

Pope John Paul II gunman looks for movie, book deals (Feature)

By Yigal Schleifer Jan 15, 2010, 2:08 GMT

Istanbul - The assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II in St Peter's Square may have taken place almost 30 years ago, but the event remains seared in the minds of many around the world.

That, at least, is the hope of the would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, who is set to be released from Turkish prison on January 18.

Once free, Agca is apparently hoping to land lucrative book deals and earn big sums for interviews. He has reportedly even written to Dan Brown, author of the best-selling 'Da Vinci Code' about his idea for a book titled 'The Vatican Code.'

The Pope later forgave Agca, who is now 52, in a 1983 visit to his Italian prison cell. But is the rest of the world ready for the Pontiff's attacker to cash in on his crime?

'You can see it from two sides. From the point of view of the police, it is a criminal who wants to earn money with his book,' says Agca's Istanbul lawyer, Haci Ali Ozhan.

'On the other hand, he has received his punishment. He is free to publish his memories,' he says. According to the lawyer, an Italian publisher has estimated the value of a book written by Mehmet Ali Agca at about two million euros (2.8 million dollars).

The assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II took place on May 13, 1981, as the Polish-born pontiff was riding through St Peter's Square in an open vehicle. Several shots rang out, four hitting the pontiff, who was rushed to the hospital.

It took the pope nearly a month to recover.

Arrested at the scene, Agca spent 19 years in Italian prison. In 2000 he was pardoned and extradited to Turkey, where he was arrested and jailed again, this time for the 1979 murder of Abdi Ipekci, a well-known Turkish journalist.

Almost 30 years later, mystery and conspiracy theories still surround the shooting. Was Agca, a former member of an ultra-nationalist Turkish group called the Grey Wolves, acting alone or was he part of a conspiracy?

Was Agca even part of a KGB or Bulgarian secret service plot to silence the fiercely anti-communist Pope? Although three Bulgarians were arrested along with Agca, they were acquitted after he proclaimed himself Jesus Christ at their trial, making his evidence unreliable.

Along with his book plans, Agca has reportedly expressed a desire to come to Rome and meet the current Pope, Benedict XVI, and even to convert to Catholicism in a baptism ceremony in St. Peter's Square. He has also said he wishes to pray at the tomb of John Paul II.

In a recent handwritten letter sent from jail to The Sunday Times, Agca declared himself 'sane and strong both physically and psychologically.'

On the other hand, his letter also left some question marks about how sane Agca might actually be.

'My plan is to proclaim the end of the world and to write the PERFECT GOSPEL [sic],' he wrote. 'I will proclaim the Perfect Christianity that Vatican [sic] has never understood.'

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