

Should Susan Sarandon Apologize for Calling Pope a 'Nazi'?

Actress and social activist Susan Sarandon fired up the religious community by reportedly calling Pope Benedict XVI a Nazi.

In an interview with actor Bob Balaban on Saturday at Long Island's Bay Street Theater, Sarandon, 65, mentioned that she sent a copy of Sister Helen Prejean's book, *Dead Man Walking*, to the pope.

"The last one. Not this Nazi one we have now," she was reported as saying by New York newspaper *Newsday*.

The book was the basis for the 1995 anti-death penalty movie of the same title—for which Sarandon won the best actress Academy Award for her role as a Prejean.

Although Balaban appeared shocked, the *Thelma and Louise* actress repeated her remark, garnering some laughs from the audience.

Bill Donohue, president of New York-based Catholic League for Religious Rights, is taking her comments seriously.

"Susan Sarandon's ignorance is willful: those who have hatred in their veins are not interested in the truth," Donohue said in a statement on Monday.

The German pope, formerly Joseph Ratzinger, was reportedly forced to join the Hitler Youth as a teenager.

"Unlike most of the other teenagers, Ratzinger refused to go to meetings, bringing economic hardship to his family," Donohue noted. "Moreover, unlike most of the others, he

deserted at the first opportunity.”

When the pope was elected in 2005, Rabbi David Rosen, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said it was “rubbish” to maintain that Ratzinger chose to belong to the Hitler Youth. He spoke kindly about the pope and added that “enrollment was compulsory.”

Although Donohue is not interested in an apology from Sarandon, saying “she is ignorant and full of hatred to the Catholic Church,” a group that fights anti-Semitism on Monday issued a call for Sarandon to apologize.

“We hope that Susan Sarandon will have the good sense to apologize to the Catholic community and all those she may have offended with this disturbing, deeply offensive and completely uncalled for attack on the good name of Pope Benedict XVI,” Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham H. Foxman said in a statement.

“Ms. Sarandon may have her differences with the Catholic Church, but that is no excuse for throwing around Nazi analogies,” he continued. “Such words are hateful, vindictive and only serve to diminish the true history and meaning of the Holocaust.”

Sarandon, who was raised as a Roman Catholic, is known for her support of causes such as AIDS, hunger and opposing the war in Iraq. She was also appointed a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador in 1999.

Although many are outraged by the veteran actress’ comments, public relations expert Glenn Selig predicts the controversy will not hurt her image in the long run.

“Susan Sarandon has a reputation of saying things that are controversial. This statement is certainly right up there. But given her history I doubt it will harm her career,” reported Selig saying. “While inflammatory and insulting to many,

particularly Catholics, people know her as someone who speaks her mind. Being opinionated is part of what the public seems to like about her or choose to accept about her, even if they don't agree with her."

However, entertainment and political publicist Angie Meyer disagrees, reports.

"Sarandon's now positioned herself in an unwise position by insulting a large religious sector, who might otherwise pay to watch her movies," Meyer said. "Her outlandish words come as a huge liability to movie producers and film financiers. There will be push back; she's stuck her foot too far down to fully recover, at least for the short term."

Do Sarandon's comments offend you?