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Pope's assailant appeals to CIA for help

By Uli Schmetzer
Special to The Tribune

ROME—Mehmet Ali Agca, 27, the man who tried to kill the Pope, has appealed to the American CIA for help in finding a country where he can live as a political exile.

The appeal was made in a confiscated letter he tried to send last week to a woman "fan" with whom he has corresponded since he was sentenced to life in prison for shooting Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981.

Pressed by court President Severino Santiapichi to explain why he thought the CIA would help him, the evasive Agca finally admitted: "Though I've never had any contact with the CIA, I feel that its members must be great believers. . . ."

The two-month-old trial to determine complicity in the assassination attempt on the Pope resumed Monday after a two-week recess.

Under questioning Agca admitted that he scribbled the word "CIA" on a newspaper clipping attached to the letter. The clipping casts doubts on his mental health. He also had written to the woman admirer: "I send you a clipping that speaks for itself."

"After the end of the trial, I thought, I expected some help, some collaboration. . . .," Agca said in explaining his new appeal.

For once Agca—who says that the Soviet KGB and the Bulgarian secret service masterminded a plot to kill the Pope—dropped the mask of a tough killer and revealed the face of an insecure young man dreaming in his cell of an impossible deal as reward for his collaboration with Italian justice.

In his letter, addressed "Dear friends," Agca wrote: "The friends of the CIA can convince Turkey, Italy and Costa Rica. . . ." With baffling innocence the young Turk explained that he should be subjected to "a humanitarian solution." According to his reasoning, this meant the United States should persuade Italy to release him, Turkey to waive pending criminal proceedings and Costa Rica to accept him as a political exile.

"The Costa Rican president has already said his country was prepared to accept me as a political exile," Agca told the court.

To promote his plan, Agca again appealed to the kidnapers of Emanuela Orlandi, 15, daughter of a Vatican official who was apparently abducted two years ago, to release the girl. Her fate, according to an anonymous letter, "is linked to that of Mehmet Ali Agca." Since the letter, there has been no word from the girl's kidnapers.

"After the unconditional release of Emanuela Orlandi and the end of the trial—and I want her to be released—I can hope for a humanitarian solution," Agca said. "It would be good for all of us if she was released."

His latest "mini-plot" once more revealed a man determined to make a deal with anyone at any cost to escape his life sentence. It also cast fresh doubts on other statements by Agca, who has named a string of fellow Turks, Bulgarians and a Soviet official as his collaborators and fellow conspirators in the attempt to kill the Pope.

Piece by piece, Agca's testimony has been dismantled or made to look ridiculous. Still he shows no reaction when he is virtually called a liar by a court that also realizes he did have accomplices who supplied him with money, false documents, accommodations and plane tickets for 18 months before they brought him the gun to shoot the Pope.

To cross-check Agca's claims, prosecutor Antonio Marini has traveledto Turkey, West Germany and Holland to interview jailed Turks named by Agca as his accomplices. On Monday, he said he wanted to bring these men on temporary extradition orders and with their consent to the Rome trial to confront Agca and his allegations against them.

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