

EXCLUSIVE

“How I diverted the shots against John Paul II”

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May 23, 1981, 5:17 p.m. Rome, St. Peter's Square. But also Fatima. And Santa Croce sull'Arno. These are the space-time coordinates that connect the epoch-making assassination attempt by Ali Agca against Saint John Paul II, of which the fortieth anniversary falls today. Rome is obvious; Fatima is understandable, given the coincidence of the date and the Polish Pope's explicit admission that “one hand pulled

the trigger, but a maternal hand deflected the trajectory of the bullet”.

But Santa Croce sull’Arno? There, in the Monastery founded by Blessed Cristiana Menabuoi at the end of the 13th century, lived, from 1940, the Augustinian nun Sister Rita Montella, originally from Cèrcola, in the province of Naples. And there she remained “sequestered” until 1992, the year of her death. Since she was a young girl, this cloistered nun used to meet Padre Pio, who visited her in his own way, in bilocation. Sister Rita also had the gift of bilocation. As was demonstrated in her visit to Cardinal Mindszenty, who was in prison. Her spiritual director, Father Teofilo Dal Pozzo, decided to put her to the test. He gave Sister Rita a postcard with an image of Our Lady and ordered her to ask the Cardinal to write a greeting to the Holy Father on it. On the night of 26 May 1949, Sister Rita in bilocation visited the Hungarian Cardinal and returned with the postcard. On the back was written: “*Deo gratias... me benedic. Additissimus filius Joseph Mindszenty. XXVI-V-MCMXLIX*”. This note was promptly delivered to Pius XII.

Still, our interest is focused on another bilocation on this fortieth anniversary of the assassination attempt against Saint John Paul II. Father Franco D’Anastasio, who knew of Sister Rita’s extraordinary phenomena since 1957, wrote in a statement countersigned by notary Luigi Napolitano and sent in 2006 to Cardinal Stanisław Jan Dziwisz: “On the occasion of a meeting at the end of 1981, we found ourselves talking [with Sister Rita, *ed.*] about the assassination attempt on the Holy Father John Paul II: Sister Rita confided in me: ‘Our Lady and I diverted the Pope’s attacker with our own hands’. Sister Rita was referring to a phenomenon which, in my personal opinion, can be defined as bilocation”.

Now, for the first time, the content of this statement has been investigated by Magistrate Giancarlo Massei, since 2011 President of the Criminal Section of the Court of Appeal and of the Appeals Court of Assizes of Perugia. Massei, at the request of Father Fabiano Montanaro, who is collecting material on Sister Rita’s life to make known this great nun of the last century, has come to the conclusion that this extraordinary statement is reliable. In a document he completed in November 2020, included in the dossier edited by Father Montanaro himself, and which the Daily Compass was able to preview, some important findings are highlighted.

“At the time when the disclosure was made (at the end of 1981) the first sentence, of July 1981, had already been passed: Ali Agca was sentenced to life imprisonment, and in that sentence there was no mention of any obstruction that Ali Agca had come up against while firing deadly shots at the Pope; nor in the investigative or trial documents was there any statement in which Ali Agca reported having suffered

any impediment to continuing shooting at the Pope". The disclosure that Sister Rita had confided to Father D'Anastasio was therefore to all intents and purposes a "scoop": at the time, no one had hypothesised an external intervention on the would-be assassin, not even Agca. Massei continues: "A circumstance was reported that was completely unknown at the time, never told nor even hypothesised by others, and which the event, as it occurred and was brought to the world's attention (the Pope was mortally wounded by the gunman's precisely aimed shots), seemed to contradict and deny".

It was only on 22 December 1982 that Ali Agca began to report that someone had grabbed his arm, preventing him from succeeding in his intention to kill the Pope: "As for that day... that predicted success did not occur, above all because, after I had fired the second shot, someone violently grabbed my arm, preventing me from continuing to shoot at the target". Even when John Paul II visited Agca in the Rebibbia prison on 27 December 1983, the "grey wolf" confessed to him that he still could not understand how he was not dead.

During the questioning of 17 October 1983, Agca again specified that he wanted to fire more shots, but had been unable to "because some people who were standing next to me had become aware of what I was doing and had grabbed hold of my arm. I was holding the pistol in my right hand. They immobilized my right arm".

Agca could not have known about Sister Rita Montella's revelation, because Father D'Anastasio revealed it only after her death (1992), as the nun had expressly requested. Nor was it likely that the assassin had invented it, because for him, who had already been sentenced to life imprisonment in July 1981, the confession that he had intended to fire more shots would have constituted an aggravating, rather than an attenuating, circumstance.

In the light of these statements and of the ballistics report on the firearm used by Agca by the Public Security Officer Giannone Rosario (the firearm was new and well maintained; the jamming noted was exclusively due to the impact produced when it hit the ground), Dr Massei was able to conclude that "it is therefore certain, as stated in sentence No. 20/86 of the Court of Assizes of Rome issued on 26.3.1986, that Ali Agca fired only 2 shots and not the 5 or 6 that he would have fired; and it is certain that he could not fire further shots against the Pope, because of the decisive, energetic and violent intervention that someone performed at that juncture, thus saving John Paul II's life".

The intervention of that "someone" is therefore ascertained. But what about

their identity? For years, it has been hypothesised that it was a certain Sister Lucia Giudici who held Agca's arm, as she was present that day near the attacker. This identification was also made by the judges of the Court of Assizes of Rome in the sentence of 26 March 1986, which, affirms Massei, "turned out to be blatantly wrong". And yet, in those 1200 pages of the sentence, there are important considerations that contradict this identification and open up the supernatural hypothesis.

In the declarations made by Sister Lucia during the interrogation given to Prosecutor Luciano Infelisi, she stated that Agca, after having fired the two bullets that hit the Pope, "pointing the gun in his hand towards passers-by tried to run away. I grabbed the lapels of his jacket immediately after he had pointed his gun at me and at a policeman who was coming towards me; then he threw it on the ground away from him". Questioned again on 7 January 1982 by Investigating Magistrate Ilario Martella, she specified that, at the moment of the shooting, she was about ten metres from the attacker and four metres from the Pope. Both statements rule out the possibility that it was she who grabbed Agca's arm: Sister Lucia grabbed his jacket only after the shots had been fired and while Agca was running away.

Massei also points out that in the over one thousand pages "none of the numerous witnesses, even though they were very close to the scene of the crime, had mentioned seeing Ali Agca yanked and restrained immediately after he fired the two gunshots", though he attested that this had happened, and it was confirmed by the fact that he had only fired two shots. Moreover, "no one has spoken of such an intervention, no one noticed Ali Agca being grabbed and restricted; no one saw one or more persons pulling at Ali Agca's arm; it was solely the latter who felt himself being restricted. Nor did the author of such a fearless, decisive and meritorious action reveal themselves in any way so as to be able to be questioned, identified, or offer their own narrative contribution to the event. Nor did any photo frame, any video, capture such an action, even though it was so important and took place only a few metres from where the Pope was passing, at a very short distance from where attention was focused at that moment".

We are faced with an unresolved enigma: someone evidently held back Agca's arm, according to his testimony; otherwise the "grey wolf" would have fired at least another 3-4 shots, as he expressly confessed. Yet that someone has never been found, has never come forward, and has not been identified in any photo or video recording. No one has admitted this feat, except the cloistered nun, Sister Rita Montella.

