



I2 A Mystic Religious Figure Who Became an Actress—From a Man of God to a Showgirl: A Particular Case of Circumvention of the Mentally Incapable Perpetrated Against a Couple, as Well as Crowds of People

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will more fully appreciate the importance of knowing how to recognize the various signs of circumvention of the mentally incapable and the need to take the necessary steps, both in its prevention and in response to it.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that circumvention of the mentally incapable comes in many forms, some obvious and others not so obvious. New ways to address this phenomenon must be formulated and put into practice.

In Italy the offence of circumvention of the mentally incapable is defined in art. 643 of the Penal Code as follows: “*whoever, to gain profit for himself or others, abuses the needs, passions or inexperience of a minor, or abuses the state of infirmity or psychic deficiency of any person, even not subject to interdiction or declared mentally incapable, and induces this person to accomplish an act that has any harmful judicial consequences on himself or others, is punished ...*”

Victims of such crimes are people who normally conduct a normal, well-adapted existence, but who may be affected by some fragility, unexpressed desires that have not been fulfilled, traumas, unresolved problems that have not been processed, or even psychopathologic traits, characterized by a tendency for dependency, low self-esteem, or a highly suggestible personality. An examination of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim in these types of crimes is essential during the related clinical and legal investigations.

The Case: In a rural area in southern Italy, where daily fears and hopes for the future seek an ear and reassurance against the background of the anguish of their daily life, Mr. B. and Mrs. D. came to this study’s attention, bound by a marriage that was over in all but name. They had been selected by a self-proclaimed seer and mystic as the “adepts and beneficiaries” of his “powers.”

The circumstances of “P. the mystic” are those of the last born of a large family living on a single salary, a minor and self-proclaimed seer, who over time built up a reputation for monthly apparitions of Our Lady, attracting crowds of the faithful and huge donations for fantastic projects aimed at saving the world. He came to know the above-mentioned couple and promised intercession with God to allow them to create a family and receive the blessing of children.

“P. the mystic” gained the trust of both, and love of both at different times, sometimes purely carnal, also in a homosexual relationship, and at others involving profound submission, obedience to making love to the person indicated, and total credulousness, as when instructed to believe in a pregnancy in the man. The financial (about two million euro) and emotional costs (two relationships outside marriage for each of them), presented as the means to happiness, mark an episode that is in its own way unique, exceptional, and terrible, as curious as it is unlikely, unhappy and distressing for the parties.

Manipulations and suggestions ensnared them. Data on reality were freely interpreted in a mystic-grandiose manner in a type of delirious trance. True events were afforded the same credibility as parables or prophecies. The absolute remission to the “divine will” appears more as the expectation of a Messianic destiny to which fears and responsibilities are continually subordinated than as a true, aware act of faith.

Conclusions: In this view of the world, often driven by a preponderant belief in magic that is seen as a form of religion, it is reasonable to suppose that the suggestions insinuated could have achieved the dual function of reassurance and credibility.¹ It is well known that religions in general, to respond to these needs and be presented as meaningful systems, are proposed as communication systems built on narratives, social forms, and actions.^{2,3} In particular, by offering shared beliefs, stories, and meanings, religions contribute to confer order to social reality, proposing various forms of “communicative contract,”^{and} how the destinies of such proposals accept them opens up ample scenarios offering different possibilities and positions.^{4,5}

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Crime, Forensic Evaluation, Circumvention