

Killing in the Name of the Lord

Cases and Reflections Regarding Reli-Criminality in the Western World

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In Christian circles the tendency exists to deny that the causes of manslaughter and homicide may be due to the existence of a biblically based frame of orientation – indeed, that frame teaches respect for other persons' lives. However, it is shown that the presence of such a frame may also lead to gruesome forms of manslaughter, usually represented by Christians as absolutely un-Christian, devilish, or heathen aberrations, worse than homicides committed out of pure hatred, aggression, or self-defence. The purpose of this article is, first, to present a typology of biblically inspired fatal crimes (or 'reli-crimes') as they occurred in the last two centuries in Europe, and, second, to present an interpretation of the relationship between religious imagination and representation on the one hand and atrocious forms of physical violence towards fellow human beings on the other.

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Introduction¹

'It is not the violence of the Westerner that has to be explained, but its combination with such a peace-loving religion as Christianity,' wrote sociologist of religion Ter Borg at the end of 1994 in a Dutch Newspaper (*Trouw* d.d. 17 December 1994). According to him this violence is an unrecognized paradoxical effect of Christianity: '[B]y prohibiting violence and even sacrifice, Christianity [as a matter of fact] unchained the violence of Christians.' This is an interesting though somewhat simplistic (Girardian) vision. Not only does it rest on the questionable assumption that every Westerner is Christian, but it also implies that the Christian taboo on physical violence (*vide* the sixth commandment) in general and on violent sacrifices in particular would generate this kind of violence. When Christians kill, Ter Borg seems to argue, they do so because of these prohibitions. If this is correct, it would certainly have been better if Moses had not come down from the

mountain with the Ten Commandments. The author of the *Heidelberger Catechismus* wasted his time composing it, and if priests and preachers had left all references to the sixth commandment out of their sermons, then less or even no killing and murdering would have taken place. I think that there is much more to say about the relation – a topic that has already been studied by many scholars² – between Christian religion and physical violence practiced by its adherents.

In this paper I will try to shed some light on that intriguing relationship by presenting and analyzing what I once labelled 'reli-murders' (Verrips 1991). A reli-murder is a 'murder inspired by religious motives' in the sense that 'the committing of homicide or heavy physical abuse resulting in the death [of the victim(s)] by one or more persons who act under the influence of delusions in which religious moments are predominant' (Plokker 1948:147). By this definition one could consider a human sacrifice to a god to be a kind of particular reli-murder.

This, of course, is an outsider's view, for those who make such a sacrifice would not call it murder at all, but, for example, a very precious 'gift' to a deity. Though I realize that my definition does not do justice to the fact that commit-tees of reli-murders may be totally convinced that they correctly interpret and implement their religion and therefore are not murderers at all, I still consider this act of religious loyalty to be murder. That it is not easy to decide what one can define as a 'crime' inspired by 'a religious belief system' is extensively shown by Lanning (1992:117/18). What X will characterize as an absolute misinterpretation of a belief system and as a crime may viewed by Y as a completely correct interpretation of the same system and as a benefit to a person or even to humanity.

In Christian circles the tendency exists to attribute manslaughter and homicide not to a biblically based (ethical) frame of orientation – after all, that frame teaches respect for other persons' lives – but rather to its absence. Because it is not there, so one reasons, it may happen that a person loses his self-control in a fit of extreme anger, jealousy, greediness, etc., and takes a person's life. However, that a biblically based frame of orientation also may lead to gruesome forms of manslaughter is mostly denied or else represented as an absolutely un-Christian, devilish, or even heathen aberration worse than homicide committed out of pure hatred, aggression, or self-defense. One comes across such a representation in the case of the killing of a farmhand in the Dutch village of Appeltern at the beginning of this century who was perceived by his murderer, a fanatical orthodox Protestant farmer, as a devil that should be crushed in order to bring the Lord's Kingdom closer. Abraham Kuyper, the founder of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands, ascribed this homicide to: '[H]eathen customs that contrary to God's word partly remained alive in some regions of our country' (Van Belzen 1996:37).

Some years ago I developed a tentative typology of religiously inspired fatal crimes as they happened to occur – luckily infrequently but nevertheless with a certain regularity – in Western Europe and the USA (Verrips 1991). The

purpose of that exercise was to create some order in the rather confusing amount of data and cases and by doing so to reach more insight into reli-criminality. I tried to make sense of differences in the background and nature of reli-murders and to estimate the probability of their disappearance. However, in the meantime several new cases have occurred. Though I am still convinced that my typology holds water, my ideas with regard to particular reli-murders underwent some elaboration. What I therefore intend to do in this paper is (1) to present and illustrate my typology of reli-criminality and (2) to sketch my latest ideas with regard to this fascinating phenomenon. It is my hope that our insight into the relation between religion (or religious imagination and representation) and physical violence will be thus deepened.

A Typology of Reli-murders

In the movie *The First Power*, directed by Robert Resnikoff, a detective specialized in tracing serial killers catches a ruthless murderer who used to carve five-pointed stars in the bodies of his victims. Although this satanic criminal has been executed, he returns in a miraculous way. 'Only a nun specialized in mystical skills is able to bring relief. She gives the detective a crucifix that contains a dagger. By stabbing the Devil in the heart he can stop him from doing his evil works' (*NRC HB* d.d. 4 October 1990). If one thinks that one is confronted here with just a figment of the imagination or a kind of crime that never takes place in reality, then one is really mistaken. For in this film two types of reli-murder occur that every now and then also occur in reality, i.e., (1) killing to please Satan ('sacrifice to Satan') and (2) killing somebody because he or she is deemed to be or to be associated with the Devil. The second type can be subdivided into three (sometimes overlapping) subtypes: killing a person, because one thinks he or she is (a) a satellite of demons and/or the Devil ('execution of witches'), (b) possessed by the Devil or devils ('exorcism murder'), and (c) the Devil himself ('Devil's murder').

Next to the two main types one can discern a

third, i.e., killing somebody because one thinks that it is necessary to make a sacrifice to God in accord with a biblical example. This type can be divided in two genres that I want to label (a) the 'Abrahams sacrifice' and (b) the 'crucifixion.' In the next sections I will illustrate these types and subtypes with case material.³

'Sacrifice to Satan'

The idea that certain people are in league with the Devil and commit all sorts of evil in his name, for example, bringing human sacrifices to honor him, is not only very old (cf. Cohn 1975), but still very much alive (cf. Sakheim & Devine 1992; La Fontaine 1992). This appears from the fact that in the last decades more and more people and institutions in the USA as well as several European countries not only report the occurrence of ritual child abuse, but even the ritual sacrifice of children by the members of a sect of Satan with branches all over the world. Very often their reports are based on fantastic stories told by children to their parents. They say, for example, that they have been enticed by strangers, sometimes dressed in clown costumes, who forced them to be present at and even to participate in the gruesome ritual of sacrificing age-mates. Nice illustrations of such 'eye-witness accounts' are the horror stories told by some of the kids involved in the sensational Oude Pekela case in the Netherlands a few years ago. In the meantime all sorts of specialists have done research on the empirical basis of the persistent and widespread rumors with regard to the ritual killing of children in order to please the Prince of Darkness. It is striking, however, that these specialists often had to conclude that there is no convincing evidence of large-scale ritual abuse of children and adults sometimes ending in their death. Yet especially in the last three decades, a few horrific cases of what I call 'sacrifice to Satan' took place. A well-known and gruesome example is the Tate-LaBianca-killings of 1969 in Los Angeles committed by the Manson Family (cf. Bugliosi & Gentry 1974). Apart from the USA (see, for example, Nash 1992:106 for the case of Joseph Cantero) there are also cases of 'sacrifices to Satan' reported for Hungary (cf. *Le Nouvel Observateur* d.d. 20 – 26

December 1990) and Germany. In a section of his book with the sensational title 'Blutopfer auf Satans Altar' Wiesendanger writes:

Mitte Oktober 1987 saßen René (17) und Elke (15), Mitglieder der Lüdinghauser Teufelsgruppe 'Die Luzifikaner,' vor dem Landgericht Münster wegens Totschlags auf der Anklagebank: Am 15. Mai hatten sie sich mit Gruppenmitglied Anja (15) im Wald verabredet – zu ihrem gemeinsamen Todestag, 'um in Luzifers Reich einzugehen.' Als erste kam Anja dran: René und Elke schnitten ihr Hals und Pulsadern auf. Von ihren Schreien wachgerüttelt, rannten sie davon – Anja verblutete' (1995:32).

Wiesendanger also presents a number of cases where predominantly young people tried to 'sacrifice' themselves or peers to Satan, and others where they really achieved their aim. According to him it is important to realize, however, that these horrendous acts frequently called 'rituelle Opferungen' have not always owed to satanic motives alone. But I would stress that these motives were important and that one can not properly understand the crimes in question without taking them into consideration.⁴

'Murder of Witches'

Upon hearing the term 'murder of witches' many will immediately think of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, when in several West European societies mostly women – often after torture – were burnt at the stake because they were thought to maintain real relations with demonic beings, especially God's dark antipode, the Devil, but less of the following centuries, especially the 20th.⁵ Though one is prepared to accept that belief in witches and witchcraft persisted for a long time and in some places still does, one probably would be astonished to hear that cases of killing witches or attempts to do so have been occurring up until now.⁶ Yet these cases took place, although – luckily – on a very modest scale. In the work of the German criminologist Hellwig, who developed a great interest in criminal acts partly originating in religious and so-called superstitious beliefs, one

finds several examples of what I call 'murder of witches.' 'Mordtaten aus Hexenglauben,' as he writes (Hellwig 1908b:16), 'sind häufiger als man annehmen sollte,' and then he presents a long list of this kind of murder as they occurred all over Europe from the 19th century onwards. A very notorious case presented itself in 1896 in Germany.

In der Nacht vom 6. zum 7. Juli 1896 wurde die Witwe Euphrosine Gerber geborene Löschi in dem Dorfe Forchheim bei Emdingen erwürgt. Der Verdacht der Täterschaft lenkte sich sofort auf den am 30. November 1875 geborenen ledigen, katholischen Landwirt Franz Xaver Werneth, dessen Großmutter väterlicherseits eine Schwester der Ermordeten gewesen war. Es war im ganzen Dorf bekannt, daß Franz Xaver Werneth und seine Angehörigen die Ermordete für eine äußerst boshafte Hexe hielten, der sie allerlei Unglück in Haus und Hof, ganz besonders aber die Epilepsie des Franz Xaver Werneth und die auf hysterischer Grundlage beruhende angebliche 'Besessenheit' seiner Tante Sibylla zuschrieben (Hellwig 1909:173).

In court the accused declared that he had to kill his aunt in order to get peace. God would not at all be angry with him because killing a harmful witch was something totally different 'als wenn einer den anderen aus Luxus totschiage' (Hellwig 1908b:16). The man was sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

Though there is evidence that 'murders of witches' took place elsewhere in Europe at the beginning of this century (cf. Hellwig 1908b), I did not come across clear-cut cases for the Netherlands. However, recently there was a court case that illustrates that belief in witchcraft in connection with threatening or even killing a person is not totally absent.⁷ In 1988 the following remarkable message could be read in a Dutch newspaper:

Man is sentenced to five years for strangling his wife. Utrecht (ANP) – Last Tuesday O.A., (51) from Utrecht was sentenced by the court of Utrecht to five years imprisonment. October last year the man left his 22-year-old wife whom he had strangled in a ditch alongside the road in

Utrecht. A. told the judge that his wife had been 'bewitched' (*Volkskrant* d.d. 6 April 1988).

Though in this case, about which I unfortunately could not collect more material, no 'witch' was involved but only a 'bewitched' woman, I present it in order to demonstrate that belief in witchcraft is still capable of inspiring persons to kill a human being.⁸

It may be possible that the murderer intended to say not so much that his wife was 'bewitched' as that she was 'possessed (by the Devil).' If this is correct, his crime would be an illustration of the next subtype.

'Exorcism Murder'

The fact that the special office of exorcist in the Roman Catholic Church no longer exists does not mean that within this church exorcism takes place no longer. Priests are still allowed to cast out demons and devils when they deem it necessary. In such cases they are bound by strict rules and not allowed to exorcise unless they have permission from their bishop. The same holds true for the Anglican Church. In Protestant churches, however, the ritual expulsion of the Devil or devils is nonexistent.⁹ The idea that people may be possessed by evil spirits that may then be driven out is prevalent in the New Testament. There one may find the origin of exorcism as it has been practiced through ages and as it still takes place in the Roman Catholic and Anglican as well as in the Pentecostal churches. Though the purpose of exorcism has always been positive to rid people of evil spirits that occupied their bodies it sometimes resulted in the death of the possessed. Maquart, for example, remarks:

Malgré la sévérité de l'Eglise à ce sujet, il faut regretter parfois chez certains prêtres adonnés à ce dangereux ministère, la pratique inconsidérée et imprudente de l'exorcisme (1948:328).

But not only fanatical priests have been guilty of practicing exorcism with fatal consequences, but also laypeople.¹⁰ Though the number of cases since the end of the 19th century has not been large, which by the way holds true for all the reli-murders I deal with in this essay, the

world has not been disenchanted to such an extent that they occur no longer. In order to illustrate this I will present a few spectacular recent examples.

In 1957 Jozef Stocker, an excommunicated priest, together with his lover Magdalena Kohler founded in Ringwil near Zürich a small sect that he baptized the 'International Family Community for the Benefit of Peace.' Both believed that the end of the world was near. Stocker tried to persuade credulous peasants to buy a place in his 'Noah's Ark' so that they could escape the crack of doom. Together with Magdalena he engaged in the 'education' of children and adolescents entrusted to them by naive parents. One of their pupils was the seventeen-year-old farmer's daughter Bernadette Hasler. According to the guiding couple she was possessed by the Devil and only exorcism would cure her. In the spring of 1966 Stocker, his sweetheart, and a few faithful followers began to treat Bernadette. The results were dramatic. She died as a consequence of their healing efforts, which showed almost no resemblance to the treatment of possessed persons that is permitted in the Roman Catholic Church.

Sie prügelten Bernadette täglich, liessen sie ihre eigenen Excremente essen, gossen eiskaltes Wasser über sie, sperrten sie ein, liessen sie 400 Seiten Selbstbeschimpfungen aufschreiben, schlugen sie buchstäblich zusammen. Bernadette hat es nicht überlebt. Sie starb nachts, Kerzen umstrahlten ihr Bett, Stocker predigte wirres Zeug: 'Sie hat sich selbst befriedigt... o haben wir sie wenigstens vor der Hölle retten können...' (*Bild am Sonntag* d.d. 28 February 1988; see also *Frankfurter Rundschau* d.d. 9 November 1988).

Stocker and Magdalena, who appeared before the court in Zürich only in 1969, were sentenced to ten years of imprisonment each, whereas their accomplices got lighter punishments (cf. *Het Parool* d.d. 5 February 1969). While nothing was heard of Stocker since, Magdalena Kohler once became front page news again a few years later. I will return to that.

Nine years later two Roman Catholic priests and the parents of a young girl had to appear in

court at Aschaffenburg because they had committed a similar kind of crime as Stocker and Kohler.

Before the court of Aschaffenburg in Bayern the Middle Ages are revived these days. There is talk about devils who call themselves Lucifer, Kain, Judas, Nero, Hitler, and pastor Fleischmann. They had taken possession of the body and soul of the innocent girl Anneliese Michel from Klingenberg near the Main river. The six devils were expelled by two Catholic clergymen, but at the end of the 'exorcism' the girl was quite dead. She died of undernourishment (*Volkskrant* d.d. 6 April 1978 – transl. J.V.).

After a spectacular trial the four persons accused, who were absolutely convinced that they had done no harm, got a sentence of six months' probation for having caused the death of the girl (cf. *Volkskrant* d.d. 22 April 1978).¹¹

Precisely twelve years after Anneliese Michel died in consequence of an exorcism, almost all Dutch newspapers reported that the police of Velp (a small town in the province of Gelderland) had arrested a local couple and a woman from Maassluis because they had burned a baby to death after trying in vain to cast out the demons that possessed it.

The burning of the baby...in the lavatory of the house of the couple in Velp was, according to police, the climax of an exorcism ritual that lasted 48 hours. Initially the father (30), the mother (27), and their friend (31) assaulted the baby with pillows and knives. Afterwards they poured alcohol, paint, and hydrochloric acid over the baby and set it on fire. The police speak of a ritual murder (*NRC Hb* d.d. 1 July 1988).¹²

Because there are indications that the little victim was deemed to be the Devil himself, I will return to this case when treating 'Devil's murders'.¹³

Though the tragic event in Velp was front-page news, a few other cases that occurred shortly before and after it got almost no attention from journalists. However, there were two remarkable short items in the newspapers with regard to the type of killing I am dealing with

here. On 29 January 1988 one could read the following:

Psychiatric confinement demanded for the stabbing of a woman in order to cast out the Devil. Groningen (ANP) – Before the court of Groningen public prosecutor M. Severin...demanded unconditional psychiatric confinement of a 28-year-old inhabitant of Groningen who committed homicide. The man is suspected of having killed his 37-years-old girlfriend on 8 August last year because he believed that she was possessed by the Devil. During the four months that he and the victim were involved, they regularly indulged in the exorcism of spirits. Just before the tragic event took place, the man became convinced that the Devil had taken possession of his girlfriend. In order to cast him out he stabbed her. The public prosecutor followed the psychiatric report, which says that L. suffers from paranoid psychosis and is of unsound mind. Verdict on 11 February (*Volkskrant* d.d. 29 January 1988).

In November, the newspapers reported a case against a German woman of 74 who was accused of having killed in February 1988 (together with her since deceased sister) a widow of 66 because they thought that she was possessed by Satan (cf. *Volkskrant* d.d. 9 November 1988). On 23 February a German newspaper published the following:

66-jährige zu Tode geschlagen. Singen. (dpa) – Einem ungewöhnlichen Verbrechen, in dem nach den ersten Ermittlungen religiöser Wahn und jahrelange Teufelsaustreibung die Hauptrollen spielten, ist jetzt in Singen (Kreis Konstanz) aufgedeckt worden. Wie die Konstanzer Staatsanwaltschaft und die Polizei gestern mitteilten, sind zwei 70 und 73 Jahre alte Frauen am 19. Februar verhaftet worden, weil sie eine 66-jährige Witwe jahrelang gefangen gehalten und zur 'Austreibung des Teufels' so geschlagen hatten, dass diese Anfang Februar an ihren Verletzungen gestorben war (cf. *Rhein-Sieg-Zeitung* d.d. 23 February 1988).

This case is interesting, because the main suspect was no one else but Magdalena Kohler

whom we met before. In the 80s Magdalena, who after her early release from prison was expelled from Switzerland and settled in Singen, still believed that she was chosen by the Lord. She now claimed that the Madonna had appeared and told her to gather a family around herself, just as she had done before, in order to survive a coming catastrophe. Magdalena's victim had been a member of the sect founded by herself and Jozef Stocker. A unique case of recidivism! During the trial Magdalena's lawyer made the interesting remark that she had once again made a mistake 'nicht weil, sondern obwohl sie fromm war.' We can observe here that killing someone is not seen as the result of religious beliefs held by the offender, but rather as the consequence of something totally different, for example, a state of mental derangement or an attack of insanity that has no relation with these beliefs at all. That such attacks have a clear-cut connection with religion and can be seen as a kind of pathological implication seems to be toned down or even denied, especially by the experts, for example, psychiatrists and psychologists, who are recruited to make sense of such cases (cf. Van Meer 1988, Verrips 1988, Van Belzen 1996). By defining the state of mind of what I would call 'reli-delinquents' in technical jargon as, for example, '*ontoerekeningsvatbaarheid als gevolg van een paranoïde psychose veroorzaakt door schizofrenie*' ('mental incompetence as a consequence of a paranoid psychosis caused by schizophrenia') one conceals more than one clarifies about the pathological turn that the religious thinking of specific people can take under particular circumstances. Such labelling deprives us of a clear perspective on the logic of the offenses and on how that logic can originate from, for example, the Bible or theological treatises.¹⁴ These writings may function as a source not only of orientation but also of disorientation such that people may become totally confused and fall into criminal behavior, though they would not admit it to be such. On the contrary, they often think that they did something to benefit a particular person or even humanity.¹⁵ It is striking that journalists who write about such misdeeds often describe them as 'devilish.' For example, the two elderly sisters who exorcised the lady of 66 until she

died were more than once characterized as 'die teuflichen Schwestern' just as their homicide was called 'teuflisch.' We are confronted here with the relative nature of what people experience as good or evil.

Also in the 90s a number of fatal exorcisms took place. In 1993, for example, two fortune-tellers in Spain who tried to exorcise a ten-year-old girl manhandled her in such a way that she died of her injuries (*VPRO-Gids* d.d. 19 May 1993). And in 1995 a child died in Canada after her grandmother had poured water in her throat in order to cast out the Devil who possessed her (*VPRO-Gids* d.d. 16 December 1995).¹⁶

The people who start an exorcism do not intend to kill a possessed person. On the contrary, they want to deliver him or her from tormenting spirits. However, if these demons do not go away, the exorcists sometimes intensify their healing efforts in such a way that the possessed succumbs. In the beginning they still distinguish between the possessed and his or her possessors, but as the ritual goes on because the demons will not leave the distinction may become sometimes so vague that the exorcists start thinking that the possessed *is* the Devil in person who must be destroyed. This dramatic development typically occurs when laymen undertake deliverance 'rituals' (*vide* the case of Magdalena Kohler). There exists smooth transition to the cases I shall treat now.¹⁷

'Devil's Murder'

Characteristic of this kind of reli-murder is that the victim is perceived not as possessed by the Devil but as the Devil in person. In the eyes of the murderers their victim is not somebody who suffers from demonic powers who took possession of his or her body, but is Satan himself whom they can expel only by radically destroying him. Sometimes, but not always, this destruction is preceded by a kind of exorcism. During this century several spectacular 'Devil's murders' took place in the Netherlands. The most sensational Dutch cases occurred in the village of Appelteren (1900), at sea aboard a lugger from Katwijk (1915), and in Weverwijk, a small hamlet near Meerkerk (1944).¹⁸ Since they form prototypical cases I will briefly sketch each of them here.¹⁹

On the night of 2 to 3 February 1900, the ultra-orthodox Calvinist farmer Mettinus Scherff (also called Marius) smashed – in his farm-house and whilst his wife, five children, maidservant, and the girls Mina en Emma Levoir were present – the skull of his Roman Catholic farmhand Piet with a blowpipe because he thought him to be the Devil himself.²⁰ After this Marius fancied that he was the returned Jesus Christ, and he and his followers expected the coming of the millennium. Preceding the event various things had happened, for example, an effort of Marius to deliver Emma Levoir from dark forces. During this exorcism he ordered his servant

to hold the chamberpot in order that Emma could spit the Devil into it. Marius then screwed up her eyes, hit her in the face, and asked: 'Do you feel that?' She answered: 'No.' What happened afterwards, she does not remember very well. She saw how Piet fell down, 'hit by God's hand.' Then the Devil came out of her mouth and eyes. She saw flames and heard roaring. She thinks that the Devil came out of her and took possession of Piet. At that moment she felt enlightened. She remembers how the slain body lay upon the floor and how it was treaded upon and beaten by Marius and the others... She also saw how Marius trampled on the corpse's chest till blood was flowing out of it. Afterwards she was very happy just like all the others who were present. She felt so well, so very well, for they had conquered the Devil. And they sang: Blessed be the Lord, the Devil has been slain! (Ruysch 1900:89).

The participants were never brought to court and sentenced. Though this case differs in several respects from the one in Velp I dealt with above, there is a remarkable resemblance.²¹ In both cases the reli-delinquents started with an effort to cast out demons or the Devil but later grew convinced that the Prince of Darkness had materialized in a human being.²²

Fifteen years after the reli-murder in Appelteren, the crew of the saillugger KW 171 from Katwijk literally and figuratively went adrift when an ultra-orthodox Calvinist sailor claimed that the world had ended. After having several

visions, for example, of the New Jerusalem, he thought to recognize Satan in one of the crew members and ordered his death, whereupon the unlucky man was killed and thrown overboard. The next day the sailor and a companion cleft the skull of another hand because he also was considered to be a devil. Finally, a third devil was discovered aboard the lugger and also killed in a horrific way. After these murders the sailor ordered them to throw everything overboard since the crew needed nothing anymore. After the remaining fishermen had unrigged the ship, they lay down hoping soon to be in heaven, where they thought their fellow humans would already be. However, the rudderless wreck was noticed by the crew of a Norwegian merchantman who took the exhausted fishermen aboard and brought them to Grimsby. In this case also no prosecution followed because the men were deemed to be mentally incompetent when the killings took place.

In 1944 another sensational reli-murder occurred in the Netherlands, this time in an ultra-orthodox Calvinist peasant family consisting of a father, mother, three daughters, and six sons living in a hamlet near Meerkerk. Religion and especially the question whether one belonged to God's chosen few formed the pivot on which everything hinged in this family. At the beginning of 1944 one of the sons was troubled by an unprecedented test of faith that lasted for hours and ended with prophecies. The end of the world was near, Satan who went roaring around would be crushed, Jesus would appear on the clouds, and the Kingdom of the Lord would come down to earth. Except for one son, everyone believed what the anguished man predicted. Hereafter life on the farm took an exceptional turn. The family neglected normal daily chores, hardly ate or drank any longer, stopped the clocks, and instead of sleeping sung and prayed. At a certain moment one of the family members came to the conclusion that the unbeliever in their midst was the Devil in person and that he had to be destroyed in order to speed up the coming of the Lord's Kingdom. Thereupon the man was killed in a horrendous way by his next of kin.²³ Again no prosecution followed because of the supposed mental incompetence of the actors.

Striking in this and similar cases²⁴ is that people imagine that someone is a devil or even Satan himself and that his destruction is a *conditio sine qua non* for deliverance from evil and a quiet life in this world or a new one to come. In the other two subtypes this idea is lacking. There seems to be no final reckoning with the Prince of Darkness and his accomplices, or at best a temporary one, and that is exactly what distinguishes these subtypes from the one I deal with in this section. Although the result in each case is the same, that is, the death of human beings, the ideas and motives which lead to it are different. However, in each case the deeds originate from the same source, namely a firm belief – well-founded in the Bible and time and time again confirmed by theologians – in the existence of the Devil and of his being active – directly or indirectly – in this world. That the number of Christians who through that imagery become murderous has drastically diminished does not mean that this belief does not influence people any longer such that they kill innocent others. This became evident, for instance, in a poignant way in December 1994 when Margrit Müller (43) during an early mass at the St. Mary Church in Hamburg smashed the skull of Hedwig Buhr (72), whom she perceived to be a devilish competitor for a seat ('Sie war des Satans – sie sass auf meinem Platz' [*Bild* d.d. 15 December 1994]), with an axe. Since this case has different aspects that are important for developing deeper insight into the occurrence of 'Devil's murders,' I will sketch them here. Although Margrit Müller was originally Protestant, she made a pilgrimage to Lourdes with her sick mother three times. – In vain, for the old woman died in 1979. After that Margrit was not only seriously troubled by hallucinations, but also started hearing voices. This condition became worse after her relation with an ultra-orthodox Catholic man suddenly came to an end. Next to words of consolation she also got threats from what she called the 'Lourdes-Sau' ('Lourdes sow') or sexually perverted 'Satansnutte' ('Satan's whore'). Her skin would be ripped off and given as food to all kinds of carnivorous birds. Neither praying nor stays in clinics brought relief. Also her entry into the Roman Catholic Church did not

silence the voices of the 'Lourdes-Sau' or the 'Satansnutte.' When she then got the message that she still had one task to accomplish, she decided to dispatch a Roman Catholic. She announced her mission in several letters, but in vain, for no one paid any attention to her horrific warnings (cf. *Stern* no. 28 1995). The specialists who treated Margrit Müller after her lugubrious homicide called her psychotic as seems to be the custom in cases like this. Earlier on I remarked that such a label can seriously impede better insight into the logic on which these cases are based and their origin in the Bible and theological treatises. In my conclusion I will come back to this case.

A striking phenomenon in the publications about 'Devil's murder' is that they are very often represented as a ritual offering or a sacrificial killing (cf., for example, Schotman 1946:34 and Van Rooy 1949:24), whilst the perpetrators almost never use that terminology. This does not mean, however, that it would be impossible to interpret the murders as sacrifices. I have done so at an earlier occasion (Verrips 1987), when – referring to Hubert & Mauss' [1898] famous theory on the nature and function of sacrifice – I tried to answer the question whether these murders would serve to reach a state of sacredness *or* to get rid of something polluting? I had to conclude that they served both these purposes, and that the pollution one wanted to get rid of had to do with sexuality experienced as sinful.²⁵

Meanwhile, several reli-offenses took place that undoubtedly were motivated by a desire to make a sacrifice (in the sense of an offering to God).

The Killing of Others as Sacrifice

The 'Abraham's Sacrifice'

The Bible (especially the Old Testament) teems with passages about the sacrifice of human beings, for example, small children (cf. Dronkert 1955). Almost without exception it concerns acts committed by heathen idolaters that are disliked by the Lord and therefore sharply condemned. However, there happen to be cases where that condemnation does not occur. The best known example is Abraham who got the

order from above to sacrifice his son Isaac, an order that was cancelled at the last moment. Time and time again this biblical story has inspired for committing fatal crimes, especially killing one's children, which I therefore call 'Abraham's sacrifices.'²⁶ In the works of Ideler one finds several of these tragic offenses described. An example:

In the county of Norfolk a tanner murdered his four children, the eldest only being four years of age. Three of them were killed by smashing their skull with a hammer, whilst the youngest, a little girl of ten weeks, was kept so long under water till she drowned. The tanner was convinced that in committing this heinous crime he served the Lord and he called the killing of his offspring an ABRAHAM's *sacrifice* (1851:211).

This type of crime also occurred in the Netherlands. A dramatic case is reported for Born in the province of Limburg. In 1917 a Roman Catholic woman there killed five of her seven children and severely wounded the other two as well as her husband. About the background of this stupefying act Van der Scheer says the following:

Zu Hause angelangt, kam ihr beim Kartoffelschälen – es war zur Zeit der Hochmesse – plötzlich die *Eingebung*, daß sie am Mittwoch 8 Personen töten müsse und daß damit gemeint seien ihr Mann und 7 Kinder. Sie widersetzte sich mit aller ihrer Kraft dieser Eingebung, um sich über das Schreckliche dieses innern Befehles, den sie als von Gott herrührend und vom dem Schutzengel als eingegeben betrachtete, hinwegzusetzen. Sie bat, dies Opfer nicht von ihr zu verlangen. Jedoch erinnerte sie sich, daß der Pastor vor einigen Wochen gepredigt hatte, daß jemand, der eine große Übeltat gegen seinen Willen begehe, keine Todsünde tue, und ferner suchte sie sich mit dem furchtbaren Gedanken dadurch zu versöhnen, daß sie an Abrahams Opfer dachte (1917:204).

What is striking in this case is that it concerns a woman who identified with a man, that is, Abraham. However, this is no unique phenomenon as we can learn, for example, from a case

that occurred a few years later in a Calvinist milieu in the Veluwe, an orthodox region in the province of Gelderland. Though there are no explicit references to Abraham's sacrifice in this case and other traits appear that are lacking in the Born case, here we also meet a woman who 'bended' her gender and insisted – luckily in vain – upon sacrificing two children.²⁷

Though I have looked for other examples of Abraham's sacrifices after the tragic incident in Born, I found none between 1917 and 1993, when a 42-year-old man from Hoek in the province of Zeeland was sentenced to six years of imprisonment for killing 'on purpose, with malice aforethought, and after calm deliberation' his two children. Before the court he asserted that he had received an order from the Lord to 'let them fall asleep' (*NRC HB* d.d. 31 July 1993). There are indications (for instance, passages in his farewell letter) that the father who in March 1996 in Assen (capital of the province of Drenthe) killed his three children and then committed suicide also acted on order of the Lord (*NRC HB* d.d. 20 March 1996). In any case together with his children he wanted to be reunited with his deceased wife whom he thought to be in heaven. The two cases mentioned belong to a series of childkillings in the Netherlands, which started in 1988 and of which five occurred in 1996. It would be worthwhile to find out if the killers in the other cases also got orders from the Lord or similar metaphysical instructions. One of the main motives for the killing of one's own children seems to be the desire to safeguard them against evil in this world, that cesspit of vice and impurity, and to let them go as pure as possible to heaven. Did not Jesus say, 'Let the children come to me?'²⁸

Walter Schubart distinguishes four kinds of 'aberration and degeneration' of eroticism and religion, i.e. jealousy and fanaticism, erotic and religious nihilism, masochism, and sadism. In the context of this essay what he says about religious masochism is particularly relevant. In case of religion it may happen, Schubart argues, that an adoring love leads to an enormous aggrandizement of the adored one, i.e. God, on the one hand and an effacement of one's self on the other. And this may be a source of masochism or 'a form of degeneration of the adoring

love for God' (1941:172). In the last resort this can imply self-destruction or suicide. 'In religion the masochistic urge to self-destruction often disguises itself as a desire to mortal martyrdom' (ibid.:173). We are confronted here with an extreme kind of mystic masochism that, according to Schubart, is one source of making sacrifices.

And because human beings are the greatest that man can sacrifice, the masochistic character sanctifies human sacrifice as the worthiest form of worshipping God. He sacrifices human beings whom he loves and whose dying causes the contraction of his heart. Of the original emotional attitude of the sacrificer, of the dismaying experience of one's own paltriness, of the trembling before the face of the Lord, the patriarch Abraham is the classical example. A real sacrifice still implies that we love what we sacrifice and that we sacrifice exactly that which we by preference would most like to keep (read: our neighbour, our child, ourselves) (ibid.:175).²⁹

This brings me to the subtype of reli-criminality that I want to deal with now.

'The Crucifixion'

The general category 'killing a human being as a sacrifice' also includes another type of reli-murder, namely the 'crucifixion.' Here killing someone and committing suicide as a kind of offering are mixed up in a complex way. However, in killing and suicide Jesus' death on the cross functions as the 'model for.' In order to avoid making matters too complicated I will not deal here with cases of pure self-crucifixion, which occurred now and then in the last two centuries, but concentrate on what could be termed 'crucifixion in union.'³⁰ In such a case a man or woman imagines that he or she is Jesus Christ and succeeds in convincing his or her followers to nail him or her to a cross. The imitation of the suffering of Christ is pushed to the bitter end, so to speak.

An early case of this type of reli-delinquency took place in March 1823 in Wildenspuh (Switzerland). The main actress was the fanatical farmer's daughter Margaretha Peter. Together with a number of kindred spirits she had gath-

ered in her parental home, she fought against devils and demons who had taken possession of her brother and sister. After the latter had been beaten to death at her instigation Margaretha requested her followers to crucify her first and to smash her skull afterwards in the idle hope – shared by her helpers – that she would be resurrected soon after (cf. Ideler 1851:205 – 10).³¹

An exceptional case I briefly want to mention here occurred in 1959 in Frankfurt. There the 64 year old shoemaker George Krausert, self-appointed leader of a small sect of religious fanatics who strongly identified with Jesus, committed suicide by hanging himself in order ‘to give the world back its senses.’ Shortly after a few of his disciples crucified his body to the wall of his sitting room.³² Strictly speaking this case does not fit here, because Krausert’s crucifixion took place only after he died, but it was so evidently inspired by the biblical model that I categorize it as ‘crucifixion.’ That the frequency of this kind of delict has been small in the last two centuries I find less important than the fact that it occurred at all. For its occurrence once again demonstrates that particular passages from the Bible may orient certain people in such a way that they become a danger to themselves and to people around them.³³ It concerns atrocious examples

von der Suggestivkraft, die manche Partien des Alten und Neuen Testaments, besonders die Opferung Isaaks und der Sühnetod Christi auf empfängliche, vielfach pathologische Naturen auszuüben vermögen (Hellwig 1908a:186/87).

Because it would make my essay too long I cannot deal here with a type of murder that shows a remarkable family resemblance to the (sub)genres presented so far. I mean the lethal crimes evidently influenced or inspired by modern mythological discourses such as novels and movies. Like the ‘palaeo-mythologically’ inspired crimes, the ‘neo-mythological’ ones are indeed few, but they nevertheless occur with a certain regularity. It is striking that the ‘disorienting’ effect or lethal implication of old myths is usually underexposed whilst that of the new ones is greatly exaggerated (cf. Verrips 1995).

Concluding Remarks

In this contribution I have tried to present a tentative typology of reli-murders in the last two centuries in Europe and the USA. The creation of order in phenomena that at first sight make a puzzling and chaotic impression is a first step on the road toward a deeper understanding. A number of types and subtypes can be distinguished. One of the main distinguishing criteria is the biblical passages on which the killers based their thought and action, especially those dealing with the casting out or destruction of demons, devils, and Satan on the one hand and Abraham’s sacrifice and Jesus’ suffering and death at the cross on the other, often but not always in combination with eschatological sections. Elsewhere I argue (Verrips 1987) that the pathological use of biblical stories can be explained at least partly as a consequence of tremendous problems (especially in the realm of sexuality), that certain people are confronted with owing to their interpretation of other parts of the Bible or theological treatises. I will come back to this shortly. Here we encounter a shady side of Christianity that is too often neglected. It turns out to be a double-edged sword in the sense that it propagates nonviolence, but may stimulate certain people under specific circumstances to do exactly the opposite. The perpetrators I deal with did not want to do evil but wanted instead to do good. But in this regard there exists a difference between ‘exorcism murders’ and ‘Devil’s murders.’ The former are a tragic result of a derailed ritual begun to end the suffering of an individual, whilst the latter concern crimes committed on behalf of mankind, for after crushing the Devil the Kingdom of the Lord is expected to come down to earth. A similar difference can be noticed between the ‘Abraham’s sacrifice’ (as well as the ‘sacrifice to Satan’) and the ‘crucifixion,’ for the former also is an individual affair and the latter is for the benefit of humanity.

Moreover, it is striking that ‘exorcism murders’ generally take a less gruesome turn than ‘Devil’s murders.’ In the first case the killings are seldom followed by efforts of the killers to radically destroy their victims. In order to better understand this conspicuous difference it

seems important to note that 'exorcism murders' usually occur in Roman Catholic and Anglican circles, where rituals of deliverance are officially accepted, and that 'Devil's murders' are generally committed by ultra-orthodox Protestants, who are unfamiliar with these rituals. While Roman Catholics and Anglicans are taught that the Devil after having manifested himself in someone can be cast out, ultra-orthodox Protestants cannot resort to such a practice, for it is officially rejected. Is it possible for the former to 'domesticate' Satan and his henchmen, though this may get out of control, whereas the latter lack this option altogether and are left with little else but prayer and, if this does not work, waging a life-and-death struggle in order to literally destroy him. It seems that the relation between the divine status claimed by ultra-orthodox Protestant perpetrators of 'Devil's murders' and their horrendous crimes owes to their not being raised in a theological tradition that accepts exorcism. However, being socialized in such a tradition does not guarantee that excesses will not occur.

I think that the inability of Protestants to exorcise has to do with their conception of the relation between body and mind (spirit, soul) as it developed during and after the Reformation. Whilst Catholics acknowledged that alongside the spiritual the corporal was important in the religious realm, Protestants developed the view that the spirit dominates and the body serves. Catholics somatized the spiritual, and Protestants desomatized it (cf. Roper 1994:177).³⁴ According to Catholic doctrines the body, being the temple of the Holy Ghost, may and must be purified of pollution. According to orthodox Protestant doctrines it cannot be cleansed of evil (especially sexual lust). A willing spirit is often kept prisoner in bad, devilish flesh.³⁵ Because of the subordination of the body to the mind and the idea that the former is the source of drives and desires that are not bad in themselves but may be used in sinful ways, orthodox Protestants in default of a ritual able to clean the body of polluting evil are left with a problem. They can only *think* the body pure, for example, by projecting the sinfulness of their own onto another already killed or about to be killed and by expecting that they will be purified by the blood

of this victim. Most Christians do this by thinking of Jesus and his grace-bringing death on the cross, but some lost souls do not and instead perceive the Devil in someone else whom they literally try to shatter. To kill the Devil in the shape of another person, who represents a sinful part of the self, can thus be seen as a sacrifice in order to get rid of evil radically and so to become a human being equalling God.³⁶ One may think that the case of Margrit Müller's 'Devil's murder' contradicts my argument, for as a Catholic she did not take resort to exorcism, but instead cleft – just like other Protestant killers of the Devil – the skull of somebody in whom she saw a kind of devil. However, if one realizes that Müller was raised a Protestant and only later converted to Roman Catholicism, her horrific crime becomes more understandable.³⁷ She did what one might expect of a Protestant who became totally possessed by his religion.

More abstractly, one could say that what is called 'devilish' is a metaphor for everything in an individual that is 'chaotic,' 'disturbing,' 'disorderly,' 'uncivilized,' 'wild,' in short his or her 'shady other side' that cannot be denied but has to be suppressed or even to be cast out in the interest of the continuation of the established order. As I point out, unlike Catholics orthodox Protestants subordinate the corporeal to the spiritual and ignore the possibility that devils and demons may take temporary possession of someone's body and so reject exorcism rituals. For that reason they do not know how to handle manifestations of this shady other side or puzzling otherness which, if not recognized as an essential part of the self, is often projected – as Lacan remarks – on someone else who then becomes an object of aggression (cf. Shapiro 1995:112). Tolerance implies the acceptance, at least to a certain degree, of what is 'disorderly,' 'different' or 'devilish' in one's own or another person's body, society and culture. And this is only possible if one is prepared to recognize and acknowledge what is 'disorderly,' 'different' or 'devilish' within one's own self. When Ter Borg states that the violence Christians may commit is a result of their prohibitions with regard to physical violence in general and violent sacrifice in particular, I cannot say this is completely

irrelevant and incorrect. However, against the background of the material presented in this paper I think that his view is simplistic. For my argument clearly demonstrates that between these prohibitions and their dreadful 'trance-gressions' an intricate complex of diverse social and psychic processes is hidden that remains absolutely obscure if one accepts Ter Borg's Girardian viewpoint. In order to understand this complex one has to consider all sorts of biblical representations, theological doctrines, and religious rites based on them, as well as how this ensemble under specific conditions may be pathologically interpreted and violently put into practice. Studying the extreme cases presented here in which people evidently became possessed by their own religious beliefs and lost their respect for the physical integrity of others on whom they had projected their own unbearable and confusing otherness can be useful for developing deeper insights in the commission of violence by believers in palaeo- or neo-mythological stories. If these extreme cases deter, they probably do so not only because they are horrific but also because they fix our thoughts on the frailty of the civilized husk covering our wild core. 'We seem to move on a thin crust which may at any moment be rent by the subterranean forces slumbering below' (Frazer 1922:36).

Notes

1. I am grateful to Rod Aya for editing this article.
2. A recent example of such a study is the rather cynical one by the German theologian-sociologist Horst Herrmann, *Passion der Grausamkeit* (1994).
3. Because it would take too much space I will not deal in this paper with cases in which the leaders of religious groups stimulate their followers to: (a) mutilate their own bodies and the bodies of their children (as the leaders of the Russian Khlysty and Skoptzy did), (b) commit suicide (as Jim Jones the founder of Jonestown did in 1978, Luc Jouret of the Order of the Temple of the Sun did in 1994 and 1995, and as Marshall Applewhite of the cybersect Heaven's Gate did in 1997), and (c) to kill non-sect members (as Shoko Asahara the spiritual leader of the Aum Shinrikyo or Seekers of the Truth did in 1995). Strictly speaking, only the last phenomenon (c) falls in the general category of reli-murders. However, it

is difficult to be strict, for in cases that at first sight appear to be religiously inspired collective suicides, 'ritual' murdering might still be involved (as is said of Luc Jouret's sect).

4. That one has to be very careful about calling the murderous activities of Satanists as ritual sacrifices can be illustrated by the case of Sandro Beyer. In 1993 this boy from Sondershausen (Thüringen) was killed by three members of a club of Satanists at a remote spot in a forest where they used to gather in order to perform particular rites. In the media this crime was almost immediately represented as a horrific example of a satanist sacrifice. However, convincing evidence that Sandro Beyer was really sacrificed to the Devil in the way sometimes described in satanist publications could not be found. There is every indication that the three boys who killed Sandro just wanted to get rid of him because he became too exacting and had threatened to tell tales about their satanic rites in the forest (cf. *Stern* d.d. 19 May 1993 and *Der Spiegel* d.d. 17 May 1993). Thus we are confronted here with a case of homicide that could not be properly understood without paying attention to satanism, but that nevertheless cannot count as a 'sacrifice to Satan.'
5. The Bible teems with passages in which sorcery is strongly forbidden (*vide*, for example, De Jong 1959:84). So one can read in *Exodus* (22:18): 'You shall not permit a sorceress to live,' and in *Revelation* (21:8): 'But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.' See for a connection between sorcery and the Devil *Acts* (13:6 ff.).
6. In connection with the belief in witches and witchcraft I want to note the existence, especially in Great Britain, of generally small groups of people who consider themselves to be witches (cf., for instance, Luhrmann 1989 and Greenwood 1995).
7. For the second half of the 19th century several cases are known in which putative 'witches' were threatened with death and sometimes severely ill-treated. In the *Provinciale Drentsche & Asser Courant* d.d. 21 March 1873 one could, for instance, read: 'A family in Leksmond thought that their daughter was bewitched. Last Thursday a 30-year-old woman who was accused of the crime was called to the house. There was a great fire burning with a kettle hanging above it full of boiling water. She was summoned to bless the daughter or to lift her bewitchment. When the accused said that she did not have the power to do this, five persons attacked her and threatened to burn her in the kettle with boiling water. She was manhandled and only after she had screamed for some time that she was murdered the door was opened. The ill-treated [woman] walked bleeding all over to the mayor.' I am grateful to

Willem de Blécourt who drew my attention to this case.

8. See, for a splendid literary evocation of this type of murder, Konrad (1986), who by the way does not use the term 'witch.' Some years ago the British Anglican priest Anthony Kennedy made a splash by proposing to burn female priests as witches because they were trying to assume power that did not belong to them (cf. *Trouw* d.d. 10 March 1994).
9. But see the exceptional case of Gottlieb Dittus (Blumhardt 1972).
10. A remarkable case regarding a priest who was attacked and beaten bloody by the members of a particular sect who wanted to deliver him from the devil who allegedly took possession of him, occurred in 1926 in Bombon (France). However, the victim did not die (cf. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant Ochtend- en Avondblad* d.d. 6 January 1926).
11. See for an extensive description of this case Naegeli-Osjord (1982:155–70).
12. The expression 'ritual murder' which occurs in almost all the newspaper reports and also a few times in this paper, is interesting. The adjective 'ritual' evokes special associations, for instance, with human sacrifices as they were supposedly made by 'primitive' or 'heathen' peoples. Certain reports on the Velp case make explicit reference to 'sacrifice' (cf. *Panorama* d.d. 21–29 July 1988). It is striking that one did not represent the offenders as, for example, wild animals, but rather as 'wild,' 'uncivilized,' 'unchristian' humans. This is, I think, a consequence of the fact that when killing the baby they had indulged in a series of acts that were clearly inspired by their religious ideas. If this is not the case one often falls back on comparisons with animals devoid of reason and full of irrational impulses.
13. Besides a series of newspaper articles and a few reports in periodicals (cf. *Nieuwe Revu* d.d. 4–11 August 1988 and *Panorama* July 1988) I know of only one article that puts this case in a wider historical context in order to understand it better (see Van Belzen 1988).
14. I want to emphasize that I do not consider psychiatric diagnoses to be insignificant for gaining insight in the kind of cases presented. But I want to make clear that these diagnoses tend to be one-sided and incomplete.
15. The idea that one does something to please God comes clearly to the fore when a child dies because its parents refuse medical treatment on religious grounds. That they may be brought before court and accused of homicide, as sometimes happens, is simply inconceivable to them. On 14 October 1990 BBC 1 broadcasted a very interesting documentary on such a case in the program *Heart of the Matter*.
16. A similar case occurred among Muslims in July 1994 at Lille, where a 19-year-old girl who was said to be possessed by the Devil expired after an imam had tried to cast him out by forcing her to drink five liters of water in a short time. In the Netherlands in 1991 a man and three women were arrested because they had used rough methods to deliver two children – a son and a daughter of one of the women – from devils who had possessed them. For weeks on end the blindfolded boy was confined to a small space and 'treated' with hot irons and burning cigarettes. One of the women, a professional physician, was supposed to make sure that the regular use of physical violence did not result in the death of the victim (cf. *NRC HB* d.d. 8 June 1991). In 1994 the police of Tubbergen took three members of a religious foundation (the Padre Pio Stichting) into custody because they were suspected of having physically ill-treated a psychiatric patient during an exorcism ritual by making incisions in both her ears and by beating her black and blue (cf. *NRC HB* d.d. 7 October 1994, 11 November 1994, and 29 November 1994).
17. Due to lack of information it is sometimes difficult to distinguish an 'exorcism murder' from a 'Devil's murder.' One of them occurred, for example, in 1895 in Akersloot (the Netherlands), where a shoemaker was arrested and put into an asylum because he believed that his wife was possessed by the Devil and had therefore beaten her almost to death (cf. *Provinciale Drentsche & Asser Courant* d.d. 2 August 1895). It is impossible to find out whether exorcism was involved.
18. See for similar cases outside the Netherlands Ideler (1851:209–10) and Hellwig (1908c:378–79).
19. On each of the three cases a modest amount of literature exists. The psychiatrist Tolsma (1945) dealt with the reli-murder in the Weverwijk in his dissertation (1945). He refers to the two other cases without treating them extensively (ibid.:118–19). On the 'lubber-murders' of 1915 the physician and writer Schotman published a short story (1941) and an epic poem (1946). Van der Scheer (1917), Jelgersma (1917) and Carp (1941) refer to it. The case in Appeltern is described by Ruysch (1900) and Bouman (1901, 1906), who both were acquainted with the culprits. All other publications on this case are based on their work, for example, Jelgersma (1917), Kempe (1938), Carp (1941), Tolsma (1945), Van Rooy (1949), Zaal (1972), and Van Straten (1990). See for articles in which the three cases are analyzed in relation to each other Nagel (1960), Verrips (1987), and Van Belzen (1988). Recently Van Belzen (1996) used the case of Appeltern to show the completely different reactions to it of psychiatrists and theologians.
20. Possibly the blowpipe was not coincidental since one of the means used to cast out devils is to 'blow' the eyes and mouth of the possessed (Van Dam 1973:122).
21. For instance, an important difference is that the offenders in the case occurring in Velp were not

- ultra-orthodox Calvinists but people who believed in a particular mixture of beliefs coming from both the Bible and spiritualistic literature. Another difference is that they did not believe that the coming of the Kingdom of God was near and could be speeded up by destroying Satan. In fact everything started with an effort to cast out demons who were supposed to have taken possession of one of them. Finally there are no indications that someone before or after the killing of the baby believed that he or she was the Lord or Jesus Christ. However, they claimed to have had several visions of the latter during their efforts to exorcise the baby.
22. Other important resemblances are, for example, the following: a) the fact that the offenders kept themselves busy for more than 48 hours with singing, dancing, and praying without sleeping, eating, or drinking in order to cast the demons out and b) (probably as a consequence) the appearance of all sorts of hallucinations (some of them with an undeniably sexual character).
 23. A striking trait of many reli-murders is that, just as in the case of the *crime passionnel* (cf. Philips 1938), there is a close connection between the killers and the killed. Often it concerns close relatives or, if not, people who belong to close-knit groups in which the use of a kinship idiom is common. This is an intriguing phenomenon that begs for further research.
 24. A case which closely resembles the one dealt with is that of father and son Alexander. They were Germans who went to the Canary Islands and in 1970 killed three members of their family in a really gruesome way because they thought them to be instruments of the Devil. Father Alexander, a member of an extreme religious society founded in the 19th century by a certain Jacob Lorber, called his son immediately after he was born a prophet of the Lord whom one had to obey in each and every respect. When the adolescent boy wanted to have sex with his mother and older sister this was therefore permitted. As his younger twin sisters talked about this with others the police developed an interest in the family, reason why father Alexander decided to emigrate to Santa Cruz on Tenerife, where he and his family lived in retirement. On 22 December 1970 father and son Alexander decided, that Mrs Alexander and her two daughters whom they perceived as 'unclean' had to be killed for the sake of a purification deemed necessary by both. And so happened. As Frank murdered his mother and two sisters and awfully maimed their bodies, his father was playing the organ and singing hymns. Especially the breasts and private parts of the victims were the direct objects of his bloody attacks. After their arrest the evildoers kept saying that they had indulged in 'a purification act' at a sacred moment in time (cf. Wilson 1988:396 ff.; Nash 1992:14/15). An equally macabre case about which I could not find much material occurred at the end of the eighties in Amsterdam. A man murdered his pregnant wife, took the baby out of her belly and killed it because he fancied that it was possessed by the Devil (cf. *Parool* d.d. 21 April 1990). Compare the case of the American Sanders, the leader of a sect, who together with a few disciples murdered a policeman in whom he had recognized the Devil in person (Wilson & Seaman 1989:294/95).
 25. I think that the theory Bataille developed on the track of Hubert and Mauss with regard to transgressive acts as sacrifices could also provide some clarification here. For according to him these acts can be seen as offerings that serve to lead the sacrificers out of this world of the rational, the homogeneous, and the discontinuous into a completely different world where the earthly discontinuity does not exist and one enjoys absolute sovereignty and in a sense equals God.
 26. Ger Verrips (1990:24) suggests that the reli-murder in Weverwijk, which I consider to be a clear example of a 'Devil's murder,' might be inspired by the biblical story about Abraham's sacrifice. This is unacceptable, for no data support it.
 27. If one interprets the story of Abraham's sacrifice as one about the relation between God and believers independently of sex and gender, the identification becomes less striking.
 28. Remarkable in the media reports is that killing one's own children and then committing suicide is often attributed to relational problems with a partner. I do not think that this is always an incorrect diagnosis, but it can easily divert attention from other possible causes, for example, the pathological elaboration of particular religious beliefs.
 29. When Schubart describes and analyses religious sadism, that is, a cruel desire to devour, he does not deal with cases of reli-murder, although this would have been to the point. He talks instead about slaughtering humans who are perceived as embodiments of God and killing God himself, a kind of sacred sex killing, which is committed mainly by 'wild' people, i.e., women!
 30. See for an exceptional case of self-crucifixion Ideler (1851:202 ff.).
 31. See for contemporary documentation on this spectacular case *Archiv für Kriminal-Anthropologie und Kriminalistik* (1904 15:59).
 32. The data on this case come from a newspaper report d.d. 29 October 1959. Unfortunately I forgot to note which newspaper published it.
 33. See in this connection Bordewijk's fantastic story *In plenitudine Christi* (1981:64–68) about the members of a peasant family who became mesmerized by the assertion of a stranger that the Devil had returned to earth in the shape of their servant, and decided to crucify the poor man. This story, which is probably based on the Appeltorn affair, is remarkable because it contains the ingredients of different types of reli-murders.

34. This difference is splendidly expressed in the fact that Catholics worship relics and have no trouble with the representation of the divine and holy in statues, whilst this is completely unacceptable for Protestants.
35. Illustrative examples of people who at a particular moment thought they were possessed by the Devil, while they evidently struggled with sexual problems, are those of Achille, a patient of Janet (1990), and Frank, a client of Tejirian (1990). The first suffered from remorse for adultery and the second feared his own homosexual inclinations.
36. If this view is correct, then it means that in murder cases characterized by a high degree of mutilation one has to think first of a perpetrator with a Protestant background and not a Roman Catholic one.
37. I know that my interpretation of the Müller case does not rest on a firm empirical basis. But there is often not much material available for such cases. And, if it exists, it is rather inaccessible. I would have liked, for instance, to know more about the religious background of father Alexander before he became a member of the Lorber Society. On the basis of the kind of mutilations of the bodies of his wife and two children I would dare to state that he probably was not raised as a Roman Catholic.

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