

A Leader Should Take You Forward

A REVIEW BY RAJMUND DABROWSKI

Jan Paulsen, *Where Are We Going?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011).

Immediately after his election as the world church leader, Paulsen identified three main audiences for his particular attention—the youth and women (“two majorities often treated like minorities”), as well as church leadership. In his book, Paulsen spells out his concerns as to how the church nurtures these individuals and groups, how it responds to their particular needs and interests, and what course needs to be pursued. You will not find a “them” and “us” language in *Where Are We Going?* whether the author is dealing with the church members in their internal church setting, when in conversation with young people, or with adherents to other religions.

In the realm of social media, Paulsen’s volume is a book of quotes suitably destined to populate the Facebook pages. Here is a sample: “Adventist ministers and leaders don’t have mysterious powers to assign people to heaven or hell” (31). Again about leaders: “Outstanding Adventist leaders realize that they are not always right” (35).

Another, “True communication takes place only in the absence of fear. Do our colleagues feel safe when they are talking to us?” (32). On the same page: “God will save people, not statements.” *Where Are We Going?* is a book of questions. Countless questions. Simply start with the book’s title. It opens with a question and is an invitation to a conversation.

Asking questions is an effective method for a teacher whose interest is to make his students think and think for themselves. Paulsen invites the reader to consider a language of openness, “communication without fear,” as he puts it. He calls for more listening when relating to each other, with a language of civility and acts of generosity. As “our words matter,” what’s needed is that we “really listen,” he writes.

In a chapter entitled “Living in Tension,” Paulsen challenges with a comment, “We tend not to like those who ask difficult questions.... Questions lead to a dia-

logue, which in turn contributes to the bonding between God’s people.

And questions keep us alert.” And he continues, that “As an Adventist leader, don’t be afraid of questions. Instead, fear silence, for apathy is far more hazardous to the body of Christ than is critical thinking” (110).

It’s quite expected that many readers will appreciate what the book presents. Some may perhaps study it. Others will have mixed, even negative feeling about it. In any case, such is a destiny for all endeavors when thoughts are put into words, and are made public. Paulsen will smile and simply quip that if there was no criticism, the author has failed.

Indeed, in an ecclesiastical world of sameness and predictable, lofty declarations, some readers will find the author’s invitation to a healthy, civilized discourse about the church’s future as threatening. As I see it, the author is unapologetic when pointing at the values stated and re-stated by Scripture, and the reality that “we have not arrived yet.”

Considering the unfinished journey of a Christian pilgrim, one knows exactly what Paulsen means when he reminds himself that “it’s impossible to walk backwards into the future with eyes fixed on how things used to be” (34). For a Christian church, there is only a future to be considered. As one expected, page after page, Paulsen re-states a firm belief that the church’s mission is yet to be accomplished.

Neither is God finished with me, he comments.

Though offering plenty to chew on, the *Where Are We Going?* leaves the reader wanting more.

Until we hear again from Jan Paulsen, there is already plenty to reflect, reclaim, and...change. ■

