



### 11 The Cowl Does Not Make the Monk: A Case of Sexual Abuse Committed by a “Bogus Priest” on a Group of Minors

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding how psychological damage to the developmental processes in minors is much more severe when the abuser is a significant figure who is emotionally tied to the victim, especially when the abusers are parents. In this particular instance, the abuser was a bogus priest who, in a sense, was a parental figure. The fact that he was not even a genuine priest served to further amplify the victims' feelings of confusion and betrayal.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the concept that sexual abuse committed by a priest, albeit a bogus one in this case, is just as psychologically damaging to a child as sexual abuse perpetrated by a close family member.

**Introduction:** It seems paradoxical, but the more rational a society becomes, the more its need for spirituality grows. The phenomenon of magical religiosity is not associated with any particular social class, but may be found in all social strata of the population. People often turn in this direction at times when they are unable to face negative life events. Unscrupulous criminals, who take advantage of such weaknesses and problems of others, exploit these characteristics of fragility. The case presented demonstrates this concept.

**The Case:** The subject is a 53-year-old man who is legally declared as blind, and who has various previous convictions for fraud and sexual abuse on minors. He would convince people that he was a Catholic clergyman and organized masses and personal appearances in which messages from God would supposedly come through him. In addition to overseeing two religious centers where he would gather groups of the “faithful” who believed in his visions, he would also make visits to people’s homes in order to pray and perform religious rites, as well as to offer his assistance in order to help them with their various problems.

The case of this “bogus priest” came to attention following new allegations of sexual abuse of five juvenile males; four of them belonging to one family (ages 10, 13, 14, and 17), and the other, their 14-year-old-cousin. The minors belonged to families with a multitude of problems resulting from economic hardship and relational difficulties. They had come to know the “bogus priest” during prayer meetings. When the imposter had learned of the two families’ problems, he began to make “pastoral visits” where he would offer to host the boys in his sanctuary homes during school breaks and the summer holidays. He eventually requested that custody of the boys be given over to him. He reported the families’ difficulties to social services in a manipulative way. He also stated that the boys had been sexually abused and neglected, but some of the investigations into this alleged abuse had brought his true identity to light.

Judicial investigations revealed that the boys had been the objects of sexual abuse at the “priest’s” hands over a period of time. It was found that these episodes had occurred during prayer, at confession, and when receiving spiritual guidance. The victims recounted stories of a well-planned strategy by the abuser. In addition to isolating them from their families and their home environments, the “bogus priest” touched them on their genitals, asked them to perform sexual acts on each other, tried to engage in oral sex with them, masturbated them, showed them pornographic films, and asked them very intimate questions during “phony confessions.” The fake clergyman also gave the boys money in order that they not reveal what had happened. Moreover, he threatened them, saying that if they divulged what had transpired; they would be institutionalized and would lose all contact with their families. In order to prevent the parents from speaking to each other, or with social service representatives, he spoke badly to each one about the others, thereby creating isolation and conflict between the families. After being exposed, the “bogus priest” was arrested and found guilty.

**Conclusions:** The literature, as well as clinical and rehabilitation experience on juvenile victims of sexual abuse, all demonstrate that the psychological damage to developmental processes on minors is much more severe when the abuser is a significant figure who is emotionally tied to the victim, particularly mothers and fathers. For this reason, intrafamilial sexual abuse is particularly serious and harmful to a child. It can be hypothesized that a priest is perceived as a father inasmuch as children have fewer instruments to separate the concept of God the father from a concrete figure who represents him. Therefore, it is probable, that abuse by a priest would result in wounds just as deep as those caused by a family member. In this case; however, the damage is double because the perpetrator in question was not even a real priest. For a long period of time he presented himself as genuine to the children. For this reason it is concluded that beyond the psychic damage caused, the associated feelings of confusion and betrayal are amplified.

**Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse, Bogus Priest, Psychological Damage**