

Bible and the Headlines: Cold Comfort

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In 1738 Jonathan Swift's work "Polite Conversation" introduced the term "Job's comforter" into the English language. The Free Dictionary defines this term as, "Someone who makes a person feel worse about a situation when trying to offer sympathy." The headlines coming out of Houston show that Texas' largest city could learn a lot from rediscovering "Polite Conversation."

The Houston Public Media featured on July 7, "Houston Mayor Criticizes Former Member of City's Food Insecurity Board Over Racial Comments About Camp Mystic." The comments about a "whites only enclave" by the former board officer pertained to the 4th of July flood victims in Kerr County. Houston's mayor said, "The comments shared on social media are deeply inappropriate and have no place in a decent society, especially as families grieve the confirmed deaths and the ongoing search for the missing." The mayor plans to block any re-appointment of this board member.

The July 7 edition of the tabloid Irish Star contained, "Texas Pediatrician Fired After Posting Flood Victims 'Get What They Voted For'." The Houston doctor did not blame all the victims of the Kerr County flood. She excluded, "... all visitors, children, non-MAGA voters and pets ..." The comments have been repudiated by the health care group that employs the physician.

On July 7 the International Business Times asked, "Texas Flash Flood and Camp Mystic Disaster Victims Were 'All White' Says Former Houston Official - Was Her Comment Insensitive?" The former official alleges that had the victims been minorities the media would not have given the story preeminence. The article states, "Analysts say broader societal discussions may continue, but note that timing and tone remain critical when tragedies are still unfolding."

These accounts bring us back to the Book of Job. As the Bible records, Job was an innocent victim of tragedy: enemy attacks, fire from the sky and a tornado (Job 1:15-19). Job lost not only his wealth and his children, but he also lost his health (Job 2:7). It was after these disasters that his "comforters" arrived. These men suggest Job brought the calamities on himself. They ask Job, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? It has been observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it" (Job 4:7-8). Job proclaims his innocence, but his friends keep piling on the "comfort" (chapters 4-37). They are finally silenced when God condemned them, "I am angry with you and your friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

Even after all they said, Job forgives his friends and prays for them (Job 42:9). This is what Jesus would have each of us do. Jesus tells believers, "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luk 6:28). We could use more of this type of polite conversation.