

The Articles of Faith— Composer's Commentary

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As one might expect, the basic desire of almost any composer beginning a new work is to create a good work which will give some meaningful experience to his audience. From this point he begins, and to this point he relates every decision he makes about every note he writes before it finds its way into the final copy. The criteria he uses in making these decisions are crucial to the work of art at every stage of its existence, and they determine the final character of the work. This paper is an attempt to recall, after the fact, just which criteria were significant in the decisions I made in setting the text of "The Articles of Faith" to music.

Before the idea of this work became sufficiently well defined to have a title and a text, it existed as a rather vague urge to create a good "L.D.S." work of art. In trying to bring this urge into sharper definition, I found myself comparing the artistic characteristics of works previously done by Mormon composers with religious works of art in general. Even now, more than a year after making the comparison, I feel that the image of Moroni trumpeting the message of the restoration to the world represents the character of most of what has been done by L.D.S. composers. To be fair to other L.D.S. composers I must point out that I find no problems with this type of music. I believe that much of our Mormon heritage is bound up in the proselyting of the Gospel. That our composers should be attracted to it is only natural. But deep down inside me was the secret desire that we should also try to depict some of the more intimate experiences of Mormonism. There are emotions in Mormon experience that belong in the heart rather than on the mouthpiece of a trumpet, emotions beclouded by tears in the eyes and fire in the breast until words become sacrilege and actions fumble awkwardly through their embarrassment at their own inadequacy. Other religions have given birth to profound expressions of their most personal, sacred yearnings should not Mormonism also be represented in its intimate, contemplative aspects?

I began searching for a text that would serve as a vehicle for such a work—a text which represents ideas about which good Mormons have deep personal convictions. I do not recall just when the idea of using "The Articles of Faith" merged with the original urge to create. For years I had been thinking of doing a setting of that text especially after I discovered so many fine settings of the "Credos" of other churches in the music literature

of the past. Somewhere along the line urge to create met the idea of “The Articles Of Faith,” found it compatible and joined with it.

Another series of thoughts had direct bearing this work. Often, we mistake rather shallow imitations of emotion for the real thing. There are images and clichés which have become popular as means of stimulating what I call “pushbutton emotions.” Someone sings about “mother” in sweet harmonies and we feel a twinge of emotion because we love our mothers. Someone holds up a picture of a baby and we simulate feelings of tenderness. It is good that we love our mothers and feel tenderness about babies, and to use the images of these things is certainly legitimate. Like most sacred things, however, these images lose a lot of their meaning when they are used so often that they become stereotyped. The habitual sentimental responses that accompany such images get in the way of more specific emotions that a composer wishes to depict. Some composers, especially those in the areas of popular and commercial music, play upon the trite sound image because it evokes automatic responses which are entirely predictable and thus useful for popularly and commerce. In any case, the use of images which are such common coin tends to dilute the intensity of the emotion that is evoked; and the composer trying to depict profound, sincere feelings avoids them.

The results of all of these considerations are that I rejected use of outside materials and old clichés in my piece even though such things might have guaranteed me an immediate appeal. Sections from hymns and other known Mormon songs were excluded because they have their own imagery and evoke their own feelings which could block the emotions I wanted to depict in my own music. I decided against using poetry to extend the text in favor of the scriptures since the scriptures seem to me to be more solemn and directly personal as to belief. Lastly, I selected the medium of unaccompanied choir as being most fitting for the type of expression I had in mind. Chorus, orchestra, soloists, and narrators in a grand combination seemed somehow incongruous with the personal nature of the idea. I wanted the intimacy of the pure sound of human voices blending together in the expression of some of their deepest convictions.

Having discarded the above methods of making the music attractive to the layman, I felt the need of something that would establish a bond between his experience and my expression. There are some influential people in the Church who seem to have difficulty accepting music for its own value and who discount the value of the artistic use of religious materials unless there is a proselyting end to be served. I sensed a need to provide some extra-musical substance to the piece to give such people something which might lead them to understand the musical values for what they are. Thus I began searching for symbols—symbols in sound which would supplement the

meaning of the text and help tie the piece together. I felt that my music's bond with the listener could be established through sincere expression of the emotions underlying the text.

Words and music have had rather interesting relationships in the history of Western art music. Perhaps one of the earliest types of musical symbolism was the medieval practice of using portions of the liturgical chant of the Catholic Church to emphasize religious references in nonliturgical music. Often these parts of the chant were so well hidden that the meaning of their appearance in the music remained a mystery to all except the composer himself and those to whom he chose to reveal his secret. This symbolism functioned in a rather elementary way: the melody of the chant was already endowed with rich associations in the experience of all churchgoers; these associations were brought to mind by introducing the chant in a new situation. Such symbolism has continued in use down to the present day. Examples of it in more familiar types of music might include the *Cantus Firmus* techniques of Renaissance composers, the Choral Preludes in the music of the Baroque Era, and the quotations of folk music in the Romantic Period such as the "Gaudeamus Igitur" in Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture*. This type corresponds in some ways to the use of "common coin" clichés which I had already rejected in my work. Effectively handled, of course, this type of symbolism is very moving.

The Wagnerian *Leitmotif* represents another type of symbolism somewhat related to the earlier one. In this technique special music is composed to represent the different characters and objects that have significance to the plot of the *Musik-drama*. As these characters and objects appear in the unfolding of the plot, their special music appears with them to help the listener musically recognize who or what they are and what type of significance they have in the given situation. The *Leitmotifs* are varied, developed, superimposed, etc., as the mood of the particular moment requires. The new element here is, of course, that instead of using music with pre-existent associations, Wagner and his followers have created the original association and used the music whenever that association was to be called to mind. This type of symbolism, used subtly, appeals to me as a device pregnant with meaningful possibilities in a work such as mine.

A third type of musical symbolism consists of using special characteristics of the musical language itself to represent the emotional significance of extra-musical concepts. The typical "happy" major mode and "sad" minor mode associations represent a somewhat superficial application of this type of symbolism. The shifting of modes and chord qualities in Schubert's art songs would be a more subtle example. The accompaniments for romantic art songs are alive with excellent examples of this type. Bach's use of sharply descending skips in the melodic line depicting such words as

“falling” or “death,” diminished seventh chords on ominous words of the text, and such other “word painting” devices give further illustration. When used in good taste, this type of symbolism also has great appeal to me.

It should be obvious that all of these types of musical symbolism have meaning only as we give meaning to them. There is no inherent verbal meaning in music. Verbal meanings come about because of associations which we make between the meaning of the words and the character of the music or because of previous contacts with symbolic associations in similar music. Some distrust of musical symbolism has been expressed because the symbols often have to be explained to be understood, as witness this article. This distrust really begs the question. No one can deny that these associations are extra-musical. But it is possible to treat them in an artistic fashion. Any union of words and music must come to terms with verbal meanings in one way or another, and the manner in which this union is achieved is a matter of artistic importance as well as a subject for discussion and speculation.

The first act of symbolic significance in this composition was the division of the text into homogeneous sections corresponding to a formal plan for the music. The analysis of the text revealed a natural grouping into a symmetrical pattern. Article One stands alone as the fundamental basis of the whole doctrine expressed in the other twelve statements. Articles Two and Three are conveniently grouped together since they discuss the principles which form the basis for our salvation from sin. Articles Four through Ten enumerate the details of doctrine which emerge from the first three. Articles Eleven and Twelve express civic responsibility and religious freedom as elements of a good Christian life. Finally, Article Thirteen recounts the ideals of personal conduct which are derived from a dedication to the principles of the preceding statements. Thus these thirteen statements trace the course of our belief from its foundation of faith in God, through the philosophical basis of our salvation, through the organization and doctrinal details necessary for attaining that salvation, to our attitude towards the beliefs and organizations of our fellow men, and finally to the ideals of spiritual and moral strength which such beliefs require of us. As the musical form developed, Articles One and Thirteen gave me an opportunity to frame the whole work with movements of a deeply personal, spiritual quality. Articles Two and Three are paired with Articles Eleven and Twelve to form an inner circle of music concerning the somewhat social aspects of belief, the second movement touching our relationship with God, and the fourth our relationships with our fellow men. The dogmatic core of the doctrine is the substance of the third movement. This grouping gives a symmetrical pattern of 1, 2-3, 4-5-6-7-8-9-10, 11-12, 13 to the way in which the statements are fitted into the musical form of the work. I should mention that this organization of the verbal content of the work was only

partially conceived before composition was begun. The late parts emerged rather slowly as the work took shape.

I might also mention that this intellectual, symbolical side of the composition seemed to go on consciously in parallel to the musical side and, for the most part, rather independently, although some conscious coordination of the two areas of thought was necessary. In setting up symbols for specific concepts in the work, the methodology was rather indefinite in one sense, but quite exacting in another. First, the text was analyzed rather carefully for associations of ideas between sections. Then some tentative musical ideas were sketched for some of the more prominent themes which seemed to recur. From that point, a rigorous methodology was abandoned and the direct association was left to the subconscious and the inspiration of the moment of composition. As a result of this, and as a result of my usual practice of trying to become saturated with the materials of which a given piece is built (in this case the symbolic thematic materials), I am still discovering relationships which have symbolical significance more than nine months after completing the work.

As each specific situation developed in the composition and the problem of expressing each part of the text loomed before me, I had constant recourse to the thought, "How do I, as a thinking, feeling Mormon, convinced of the truth of these statements, feel in my inmost self as I contemplate their significance?" Sometimes the answer was an overflowing of ideas and emotions which translated themselves almost without effort on my part into musical entities. Other times there was no answer because of various factors. Perhaps the significance of a given phrase had not yet become a part of what I felt. Perhaps the phrase had no significance for me when it came up for treatment. Perhaps at the time *nothing* had enough importance to matter and compositional activity had to be postponed. But eventually, after rest, study, contemplation, and sometimes prayer, each concept submitted—or rather, I should say I submitted to each concept's demands—and the music was written.

As an example of the way in which these themes and symbols work in this piece we can trace some of the symbols of the first movement through their appearances in the other movements of the piece. In developing a theme for the "Father" section of the First Article, I sensed two emotions: the sincerity of belief and the fundamental nature of God, the Eternal Father. The sincerity aspect has manifested itself in the theme as a half-step upper neighbor on the word "believe." This melodic configuration can be detected in the beginning theme of every movement of the work (with appropriate symbolic significance). The ascending perfect fifth with its strong roots in the overtone series of nature and its strong tendency to organize the chaos of sounds into tonal communities around a central tone seemed

especially well suited to the expression of the nature of God. The combination of these two ideas into a musically satisfying theme took several days of fussing, stewing, and working. It finally materialized as presented here: [graphic omitted]

This theme was set in a rather austere style to give expression to the sense of mystery that seems to surround the Father. By this I do not mean mystery in the medieval sense, but rather in the sense that we have less direct contact with Him than with either of the other members of the Godhead, and we know less about Him. In developing the section of the piece that deals with Him, I felt that the few words devoted to our statement of belief would become monotonous if repeated too many times without some contrast. Musically, too, long passages in imitative counterpoint lose interest unless treated in a unique way. Not wanting to interfere with the mood of austerity by introducing a spectacular effect, I chose to trope the text with phrases descriptive of the Father and to set these tropes to solid, wide-spaced, full-sounding chords sung *pianissimo* at intervals through this section.

In treating the Son musically, I felt the need for some relationship between His theme and that of the Father. This I achieved by using the same perfect fifth interval in a prominent part of the theme. This time, however, it is used in descending rather than ascending motion and is filled in by a descending scale line. Here again tropes were used for variety's sake.

The theme of the Holy Ghost is harmonic rather than melodic and consists of a series of chords in descending sequence over an ascending bass. The associations having to do with the Holy Ghost descending from above while we rise to meet Him are not disallowed, but the real reason for using the harmonic theme is that harmony can permeate the whole texture of a section without seriously altering the basic character of the melodies of the voices involved. Thus, the Holy Ghost theme can dominate a part of the piece without eliminating the thematic associations of the voices combining to make up the chords. This perhaps parallels the way the Holy Ghost works in real life. One more reason for this choice is that it has a reverent mood about it, especially when it is presented in the Renaissance style of the first movement.

The Father's theme and the Son's theme are treated imitatively in fugatos with the tropes interrupting at various intervals. The Holy Ghost theme is presented in its chordal aspect with its trope. Then all three themes are joined together into one phrase summing up the musical material of the whole movement. Symbolically, the separate presentation of the themes corresponds to the Mormon concept of the individual personalities of the members of the Godhead. The unification of the three themes at the end indicates how we conceive of the unity of the Godhead: each member

(theme) separate with his own attributes, yet all united in action and purpose (into one phrase). Intentionally, the contrapuntal combination of the themes was avoided since this device has been used by many composers to symbolize the orthodox Christian belief in the Trinity.

The themes of Christ and the Holy Ghost carry over directly into the second movement. The listener will perceive the use of the Son's theme at the words "and not for Adam's transgression" indicating Christ's part in relieving mankind of the burden of the Fall. Its reappearance on the words "through the atonement of Christ" was inevitable. The theme of the Holy Ghost also recurs with both original and inverted contours. His functions in the lives of men, bringing them to salvation, are indicated by using His theme wherever "obedience" is mentioned. In the closing measures of the movement His theme occurs again, intertwined with the "snake-like" theme which was used to depict sin and punishment in the somber section at the beginning of the movement. It will be noticed how the harmonic nature of the Holy Ghost theme alters the musical significance of the "sin" theme from dissonance treated rather indiscriminately in the beginning to consonance and carefully controlled dissonance in the setting of "by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

To try to trace all of the themes through all of the movements would take more time and space than are available here. I shall mention, therefore, only a few appearances of the Holy Ghost theme in the remaining movements and leave the association that may be made between the Holy Ghost and the specific subject mentioned up to the reader who has struggled this far. inevitably the theme is used in Article Four's setting at the words "for the gift of the Holy Ghost" But, where the gifts of the spirit are mentioned in Article Seven, the association is perhaps not as clear because of an intervening concept. When the words "Baptism by immersion for remission of sins" were set, the Holy Ghost theme was adapted to a falling contour in all voices to symbolize "immersion." It is this form of the theme which is used to set the articles dealing with the gifts of the spirit. There are both musical and doctrinal reasons for this. Musically, the need for recapitulation was impelling. Doctrinally, this brings both baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost into association with the gifts of the spirit since they normally follow both ordinances. The sections dealing with the scriptures are also set to a modification of the Holy Ghost theme. This time the contrary motion aspect of the theme was chosen to represent the inspiration of the Holy Ghost needed in both the writing and interpretation of the scriptures. When the *Book of Mormon* is mentioned as being the "word of God," the Holy Ghost theme occurs in its original form to indicate the fact that we consider the inspired translation of that book to have made it even more reliable as God's word than the other scriptures.

In the fourth movement, the Holy Ghost theme again occurs in another guise on the words “of worshiping Almighty God.” And in the fifth movement, the whole middle section “We believe all things, we hope all things . . .” is set to a prayer-like adaptation of the Holy Ghost theme as a plea for inspiration in realizing the lofty ideal enumerated in the Thirteenth Article.

The style of writing of each of the different movements was also chosen with some symbolic significance. The first, having to do with the inherent spiritual qualities of belief in God, copies the polyphonic style of the Renaissance. The Renaissance composers achieved perhaps the most profound spiritual emotions in their music of any composers of any period. I have adapted the style to the freer tonal relationships of twentieth century music but have attempted to retain the purity of texture and movement offered by pure counterpoint. The sections about the Son are somewhat freer in their treatment than those concerning the Father, but the essential contrapuntal nature of the movement is retained. The Holy Ghost portion of the movement leaves the contrapuntal style but stays with the Renaissance “familiar” chordal style.

In the second movement the style of writing is very free and dissonances are used, especially in the opening section, in very unorthodox ways. The choice of a twentieth century style for this movement was influenced a good deal by the idea that sin, punishment, and obedience are problems of our time as much as of any period in the world’s history.

The third movement of my setting treats the more dogmatic portions of the text. Inasmuch as the Middle Ages represent the time when religious dogma held its greatest power and the scholasticism of these centuries represents the most dogmatic form of learning, I turned to the style of that time for this movement’s main themes. Parallel fourths and fifths, “empty” sounds, triple rhythm in the patterns of the old rhythmic modes, and the rather free use of dissonances on weak beats are characteristic of large sections of this movement. Other sections where some of the more spiritual dogmas are mentioned return to techniques of the first movement.

The fourth movement is a fanfare, declaring our right to worship as we please. The dissonance treatments and the use of “bare” fifths brand this as music based upon the fanfares of either the fourteenth or the twentieth centuries. The calming of the mood and slackening of brilliance in the middle section give a less pretentious mood to go with the idea of “being subject.”

The fifth movement uses monophony for the beginning and ending sections because monophony seems to me to convey a simple sincerity that cannot be obtained with more complex textures. When the second voice enters under the opening melody, the new voice hardly restrains the motions of the first; and both retain their own integrity until the cadence.

The middle section is for male chorus, so written to produce rich contrast with the rather austere sincerity of the single lines preceding and following. The echoes of the Holy Ghost theme can be heard in these prayerful chords. The single line at the close is unpretentious, not given to preaching, but humbly pedging the search for that which is “virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy.” All of these styles and ideas have been blended together and modified by several factors. The first is my personal style of writing and my idea of what good, modern music for unaccompanied voices should sound like. Second come the limitations and strengths of the a cappella style, the fancied and real problems of the singer who must hear the sound in his head before he sings it. The interplay of motives in the musical fabric caused reciprocal modifications between themes. Thus, I am sure that no one would mistake my first movement for sixteenth century counterpoint or perhaps even recognize the influence.

Neither am I convinced that everyone will fathom the significance of each one of these devices—and they are merely devices—as the piece is performed. Nor do I feel it is necessary that people consciously recognize these relationships and symbolical meanings. But I have felt that even though no one sees the meaning of any of these symbols, they have been instrumental in determining the final character of the work, a character which has been determined by the structure of the symbolism. And, finally, there is the cautious hope that the listener will, at least instinctively, sense the sincerity and depth of feeling that led to the use of these techniques.

My goal has been to construct a good piece of music that flows well and expresses some of my conceptions of “The Articles of Faith.” All of the ideas that have been mentioned in this résumé, have been used (plus many others) since they have contributed to the attainment of this goal, and many ideas have been rejected since they have hindered it. This goal has been the controlling factor in every choice. The first performance of the work will tell whether I have succeeded in reaching the ideals that led to my setting of “The Articles Of Faith.”