

# New York Times Responds to “Photo Politics”

Below please find the email that Clark Hoyt, Public Editor of the *New York Times*, sent to Bill Donohue:

Dear Bill,

I read with interest the post headlined “Photo Politics” on the Web site of the Catholic League. It complains about a photograph in *The Times* that was taken on Ash Wednesday at the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton near Battery Park. I’ve heard from a number of your members objecting to the picture. It is clear to me that some of them did not see the picture but were reacting to your description of it. Some complained that it was on the front page. It was not, although I think it would have been perfectly appropriate for the front page.

Your main objection seems to be that the picture showed only Father Zogby and a single worshipper receiving ashes from him. You said thousands received ashes at that church on that day and asked why *The Times* would choose a picture showing the priest, a lone parishioner and no one else in the church. Then you said, “To be honest, we’re really not wondering at all: We know exactly what the newspaper is up to.”

I won’t try to read your mind to figure out what you believe the motivation was. But I think you are taking offense where none was intended or given. I asked Michele McNally, the editor in charge of photography at *The Times*, about the picture. She said the paper ran it because it was “a gorgeous photograph of a profound religious experience.” I have to say that I saw the picture in exactly that way. It was shot from high in the church as Father Zogby rubbed ashes on the forehead of a woman cloaked in black. Because the figures are relatively small in a photograph composed to accentuate the

cross formed by the marble floor, I think it speaks to the power and mystery of your faith. It is a beautiful picture, not a disrespectful one.

I think you got caught up in headcount issues and failed to appreciate a photo that was a sensitive rendering of a religious moment.

I would appreciate it if you would post this, so that those you asked to write me can see my response.

Best wishes,

Clark Hoyt  
Public Editor  
*The New York Times*