

Reflections on a 1973 Article
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The lead article in the November 5, 1973 issue of the *Pacific Union Recorder*, written by M. Carol Hetzell, was entitled, “Council Takes Time for the Spirit.” The piece reported on the recently-completed Annual Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Uncharacteristically, the article did not focus on or even specifically mention any of the 258 items on the Council’s agenda. Instead, the author explored the pastoral/theological overlay of the event, initiated by General Conference President, Robert H. Pierson. Hetzell summarized this metatext as follows: “Concerned that the church's task of giving the message to all the world is not yet completed, concerned because of rapidly fulfilling signs that the end of all things is at hand, the leaders of the church paused to ask the question: Why are we still here? What is wrong with the church? Can it be something in us as leaders?”

President Pierson summoned the group to revival and reformation—a mantra that would later characterize the session—starting with Church leaders. He declared, “We need a revival in Bible-based, Christ-centered preaching. We are not psychiatrists or psychologists. We are preachers of the Word. The message that should eclipse all others is Christ Our Righteousness. This means simply putting Christ first in our lives and through His grace finding victory over sin.” After reviewing a series of recent developments in the Church, he concluded, “All these things are part of God's plan to tell us that now is the time.”

Pierson’s plea received widespread support from his fellow leaders that day. For example, a division president opined, after noting that he had attended these Councils for twenty-one years, that “this one will go down in history as a turning point in our church.”

So, here we are about forty-eight years later. Was the Annual Council of 1973 actually “a turning point” for the Adventist Church? Apparently not! Are we not still asking the same questions, “Why are we still here? What is wrong with the church?” Are we still claiming that “rapidly fulfilling signs” indicate “that the end of all things is at hand”? Is our primary concern still “that the church's task of giving the message to all the world is not yet completed”?

In 1973, the Church seemed to understand its problem to be centered on the supposed spiritual inadequacy of its members and leaders and the insufficiency of their practices of prayer and Bible study. There was also the ever-present concern about the Church’s lack of resolve and mobilization for finishing the “work,” i.e., spreading the “message” to all the world.

After almost fifty years, nothing has changed. Despite the ultimate failure of Pierson’s plea and especially his anticipated eschatological climax, the same missional angst could easily be found in any official meeting of Adventist leaders today and likely with the same proposed solutions. However, what was missing then and what remains off limits now is the foundational question, Is the “message” itself the real problem?

Is it not time to finally acknowledge that the Millerite Movement was based on completely false and unsustainable premises and exegetical methods? Likewise, should we not admit that the

theological salvage efforts that began on October 23, 1844, were equally unsupportable? Apart from the inadequate textual foundation of these biblical and theological positions historically held by Seventh-day Adventists, the colossally practical problem of time destroys the credibility of the “message.” No rational person in 2021 gives any current credence to a proclamation in the middle of the nineteenth century that something will take place “soon.” Unless the Church takes this issue seriously and openly and until it charges its most thoughtful and competent persons to work through this issue towards a potential and defensible solution, the Church will fade into insignificance, especially among the rational and educated people of the world.