins and Evensong). This would be true not only of Jennens, but also of many of his fellow countrymen of the time. Today's widespread apathy toward scripture is not the way scripture was regarded in the 18th century. The Reformation had taught English Christians that it was a privilege to be able to read the Bible for themselves and to hear it read in their own language at Church. Ordinary Englishmen, who worshipped regularly in parish Churches or in their homes, were awash in the stately prose and cadences of the AKJV, read aloud as appointed throughout the Church Year by the lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer. G. F. Handel himself, though foreign-born, was familiar with the AKJV. When choosing a text for George II's Coronation Anthems he remarked, “I have read my Bible very well and shall choose for myself”.

If this was true for ordinary English Churchmen and for a non-native English speaker such as Handel, then it was especially true for Charles Jennens. His devotion to the Church was well known,



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George Frederic Handel



Charles Jennens

and his magnificent house, at which Handel himself was a frequent guest, had in it a beautiful chapel where he read the daily prayers of the Church with his family. It is supposed that these prayers were the Anglican Offices of Matins and Evensong. He was also said to observe the great festivals and saints' days of the year according to the directions in the Prayer Book.

The lectionary of the Prayer Book provides scripture lessons for all the services of the Church Year, and is the reason behind many of the texts that found their way into the libretto of *Messiah*. (The lectionary I am referring to is that of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, but many of the scriptures appointed are the same in the Lectionary of the 1928 American Book of Common Prayer and other members of the family of Books of Common Prayer.) The structure of *Messiah* can be shown to resemble the overall structure of the Church Year as shown in the following chart:

The Church Year through the Book of Common Prayer	Messiah Libretto
Christmas (with Advent, Epiphany): Birth and Early Life.	Part One: prophecies and proclaims Messiah's birth.
Easter (with Lent, Holy Week, Whitsunday) Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension.	Part Two: deals with the Passion of Our Lord and the spread of the Gospel.
Trinity (Lessons about life in the kingdom of God)	Part Three: deals with the General Resurrection and the promise of the life of the world to come.

At Evensong on Christmas Eve, Isaiah LX is read: 'Arise, shine for thy light is come'; on Christmas Day at Matins, Isaiah IX: 'The people that walked in darkness...For unto us a child is born,' and Luke II: 'There were shepherds abiding in the field'; and at Evensong, Isaiah VII: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive,' with the translation of 'Emmanuel' added from Matthew II (the Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas). During Advent, readings for the Daily Office include Isaiah XL: 'Comfort ye my people,' 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,' and 'Every valley shall be exalted.' From the Comfortable Words of the Anglican Holy Communion Service, 'Come unto Him all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He shall give you rest' (although it is the words of the AKJV that are used here in *Messiah* and not those of the Prayer Book). At Evensong on Good Friday, Isaiah LIII is read: 'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our

sorrows,' 'And with His stripes we are healed,' 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Scriptures taken from the Order for the Burial of the Dead from the Prayer Book include Job XIX, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and I Corinthians XV 'For now is Christ risen from the dead,' 'Behold, I tell you a mystery,' and 'The trumpet shall sound.'

The method used by Jennens in compiling the *Messiah* libretto would not have come easily to an ordained clergyman, but the fact that it came from lay Churchman is testimony to the remarkable level of Bible knowledge possessed by an ordinary man whose spiritual life is formed by the Prayer Book. The mixture of Job and Corinthians, for example, in the arias of Part III of *Messiah*, is an otherwise unlikely combination that would stretch the imagination, except that it appears first in the Book of Common Prayer.

Handel set Jennens' libretto to music in less than three weeks, and *Messiah* premiered in Dublin, Ireland at the New Music Hall on Fishamble Street, assisted by "the Gentlemen of the Choirs of Both Cathedrals". The "Gentlemen of the Choirs" mentioned were from the two Anglican Cathedrals of Dublin, Christ Church Cathedral and St. Patrick's Cathedral. At the time, Jonathan Swift was Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral. The work was so well received that Handel was compelled to give an encore performance before his return to England a few weeks later. After its success in Dublin, the work was premiered in London, where it caused considerable commotion among the musical and religious establishment as "A New Sacred Oratorio" by Handel.

Was Charles Jennens pleased with Handel's work? Evidently not. He wrote in a letter to a friend, "His *Messiah* has disappointed me, being set in great hast, tho' he said he would be a year about it, & make it the best of all his Compositions. I shall put no more Sacred Words into his hands, to be thus abus'd." This initially harsh assessment by Jennens did not last for long, however, and he eventually warmed to Handel's ingenious setting of the libretto. After Jennens heard the work in London, and after Handel accepted some revisions to the musical score at the hand of Jennens, it seems that the two men became friends once again.

Messiah remains one of the most performed and well-known works in the history of music. In any English-speaking city or town of any size throughout the world there is at least one performance of the work each year, and some cases there might be several. Choral societies and Churches offer annual "*Messiah* Sing-alongs". Music students at the world's Conservatories and Universities learn to sing the arias of *Messiah* in their voice lessons, thereby committing to memory many priceless gems of Holy Scripture from the AKJV. A trip to your local record shop will reveal any number of

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