

C.S. Lewis and Professor Haldane – V

By: Robert L. Withers

Not long ago I was in a discussion with a pastor about the closing of a church. “Well”, he said, “you know congregations have life cycles and this church reached the end of its life.”

Considering the church in question was only about ten years old, and considering it closed because its founding pastor left for other pastures, I found it difficult to accept the life cycle explanation; but more importantly, I questioned the Biblical basis for the paradigm.

“Where do you see that in the Bible?” I asked.

“Well, the human body is born, grows old, and dies. There’s the Biblical basis,” my friend replied.

“But,” I said, “what is the nature of the Church? Is it not the Body of Christ? Doesn’t the life of Christ live in His people? Is not that life eternal? Is there really a Biblical basis for thinking that the norm is for churches to be born, grow old, and die?” (Thank God no one has told the many vibrant churches in New England, founded in Colonial times, that they should have died by now!)

My friend, who is typically a critical thinker, had bought into a way of thinking in vogue among many in the professing church – churches have life cycles. These life cycles are now the benchmark, interpreter, and arbiter of pastoral ministry and leadership – not the Bible and Lord Jesus. We accept as “natural” these cycles rather than challenge ourselves and others to renewed commitment to Christ and the Gospel. We view decline as inevitable rather than fast and pray, confess and repent, and encourage one another to be faithful to the Christ of the Cross and the Cross of Christ. Where is the source of this life cycle paradigm? In the social sciences. The Church, the Bride of Christ, bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh; that which is inherently supernatural, having its roots in the Trinity; has been reduced to a sociological phenomenon – *by those who are to shepherd it supernaturally.*

The roots of many church health programs popular in the professing church are not found in the Bible but in sociology and psychology. The engines of many church endeavors are not fueled by Biblical narrative, command, and precept; but rather by social-scientific constructs which appear to make sense and work; until of course we require a new model construct to keep the machine moving. It is much like buying a

smart phone; buying the phone is just the beginning – then there are the apps you need to purchase and download.

The title of Lewis's book which Professor Haldane attacked is *That Hideous Strength*. I wonder why Lewis chose that title?