

DID THE POPE JOIN HITLER YOUTH?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on media reports citing Pope Benedict XVI's membership in the Hitler Youth:

"The English and French news services, Reuters and AFP, flatly say that the pope 'was a member of the Hitler Youth.' The U.K.'s *Timesonline* writes that he 'was in the Hitler Youth and enlisted with the Wehrmacht,' noting that 'he had the excuse that this was standard practice for young German men at the time.' The *Daily Mail* from Pakistan reports 'This is a German pope who served in Hitler's youth corps.' *Israel Today* magazine says many Israelis interpret the pope's visit to the Holocaust Memorial 'as a stunt to cover up his past as a member of the Hitler Youth movement during World War II.' In one article, the Associated Press notes that the pope 'has written that the Nazis forced him' to join the Hitler Youth, and in another it mentions 'Benedict says he was coerced.' Similarly, CBS reports that 'Benedict has said he was coerced.'

"All of this is despicable smear. The *New York Times* got it right when it said that the pope 'was forced into the Hitler Youth and the German Army in World War II.' *Bloomberg.com* also got it right when it noted 'the German pope's obligatory membership as a 14-year-old in Hitler Youth'; it said further that he 'didn't attend meetings and he later deserted when he was drafted into the German army.' Moreover, his failure to attend Hitler Youth meetings brought economic hardship to his family: it meant no discounts for school tuition. None of this was a stunt. Furthermore, no one can deny that the pope was coerced into doing what the Nazis demanded of young men at the time.

“Günter Grass and Jürgen Habermas, two German intellectuals loved by the pope’s critics, were also forced to join the Hitler Youth. But because they are left-wing icons, no one implies they are anti-Semitic.

“Even Bill Maher apologized when I blasted him for accusing the pope of being a Nazi. The guilty media should do likewise and correct the record.”