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Editorial

The Risk and the Promise: A Moment of Truth

The bells have tolled the close of the eighties. As Robert Southey once wrote, "the times are big with tidings." In the last few months of 1989 we saw the compelling chants of "FREEDOM" by millions demanding a new way of life.

The "times are big with tidings" for the United States as well. However, in many cases the tidings highlight survival issues. Some economists have described the eighties as the longest period of sustained economic growth in U.S. history. But this was also a decade when the United States consumed \$1 trillion more than it produced in goods and services. The country is undoubtedly facing a time of risks; but it can also face a time of great promise if it faces the moment of truth and, as one journalist suggested, "fixes up, cleans up, and pays up."

Adventist education in North America faces a similar moment of truth. The risks and challenges facing our schools, colleges, and universities are perhaps unprecedented. But never have these institutions been more vital to the mission of the church. As a previous editorial in this journal stated, if our schools did not exist "Adventism, as we know it, would soon cease to exist."

Some observers are openly pessimistic about the challenges. They say that past history shows that tradition and church structure are so strong that they will permit only marginal changes. This must not be the case! We must have within the Adventist Church an infectious courage and optimism similar to that expressed by Winston Churchill in 1941, when many thought Britain's prospects were hopeless. He told the United States "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down."

Organizations in the business world have faced moments of truth that involved seemingly overwhelming risks and little promise; but occasionally they achieve dramatic successes. Jan Carlzon, the dynamic president and CEO of Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), used a bold and innovative trend-setting approach to achieve almost unbelievable success in reversing the fortunes of his company. Carlzon established a vision for SAS that by 1990 it would be (1) the most efficient airline in Europe, and (2) a market leader in service, quality, and safety competing profitably on all distances and with all sizes of planes. He accomplished the turnaround by reversing the traditional, hierarchical corporate structure, by communicating the company's vision to *all* its employees, and then by listening to them. In his words, "A true leader is one who designs the cathedral and then shares the vision that inspires others to build it." "Only then can you unleash the mighty energy generated by a group of enthusiastic people."¹

In January 1988 the K-12 Board and the Board of Higher Education met in joint session. They recognized that effective change and solutions to meet the challenges facing Adventist education would not be effected by mandates from the traditional, hierarchical structure. To overcome this difficulty, the boards established PROJECT AFFIRMATION with four task forces and provided it (1) the means for wide ranging, front line input, (2) the ability to create visions and solutions, including resources, programs and services, and (3) the capacity to share the "workables" across the system.

As a result a mighty energy is being generated by a group of enthusiastic people who are bonded by the conviction that all of our children should be taught of the Lord. Grassroots participation like this may threaten those who feel comfortable with the traditional, hierarchical structure; but the risks we face demand the committed involvement of the whole church—and nothing less.

As we face our unparalleled moment of truth, wonderful promises sustain us and prepare us for the risks of the future.

"Call to me and I will answer you..."; "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (Jeremiah 33:3; Psalm 32:8, RSV).²—G.M.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Jan Carlzon, *Moments of Truth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 135.
- ² From the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright c 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.