Criteria for Discerning the Usefulness of Praise Songs

Determining the truth of what someone is saying is impossible if the person isn't actually saying anything. This is the great difficulty of assessing praise songs commonly used in the church. The nature of modern praise songs makes them difficult to make them useful judgments regarding their fitness for use in the church's worship. Often the songs are written in sentence fragments, thought and phrases rather than a regular sentence with an subject, verb and object. Simple questions are often unanswerable: “Who is this talking about?” “What does this mean?” “What is the relationship between one phrase and another?”

When I was a child we would play a game on the 4th of July. Some smarty would take a tub of Vaseline and slather up a watermelon and toss it into the swimming pool. Dozens of kids would try to get it out of the water. Anytime you thought you had a hold of the melon it would squirt out of your arms. This is something of the difficulty in making a clear judgment about such ambiguous lyrics. (Of course this ambiguity is a big part of the problem.)

What is needed, then, is an objective method of judging the usefulness of a praise song for edifying the Lord's church and bringing the comfort of the forgiveness of sins.

The following criteria are offered for use in considering the usefulness of praise songs.

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1. **Jesus**
   “Is Jesus mentioned?”

   Yes | No If yes, is it in name or concept?

2. **Clarity**
   Is the song clear? Does it use sentences (with subject, verb, object) or sentence fragments?

   10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Very clear Obscure

3. **Mysticism (Subjectivity vs Objectivity)**
   Is the song about the things that God has done (objective), or about my own emotions and experiences (subjective)? Does the song repeat the same phrases over and over in an hypnotic mantra?

   10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Objective Subjective

4. **Law and Gospel**
   Does the song proclaim the law in its sternness and the Gospel in its sweetness? (The Gospel is the promise of the forgiveness of all sins won for us through Jesus' death on the cross.) Are law and Gospel rightly divided (and not mixed up)? Is the law presented as something that we can do, or does it show us our sins? Is the Gospel conditional (based on my actions, decisions, acceptance)?

   Yes No I can't tell

5. **Is there any explicit false teaching?**