

# Pope says difficult to understand why God chose him

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Reuters

Saturday, May 30, 2009 11:13 AM

VATICAN CITY (Reuters) - Pope Benedict said on Saturday he still had difficulty understanding why God had chosen him to lead the Catholic Church worldwide, recalling his isolated upbringing in a rural community of southern [Germany](#).

The 82-year-old pontiff, whose past in wartime Germany once again came under scrutiny during a visit to [Israel](#) this month, said that as a boy he never dreamed of becoming pope.

"I must say that even today I have difficulty in understanding how the Lord was able to think of me, choose me for this mission," Benedict told a meeting with thousands of children from the Church's Missionary Childhood society.

"But I accept it from his hands, even if it's surprising and appears far beyond my forces. But the Lord helps me."

Benedict said growing up in a poor region of southern Bavaria, he and his peers did not think of the outside world. He was "a rather naive boy in a small village very far from the center, in a forgotten province," the pope said.

"Naturally, we knew, venerated and loved the pope -- it was Pius XI -- but for us he was unobtainably noble, in almost another world: Our father, but still inhabiting a reality far superior to ours."

The pope's German upbringing was thrust into the spotlight during the pilgrimage to the Holy Land this month, aimed at mending ties with the Jewish community strained by his re-admission of a Holocaust-denying bishop.

Some Jewish leaders, who criticized the pope's speech at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial as too detached and lacking in emotion, raised his teenage membership of the Hitler Youth.

In "Salt of the Earth," a 1996 book of autobiographical and religious reflections based on interviews with German journalist Peter Seewald, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said he was automatically enrolled in the Hitler Youth as a seminarian but played no active part.

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