

Some are anxious as papal visit to Turkey nears

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 1, 2006 All Things Catholic

Benedict XVI is set to visit Turkey in November, for those looking to descry omens, here's one that's not terribly encouraging: A potboiler novel currently on bestseller lists in Turkey titled *Papa'ya suikast* ("Attack on the Pope") predicts that Benedict will be assassinated.

Written by novelist Yücel Kaya, the book is subtitled, "Who will kill Benedict XVI in Istanbul?"

In a little more than 300 pages, Kaya manages to weave the Turkish Secret Service, the infamous Masonic lodge P2, and (of course) Opus Dei into his plot line. Inevitably, Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who shot Pope John Paul II in 1981, also makes an appearance.

All this might seem comical were it not for the fact that in the last seven months, three Catholic priests have been attacked in Turkey, beginning with the murder of Italian missionary Fr. Andrea Santoro on February 5. Bishop Luigi Padovese, a 58-year-old Capuchin from Milan who serves as the region's apostolic vicar, and who was Santoro's superior, has warned of a "rising tide" of anti-Christian propaganda in Turkey.

"There's a strong current of religious extremism, and that climate can fuel this sort of hatred. It's passed along in families, in schools, in the newspapers," he said in a February interview with *NCR*.

Church officials have nevertheless played down the importance of Kaya's novel.

"We have to understand this episode for what it is. We're talking about a work of fiction, and that's how we have to take it," said Archbishop Antonio Lucibello, the papal nuncio in Turkey. "We remain prudent and trusting. The Turkish government is doing everything it can to ensure that the pope's trip comes off without incident."

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