

Checklist for a Theological Critique of Songs.

Chris Jack

1. **Orthodoxy** - theologically sound?

Is the theology being expressed in the song consistent with biblical truth and free from heresy (according to whatever tradition this is being judged by)?

2. **Theological emphasis** - nuances? particular school/camp/position?

Does the song have a particular theological agenda –reflecting the theological leanings of a particular denomination or group? Is this explicit or implicit? How significant is the issue? Does this restrict the use of the song?

3. **Theological integrity** - any internal conflict? dissonance?

Is the song consistent in its theology, avoiding outright contradictions or even things which may be confusing, such as switching the person of the trinity being addressed without any indication?

4. **Theological balance** - reflecting biblical balance(s)?

Whilst no song can say everything, and sometimes it may be legitimate to highlight one aspect of a biblical truth, is the song true to the tenor of Scripture as a whole in relation to the truth being expressed? Or is the truth overstated in a way which may be unhelpful in what is conveyed?

5. **Substance** - what does it say?

There is a place for more lightweight songs as well as for those of greater depth, but does this song say anything of worth? What is the essential point/message of the song?

6. **Clarity** - how well does it say it? ambiguity?

Is the song well written in terms of its language, grammar, style etc.? Is the theology expressed with clarity and a lack of ambiguity? Deep truths may be simply expressed.

7. **Structure** - meaningful sequence? or pastiche of ideas?

Is there an obvious flow to the song? Does it have a natural progression of thought, even if the approach is more impressionistic than discursive?

8. **Imagery** - biblical? if not, is it acceptable/does it work?

Biblical imagery is clearly foundational, but it is by no means exclusive. Where non-biblical imagery is used, is it consistent with the truths that are expressed by the biblical imagery?

9. **Use of Bible** - phrases/images used legitimately? in context?

Is the Bible merely being plundered to give a scriptural veneer to the song or is it being sensibly and sensitively interpreted and applied? In particular, is material from the Old Testament rightly handled in the light of the shift from the old covenant to the new? And for all Scripture, has the original context of the phrase/image been duly taken into account? Is it appropriate?

10. **Relevance** - understandable? accessible?

Who is the song for? Is it meaningful in terms of its language, images, allusions etc.? Is it appropriately pitched? Does it work?

11. **Connotation** - what does it convey (behind the words)?

Is there anything in the style, the choice of words, the use of images etc. which may have particular

resonances, associations, or provoke particular reactions? Intentional? Helpful? Positive or negative?

12. Function - what does it do? (praise, confess, teach, etc)

Songs can perform a whole range of functions. Some will of course have more than one. Establishing the function(s) of a song helps to identify the way in which it may (or may not) be used.