

A: Mixed Themes: (Grammatical Blemish) – minus 4 points

For this, I deduct 4 points. C S Lewis spoke of an aspect of pride called chronological snobbery. This is the vague sense that our generation has improved more than all previous generations. This sense is not, but is often linked to, Evolutionism.¹ The old are seldom respected as repositories of wisdom, for the younger know better. When it comes to science, admittedly much wisdom has come, but science itself is but one form of wisdom. One invents nuclear weapons; another decides whether to deploy them; another frames benevolent legislation; another reveals God, thus meaning, to us. Chronological snobbery often ignores whether we have moved further into or away from truth, indeed postmodernism has sophisticated methods to deny that truth is anything more than individual subjective feelings. That is, it seeks to meaningfully argue that argument is meaningless. Logically it is self-defeating. Sin, it says, is to say that humanity is to be judged by objective standards, and so those who talk of sin are the real sinners. The West boasts that we have become gods. Sadly, some Christians get caught up in this pride. Correctivism can say that most under 30 years of age back its ideology, therefore all over 30 should back it, or be sidelined by piteous contempt and career threats, as irrelevant. Celebrate our party or we will damn you. It fails to ask whether it's the absence of truth both in its preferred age range, and within its thinking, that could explain its majority vice. Politicians promise change and are applauded, but so did Hitler. The body dying of cancer is certainly changing: is change good *per se*?

Let's avoid chronological snobbery and Western arrogance. In some ways, previous generations have been better than ours, and some of the old hymns were packed with themes. They can be metanarratives, in a few stanzas covering from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, and beyond. Too jam packed, at least for many of us. They don't feature inconsistencies against each other, but inconsistencies as a multitude of competing messages. I don't think we should boast that they're too complex for today's church to handle. But they probably are, and so there are some good reasons to simplify. In line with good homiletics, it makes good sense that each song should have a strong theme and stick to it.

Perhaps today's songwriters look less at the big picture metanarrative, the thematic overload. However, they can still mismatch themes and write in confusion. If you juggle themes, you might drop a clanger. Consider a fictitious song—Judas went and hanged himself / Go thou do likewise, thyself / Well done, O Good and Faithful Servant. All biblical lines, but cut & paste simply doesn't make any biblical sense. Lyricists should first ask what the lines mean, or meant, in their contexts, and only if discovering a theme, string them together. Judas wasn't commended for hanging himself, and hanged himself because he was far from being a

¹ Strictly speaking the idea of biological evolution simply means biological change, which most changes being non-beneficial to offspring. Unless theistic, this concept of evolution has no aim, no transcendent mind in charge, thus talk of progress is meaningless in its context. By definition, purposeless random change cannot progress, and invoking Nature (*she*) as a deity doesn't tick the boxes.

good and faithful servant. That God used his rebellious disposition to a good end, simply parallels to having used the evil of Joseph's brothers to move Joseph to a salvation base for them (Gen.50:20). Nevertheless, if I tweaked those lines, and added a great tune with contemporary A1 music, marketed it in an attractive package, I guess it might catch on. I dunno, maybe I could make it sound like Judas obediently hanged himself just to please God!

Seriously, any apparent unity of theme (for example, *peace*) should be a genuine unity. Some songs are like the Spot the Odd One Out quizzes. All too many song writers assume that pick & mixing biblical texts will work out fine. One quasibiblical hotchpotch is *He Is Our Peace*, woven from Eph.2:1 (about Jesus), and 1 Pt.5 (about God)—see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Kandela overlooked that two types of peace are at issue, and that internal peace (1 Pt.) is not based upon racial peace (Eph.), even though messiah is the common denominator. Instead of holding together two texts that speak of individual inner peace, or two that speak of global covenant peace, she failed to meaningfully relate A to B. As a rule of thumb, ask what the song means, and how each expression links in.

Quite frankly, biblical hotchpotch can demand a level of Bible familiarity that many singers and lyricists probably lack. When Robin Mark wrote *Days of Elijah* (1996),² was he in a most-biblical-allusions' competition? A unidirectional song would either be all to deity, or all to man. His was a polydirectional song,³ and polydirectional songs may be put like this:

Polydirectional	Part to deity, part to man	You are praiseworthy, isn't he?
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This song makes numerous eschatological assumptions, which if the feel good factor wasn't there, would raise obvious questions. Some might even say that biblically, Elijah's Days means the whole church age, and that salvation, though quoted in Isaiah's future tense (Rm.11:26), *has already come* from Zion.⁴ Some eschatological songs imply that the last 2 millennia were so much wasted time until WE came, and that WE know that the lord is no longer Yahweh but Jesus, who after the C21's mass speed-evangelism, will promptly return. How on earth did God get along without US? Are we infected with pride? I don't think it's even improved by Donnie McClurkin's addition that his favourite god is Jehovah.⁵ Since it's not unusual for lyricists to let proper standards slip, singers should usually do their own checking before opening mouth—let the singer beware and be aware.

² 19 biblical references in 16 lines, *per* Page 2004:88f.

³ *Poly* comes from the Greek word, πολυς/*polus*, which carries the ideas of many/much. If a song is only bidirectional (two directional), polydirectional might seem to be overkill. However, songs can have several directions, and rather than speak of bidirectional, tridirectional, and the like, I have settled for polydirectional.

⁴ *My Israel's Gone Global* book, covers this more. Keith & Kristyn Getty's *Oh, How Good It Is* (2012), rightly says that "the redeemer has come".

⁵ www.lyricsmania.com/days_of_elijah_lyrics_donnie_mcclurkin.html