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The Power of the Press: AP & \"Near Ground Zero\"

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 20, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

The power of the press is such that they have a professional responsibility to be careful in their word choice, indeed, a moral responsibility.

If you ever worked at a newspaper or magazine, you know that editors, not correspondents or writers, choose headlines. (One of the great things about blogging is that we get to write our own headlines.) And some people, alas, only read the headlines in those sections of the newspaper that carry items on subject matters that do not interest the reader. So, I read the headlines only on most of the style pages, and my Dad does the same with the non-local news, and a friend of mine skips even the headlines of the sports page, but admits you have to read the first headline to realize what is the sports page and what isn?t.

So, it is welcome news that AP has sent out instructions [1]to its staff not to refer to the ?Ground Zero mosque? because, in fact, the proposed mosque is not at the site of Ground Zero but two blocks away, two New York City blocks away. The AP feeds stories to a host of papers nationwide, more so now that large dailies cannot afford to keep bureaus in other cities, so the way they phrase a story really, really matters.

It is probably too late to affect attitudes on the Ground Zero mosque. But, at least the people at AP care enough about accuracy to strive for it. Mr. Limbaugh is still referring to ?Imam Obama? and then we wonder why 31% of Republicans think the President is a Muslim.

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[1] http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog_upshot/20100819/pl_yblog_upshot/ap-advises-staff-on-location-of-islamic-center-and-mosque