

Accused Ivo Poppe is questioned by the assize chairman in the courtroom. © photo\_news

## Psychotherapist: "Deacon of death acted out of unbearable pity"

**INLAND** At the assize trial against Ivo Poppe (61) the psychotherapist of the accused explained their conversations. Professor Mattias Desmet knew about the facts, but decided to abide by his professional secrecy. According to the witness, Poppe did act out of pity.

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This morning the session was adjourned so that the psychotherapist could print his notes about Ivo Poppe at the request of the chairman. Then Professor Desmet told how he acted after Poppe confessed the facts. "When I got in touch with people from the medical world, most of them shrugged. I was amazed, I was a bit shocked in fact." According to the witness, such cases apparently happened a lot before the euthanasia legislation. "Professor Distelmans even said in De Morgen that it involved 3,600 cases a year."

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**There was a sense of power, but it is therefore wrong as a motive. The motive, I think, was indeed an unbearable pity, which resulted in a compulsion**

- Psychotherapist Mattias Desmet in court today

The deacon's psychologist also explained why he did not sound the alarm. "The urge to end lives that was sometimes felt was gone after the therapy. That kind of compulsion is also very sensitive to the word and will quickly diminish by talking about it." The accused's psychiatrists eventually informed the prosecutor's office. "That was certainly not the best way. Even when it is very difficult, it is important to stay true to your profession. A soldier has to fight even when it is war."

### Difficult youth

At the request of the defense, the witness also explained the personality of Ivo Poppe. "The thin line between me and another is a central feature. He very easily takes on another's feelings and suffering." That personality was created by the relationship with his mother and his difficult childhood. "As a child he felt very strongly for his mother. He therefore did not blow his nose into a handkerchief, so as not to make her life even more difficult."

The accused served his entire life, working as a nurse and deacon. "There was a sense of power, but as a motive it is therefore wrong. I think the motive was indeed an unbearable pity, which resulted in compulsion." Poppe told his psychotherapist that the victims were terminal and unbearably suffering. "On the one hand, he partially refuses to take any blame, because he did it out of good will. On the other hand, he realizes that he has crossed a line."

### Commotion about professional secrecy

After the testimony, a long discussion ensued when it turned out that Professor Desmet had to put down his notes. "It contains details about the sexual life of Ivo and of other people, such as villagers. I would like to ask you not to force me to do that." Chairman Bart Meganck pointed out to him that the law could not be negotiated. "Then I will have to tell my students that they are not allowed to create files and not even testify anymore. This is a disaster for the psychologist profession and our professional secrecy." The chairman stated that he did not want to lure the witness into a trap by having him print the notes. "Yeah," shouted part of the audience.

It was finally decided that the psychotherapist may delete another patient's name from his notes. Then he speaks again.

### Psychiatrists sounded the alarm

Earlier in the day, the psychiatrists who treated the accused had testified. The deacon suddenly told them during a regular consultation that he had ended the lives of dozens of people. After consultation with the Order of Physicians, it was decided to inform the public prosecutor's office.

At the end of 2010, Ivo Poppe first contacted psychiatrist De Troyer. After a few consultations, it took until October 2013 before he visited his psychiatrist again. "Those first conversations were about his nightmares, his father and his home situation. And then he suddenly confessed that he ended the lives of dozens of people through palliative sedation with air embolisms and insulin." The deacon said that, among other things, he killed his father-in-law out of pity. "What shocked me a bit was a form of revenge towards the doctors, a feeling of frustration, a feeling of power. There was also a certain sense of guilt."

The psychiatrist was especially afraid that Poppe would take new deeds. After all, at that time he was still involved in mortal counseling as a deacon. After consultation with the Order of Physicians, he forwarded Poppe to his colleague Paul Lodewyck. "His nightmares were sexual scenes, father murdered, being murdered, his house on fire," said Dr Lodewyck. Poppe also repeated his confessions. "He told me that he had helped his own mother over death. I found that smothering his great-uncle in 1978 very difficult, that's a different matter than injecting air or insulin."

### Addiction

Ivo Poppe told the psychiatrists that he felt he had done something right. "But it had also almost become an addiction. The chance of being caught creates a tension that maintains the mechanism." The doctors then decided to inform the public prosecutor of the case. "He still came into contact with defenseless people in the last phase of life. I did have a small reservation that it was fantasy."

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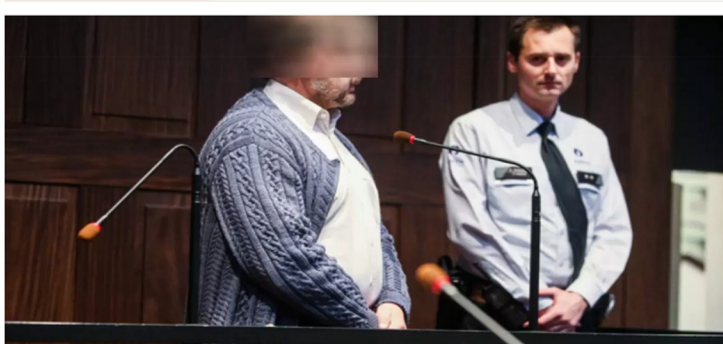
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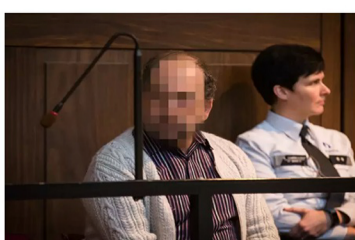
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