

“RELATIONSHIP, NOT RELIGION”

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The expression, *buzzword*, entered the vernacular a few years ago to describe a term that attains wide use, often as a slogan (e.g., *gravitas*, *holistic*, *infrastructure*, *stagflation*, even *buzzword* itself, et al). Hard on the heels of *buzzword* has come *buzz phrase* (e.g., *in the tank*, *think outside the box*, *brick-and-mortar*, *political capital*, et al). The field of religion is not without its own set of such words and phrases, for example, *relationship* emerged as a religion buzzword a few years ago. I once saw a denominational advertisement that touted its aim as “relationship, not religion.” When I read it, I thought, “At last, truth in advertising!” Actually, most of the religious groups that claim to be “Christian” have been placing “relationship” ahead of “religion” all along, but seldom do they advertise it. In fact, some of them may not even recognize that they are doing so.

What does their buzzword mean? I infer that it means that their principal aim is to encourage good human-human relations, which means that good human-Divine relations are secondary. The slogan implies that the church members are free to believe and practice whatever pleases them in religion and to behave about any way they choose in their daily lives—as long as they maintain good human “relationships.” A further implication is that they will not be “burdened” with “religion” (i.e., any dogma, doctrine, or requisite practices, especially if they are taught in that old outmoded and restrictive book, the Bible).

Relationship, not religion is one of the many sorry ends of the old mantra, “It makes no difference what you believe, as long as you’re sincere.” If “relationship” supersedes religion, one may keep his third wife who has had four husbands as long as the two presently have a “good relationship.” In this creed it matters little what one believes about the Creation, baptism, the way God has directed men to worship Him, or the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Such are irrelevant as long as one knows how to “get along” with others. The community/mega church phenomenon is a graphic demonstration of the *relationship, not religion* buzz phrase. It is little more than “Humanism-Lite.”

The greater tragedy is that some congregations that wear the name, “Church of Christ,” emphasize human relationships far more than they do Divine-human relationships. Some of these groups now boast of being havens for those involved in adulterous marriages. If these churches were honest, they would no longer use Church of Christ on their signs or buildings. Perhaps we are beginning to see some integrity in this regard by some. Max Lucado renamed his Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio, *Oak Hills Church*, in 2003. We have seen other signs that evinced embarrassment at the designation, *Church of Christ*, as they read “Family of “God” or “The Christian Fellowship” writ large, with a subscript in very small letters, a *Church of Christ*.

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Some of us have for years begged the elders of the North Richland Hills (NRH) “Church of Christ” denomination near Fort Worth, Texas, to be as honest as Lucado and Oak Hills has been. NRH at least **flirted** with honesty in this regard once as its marquee billed it as “an independent community church.” To no one’s surprise, NRH has begun using instrumental music in its Lord’s day worship. Those apostates who are zealous to lead the church into fellowship with the denominations consistently soft-pedal doctrine in favor of an “irenic (peaceful) spirit” toward and relationship with men.

No one can deny the importance of correct relationships. However, even a neophyte in Bible knowledge cannot miss its primary emphasis on the **right relationship with God**. One cannot be rightly related to one’s fellow man if he is not rightly related to God. The correct order is always peace with God, then peace with man (**Matthew 10:37; Luke 12:51-53; Acts 5:29**; et al.). There is no peace with God without respect for the authority of His Son (**Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1-2; 5:9**; et al.). Only when one has the **right religion** (as defined by the New Testament) will he have the **right relationship** with both God and men.