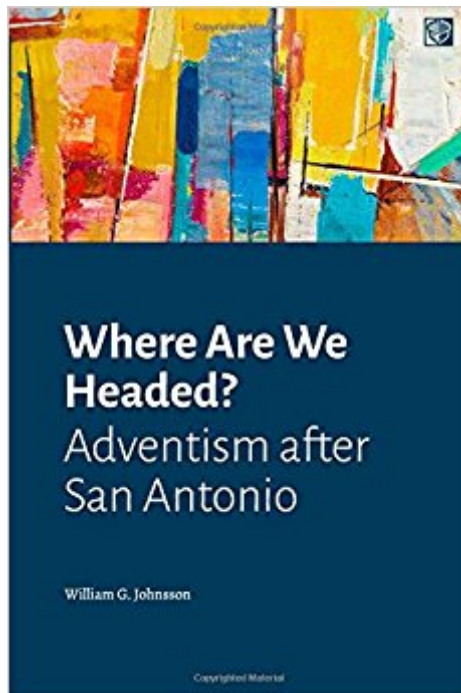


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Where Are We Headed?: Adventism After San Antonio



Synopsis

San Antonio was a tipping point in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. History may come to regard the General Conference Session of 2015 as a moment comparable to the 1888 Minneapolis convocation, when dramatically differing views of the church came face to face. In *Where Are We Headed?* William Johnsson looks at the life of the church after the summer of 2015 with two questions in mind: What issues are shaping the Adventist church? How shall we respond? Johnsson served as the editor of the *Adventist Review* from 1982 to 2006. In this book he moves easily and effectively into the role of pastor and teacher that he knows so well—and that Adventists have long appreciated.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dr Johnsson has a PhD in Biblical Studies from Vanderbilt University. In voicing his doctrinal concerns in this book, he draws on a wealth of experience from teaching Biblical Studies at the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Universities at Poona in India, and subsequently at Andrews University Theological Seminary at Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA, before being appointed in 1982 to the position of Editor at *The Adventist Review*, an official publication of the SDA church, until his retirement in 2006. He is a person of some charm, and not an agitator. He seeks agreement through reasoned argument, above confrontation. A man of candour, in this book, he shuns promotional rhetoric to "tell it as he sees it" criticizing the decision of the church hierarchy, albeit after a democratic vote, not to ordain women. This was at a convocation of members at the Alamo Dome in San Antonio, Texas, in July 2015. He argues his position with passion and clarity, that this was a lost opportunity to engage the insights and talents of women, and belatedly, to advance their

leadership roles. Certainly, there is a global trend to reject old stereotypes of the subservience of women to men, attitudes which often lead to abusive relationships. Who would now deny women equal rights to education, and employment? Do they not also deserve equal salary for equal responsibility, in all walks of life? Many companies have come to realize that women on their board can increase profit margins, and promote a more favourable corporate culture; whilst political parties welcome their considerate, and prudent opinions. Dr Johnsson views this trend as just, and inevitable. He foresees a situation where, unless there is change, individual congregations will act independently as consciences dictate, and ordain women to the ministry regardless of official disapproval. Whilst the failure to accept the ordination of women is his main grievance, he raises several other issues that have irked him over the years of his denominational employment. His opinions are presented but briefly in this book of only 162 pages, but in my opinion, deserve careful consideration by Adventists, and others. His plea is to temper the literal, verbatim, acceptance of Bible writings with interpretive considerations, taking into account the impact of time, culture and understanding on those who penned the Biblical canon. Thus, the Biblical account of Creation is not a scientific document, but rather an inspired poetic celebration of the miracle of origins. If we are genuine in our search for understanding of the world in which we live, we must accept objective scientific data, and make conclusions based on the weight of evidence. Biblical insights do not tell the whole story. I particularly value this book because of its honesty, above partisan hype. After all, this is the best way for the church to be a credible authority in a changing world.

I appreciated Dr Johnson's insights and grasp of the issues facing the church. As a book, however, it has the feeling of been rushed into print. Some arguments could have been beefed up a bit and different themes developed a bit further.

Where does the love of God meet the people? In board rooms or in the needs of every day people? Love is fulfilled in meeting the needs of the sinner, you and I.

There is a certain scepticism that comes with books from former leaders, such as *Where Are We Headed?* by Dr Bill Johnsson, now retired for more than 10 years from his long-standing role as editor of *Adventist Review*, situated as a long-time leader of the Adventist Church globally and former participant in the many committees of the General Conference. But Johnsson's strident new book rises above any such scepticism with a different motivation: the church he served has changed – and not for the better. For Johnsson,

the tipping point took place in San Antonio on July 8, 2015 – the day of the vote disallowing different practices of ordination among the Adventist Church worldwide. He describes that as “a truly sad day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I am ashamed of what transpired.” While not in San Antonio that day, Johnsson was following closely and in contact both then and since with many people who were. He describes being deeply affected by the events of that day. “For a couple of weeks after the Session, I moped and grumped around the house and took to writing a response as a way to stop ‘fussing.’ But it was not so much the result of the ‘women’s ordination’ vote that most troubles Johnsson. In his estimation, despite the continued obstructionism and obfuscation by General Conference leadership, the issue is decided. More and more women are being employed and ordained (even if by another name) in ministry by the church around the world, even in places as diverse as Papua New Guinea and South Africa; their ministry is obviously effective and Spirit-blessed; and this will simply be the way the church is among the next generation. Instead, the larger issues are the damage that is being done to the church by the responses from key church leaders to these realities and what they say about the kind of church some would have us become.

Where Are We Headed? identifies a number of related features from the San Antonio session: a tendency to “remnant arrogance and exclusivity; the mantra-like statements about the soon-coming of Jesus; the statistical focus of mission; the fundamentalism and ‘flat’ literalism creeping into our reading of Scripture; and the continuing discussions of the role of Ellen White’s writings. In Johnsson’s ‘lover’s quarrel’ with what the Adventist church is becoming, “two radically different versions of Adventism are competing for the future.” While *Where Are We Headed?* is open-ended – it is more a series of questions and reflections on the implications if we continue in some of the directions that have been set – Johnsson’s burden is to call us back to “Adventism at its best” and ultimately to Jesus. This discussion is never far away from our need for Jesus, the sufficiency of Jesus, and that the church should be shaped by the presence and ministry of Jesus. While Johnsson is writing about big issues in a global church, he draws regularly on his lifetime of personal experience of following Jesus, and writes with a graciousness and passion that is both Jesus-like and statesman-like. So *Where Are We Headed?* should not be tarred with the scepticism that sometimes meets post-retirement publications. Bill Johnsson is speaking to, with and for a broad spectrum of

the church. The standing ovation he was given after speaking at the One Project in San Diego in February is testament to respect he is held in across generations and the relevance of what he is continuing to say as an Adventist leader. As we continue to wrestle with the complicated issues of a worldwide church, we need wise voices that can offer circuit-breakers to our arguments and their continuing faith as a guidepost for our journey. *Where Are We Headed?* does this, calling us to find our best in Jesus, and offering hope for a more authentic Adventism in our frustrating and frustrated church.

Well thought out and challenging words written by a well respected theologian

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