

FORMS OF ABUSE IN THE CULT “ORIZZONTI NUOVI”: A SURVEY ON THE INTERNAL SOURCES

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Summary

The following survey has been brought forth through the analysis of the original documents produced by the association Orizzonti Nuovi, and represents a method of research that enables the researcher to the knowledge of the interrelations in pseudo-religious groups in the presence of true and authentic sources. The objective is the verification of violent behaviours such as physical, psychological, sexual and economics abuse.

The association Orizzonti Nuovi [it scattered after its founder was involved in judicial events] was a schismatic group of the Children of God/The Family, founded in 1980-81 in Italy by Domenico Di Maio, during the scattering of the Children of God.

Community life absorbs every moment of an adult and a child life and has shown to be particularly abusive and harmful to the psycho-physical integrity of children. Psychological violence is a recurring behaviour. The analysis has shown evidence of: criticism, humiliation and mockery, induction of a sense of guilt, ambiguity in the responsibility of family organisation, deprivation of social relationships (friends and other social environment), deprivation of social ties with the original family (partners, parents, relatives, sons and daughters), denial of the fundamental rights of man (and of the child) coercion, blackmail, threat, induction of fears.

Key Words:

Psychological abuse- mind control- destructive cult

For corrispondence:

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Introduction

This study represents a method of research that enables researchers to acquire knowledge on the dynamics of pseudo-religious groups. It is carried out by analysing the authentic sources of the group, a method which is already acknowledged by sociological research as well as questionnaires, interviews and direct observation.

The study utilises the primary sources of the group Orizzonti Nuovi, written by his founder, Domenico Di Maio, known as *Communications*. They are bound in two different books: “Step by step” and “The New Man”.

The analysis of the documents is one of the tools of social researchers which has many advantages, like for example it isn't reactive, which indicates the spontaneity of the author of speaking about anything or confessing actions which he would normally have censored. The disadvantages can be any form of distortions and incomplete forms, as for example the initial letters at the beginning of people's names and or places, eventually a strategy for concealing their identities. In this case the author is probably trying to bring a certain degree of censorship and it may be possible that the same could be extended to other parts of the document or that there may be other forms of distortion depending on the objectives of the author.

Another form of censorship is the use of a slang unique to the group. This is made clear by the founder when a disciple asks his opinion for reading the *communications* to people outside the group, and he shows his intention of adapting these writings (which are intended only for adherents) by *cleaning* them for non-members and in fact the author answers:

“Concerning this problem I wish to tell you that you could make an effort of cleaning this communications to make them GP [it stands for general public, that means for everybody]... we can't share everything with those that stay outside because even though they may be able to understand mentally, because of their intelligence or experience, they couldn't accept

everything by faith for lack of spiritual maturity” (“Sharing the Blessings” SD 150 par. 68 from “Step by step”)

Despite the above statement it is clear that the author wants to communicate his thought and will and, through his writings, coordinate the internal life of the organisation and even though we may face distortions, false statements or incongruence, we accept that anything that has been written is authentically expressed by him. We also acknowledge that the author controls and directs any bit of information for members and he could conceal or distort any information purposely in view of possible results.

Notwithstanding the limits already mentioned, the analysis of the primary sources is still a very useful tool for understanding the ideology of the group.

Materials and Methods

The sources

The books analysed are “Step by Step” and “The New Man” which were handed personally to me by some ex-members in 2001.

It is a collection of individual texts (called *communications*) each one having: a title, a progressive number on the right, identification letters (DA, SD, AP, PG, SP) a date (probably the date of issue), a drawing and numbered paragraphs.

Most of the communications are structured in a dialogic form because they are mainly transcriptions of meetings open to adult members or adult and children members. The initial P. at the beginning of each paragraph indicates the prayer recited by the charismatic leader before the meeting. The names of members and towns or nations where the actions take place are always substituted by their initial letters.

There are also other types of communications, mainly personal letters that the founder has originally written to individual members. They have the typical epistolary structure and in fact they start with “Dear...God bless you...”

A last type of communication is the prophecy which is structured as a collection of prophetic sentences.

A common feature for all the communications is the quoting of Berg and other Children of God/the Family’s writings at the bottom of the page. We can assume that the founder is leading his followers to deepen the subject through the reading of other sources, but it seems he is also trying to strengthen his message through the writings of the religious group from where the schism originated.

The books haven’t got any copyright, but the date of printing (February 1992, august 1993), moreover the binding has been homemade.

The abbreviations placed on each communication refer to the type of reader it is addressed to and they follow the same subdivision of the Family: DO (disciples only), GP (general public), DF (disciples and friends), SH (Shepherds Only).

Methodology

After an overall reading of the books I decide to determine the exclusive and comprehensive categories that will be used to analyse the content of the document. More studies on the organisation, have been: “*Educazione e socializzazione in the Family*” (Caparesi, 2000) , “*Successo, sacrificio e condanna*” (Caparesi, 1999), “*Costretti ad amare*” (Caparesi, Di Fiorino, Kent, 1999). Further elements are taken from the study of the Association Artemisia “Center for Women against Violence Catia Franci” revisioned by Dr. Alessandra Pauncz (<http://www.radiosa.com>).

Considering the features of the document and the type of study, I decided to select the paragraph as measure of analysis. Therefore I proceed by codifying the presence or absence of the categories previously chosen in each paragraph.

Aims of the Survey

The aim of the study is to verify any presence of abuse and physical and mental aggression.

The main form of abuse outlined are the following:

- physical abuse: any form of abuse against the body of another person or his properties
- economical abuse: any form of control on the economical autonomy of another person
- psychological abuse: any lack of respect that offends a person and his/her dignity
- sexual abuse: any form of sexual practice which is imposed on somebody

Categories

Having already defined the boundaries of the research by determining the aims and the approach, I proceed by choosing the single behaviour that will coincide with the category itself.

Physical Abuse:

- constraint to excessive physical work
- deprivation of medical assistance, of sleep and ailments
- physical aggressions

Economical abuse

- keeping the person in continuous deprivation
- preventing the person to have a personal bank account
- forcing the person to contract debts or sign contracts
- depriving the person of information on his patrimonial situation

Psychological Abuse:

The area of psychological abuse is rich and articulated as it takes account of the following aspects:

- continuous criticism
- derision and humiliations
- devaluating the person
- blaming the person for difficulties arising in his/her children
- excess of work in the family organisation
- interferences in husband wife relationship
- interferences in the parental relationship
- deprivation of social contacts (friends, social environments)
- blackmail and threat
- coercion

Sexual abuse:

- forced sexual practices
- forced witness of sexual practices
- exposure to obscene readings, words and drawings (particularly for children).

SHORT HISTORY OF ORIZZONTI NUOVI

Orizzonti Nuovi has been a schismatic group of the Children of God [now the Family] and was founded in Italy in 1980-81 following a period of dispersion and new settlement among the Children of God.

Its founder Domenico Di Maio, known as Elias, had been a member of the Children of God since 1975, just like the core of the first disciples. Conflicts with the Children of God had already started at the end of 1980, and later on became definite when Di Maio was

excommunicated for spiritual pride and disobedience [Mo letter Bury Them n° 1041], and he and his followers were expelled.

The first structure of Orizzonti Nuovi followed after the experience in the Children of God and ideology, practices, roles, relations with the outside world were practically similar. The *MO letters* [Berg's writings, founder of the Children of God] were still fundamental and kept guiding and motivating the organisational life. The activities of the group covered the spiritual teaching to new converts, the care of the children born in the group, the witnessing and economical activities (which included *provisioning*, *litnessing*, *FFing* and *busking*), the administration and control.

In 1981/2 the group had decided to leave Italy and settle in Venezuela where it grew until it numbered about 60 adherents, both adults and children. The excommunication from the Children of God had several consequences, the most important one was the loss of the new *MO letters*. Nevertheless this emptiness was soon filled with the *communications*, that is to say the writings of Di Maio, which didn't really substitute the *MO letters* [as I have pointed out previously, Berg's writings continued to be a reference point for Di Maio's followers, and the schismatic group was able to collect the new *MO letters* from disciples who had been excommunicated from the Children of God/the Family in recent times] but were able to supply a stronger identity group.

Orizzonti Nuovi had to face several problems: economical [they survived through donations], visa permits as the core group was made of Italian citizens and moreover they soon showed a tendency which became evident in a next period: the attempt of getting material benefits and acquiring consistent resources as for example properties.

There soon emerged internal conflicts: some of the followers were unsatisfied and contrary to the administration and policy of the founder and left, almost at the same time a complaint in

Venezuela caused most of the members to be under arrest for a month and even after their release they kept receiving a negative publicity from local newspapers.

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Orizzonti Nuovi had become an independent group from the Children of God/the Family and its founder showed no intention of re-joining the Family, even though the group was soon reduced to a band which amounted to its founder, a dozen women and their children and almost no other men. Most of them left Venezuela and settled in Italy again.

In 1992 and 1993 Di Maio became depressed and after that, a new vision was brought forth: acquiring a farm to gather all the members. The rising centre would serve as a working place, and as a meeting point for people in need. A 40 hectares plot of land with several damaged cottages was bought near Orvieto in the central part of Italy.

Nevertheless a number of trials against its founder Domenico Di Maio (who was also arrested and prosecuted for paedophilia and “circumvention of an incapable”¹) started out in Italy in 1997 causing the dismantling of the group.

Results and Argument

The results reveal a coercive environment in which the will of the founder is the only one and coincides with the will of God and disobedience is one of the worst sins that leads to disaffiliation and loss of family ties. When the disciple joins the group and submits to its prophet, he acquires a new identity which doesn't leave any room for privacy. The community absorbs any part of an adult and a child life and it reveals violent and prejudicial for the psychophysical growth of a subject in evolution. It has been observed that members of

¹ It is an Italian law usually applied to handicapped people and minors. In this specific case members of the group were considered incapable because of the influence exercised by the leader. The law has the objective of protecting the material properties of the incapable.

the group become tools and they have to lose themselves to be an instrument in the hands of God and his prophet, engaging in exhausting activities.

Physical Abuse

1) constraint to excessive physical work

It has been observed that adults and children are continuously requested to work and to offer sacrifices to satisfy the enormous amount of demands of the community.

“We have had some improvements with regards of living in a family where you should be willing to act at any moment when a need requires it; there’s been a progress as a team work, with less disagreements and disharmonies than in the past, that has allowed us to accomplish many more things which have required much time, a lot of work and a strong spirit of sacrifice” (“As Through Fire” 200:28)

The continuous requirement of engaging in activities for the community prevents members to get time for rest:

“...considering that I’m very much in prayer, I’m talking about how to use the time with discipline and being earnest when considering that a lost second is a lost second. I perceive looseness in this direction” (“Devoting to God” DA 123: 3)

Working is also a balm that enables members to overcome personal difficulties:

“Patient work, silent work, accurate work, willingness to work with a thankfulness hearth and a smile on one’s face, will bring everyone out of the desert and into the promise land” (“Faithful Messengers” AP 113:25)

Duties and overloading of work is an important part of the organisation in the group where every adult and child member is called upon. Children have to considered themselves as God’s Messengers. Ag. Is only 9 years old when the founder explains to the other leaders of the group that she is special for God’s work.

“...we should press giving her the place and the time to assimilate; she should be prepared spiritually and mentally and informed of what the Lord is asking of her...I believe you should push her some more; the spirit is ready...more responsibilities mean less time for herself, but also more blessings...” (“Promises of growth” SD 131: 39, 54)

2) Deprivation of medical assistance, of sleep and ailments

There aren't any clear indications for this category except the fact that members are compelled to observe a fasting of 24 hrs every month (DA 153: 43, 47). The followers make use of natural medicines and trust God through prayer and the anointing of the sick people.

3) Physical aggressions

With consideration of physical aggressions some data reveal the use of chastisement and the fear of the children to be punished (SD 141: 35, 36).

One of the emblematic cases is Si., a child who has expressed his resentfulness for the chastisement he had received. The founder wonders about this rebellious attitude and declares he has never heard of similar reactions, even though he had punished many children before. He relates of having asked Ag., a little girl, to learn by hearth a biblical verse that recites: “Withhold not correction from the child: for it thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23: 13-14)

“We have children now who are prisoners because their soul has not been delivered yet, and as a consequence of this they are fragile and they could become –and they have been for sometimes- a channel for the spirit of evil who travels through them”.

Chastisement is the only solution to the problem and the children need to realise that it is done for their freedom and that's why the founder explains that they should welcome it. The final

statement he gives is self explanatory and shows the typical consequence of mental manipulation and psychological violence:

Some children I have severely chastised in the past have also thanked me and they were honest in their hearts since the change that followed afterwards would show it and not their words; words don't always express real intentions" (Don't Build Upon Ignorance" SD 190: 32, 74)

Economical Abuse

4) Keeping the person in a state of continuous deprivation

No data

5) Preventing the person from having a personal bank account

There are very few data on economical abuse, nevertheless the few ones show that only leaders can have a personal bank account (AP 138: 77) and followers have to give account for any small expense. The testimony of Hei. is quite an interesting example of this. The woman took part in a confession meeting and later wrote the following:

I want to share with you something I have missed especially in faith; in the past because I didn't have the faith to ask for my personal needs, I used to buy what I needed without giving notice of it to my brothers in faith. I have always thought it wasn't such a dangerous attitude since I was in need, but I realise now I have stolen from God and I want to ask for forgiveness; if I confess it I will be forgiven". ("You shall Receive Mercy" SD 182: 17)

6) Forcing the person to contract debts or sign contracts

No data come out from the primary sources. Nevertheless the legal proceedings who brought the dismantling of the group started with the complaint of an ex-member who revealed that she had been forced to sign a power of attorney that caused her to loose her belongings in favour of the founder.

7) Depriving the person of information on his patrimonial situation

No data

Psychological Abuse:

8) Continuous criticism

Anyone that disobeys and rebels against the leaders is made object of continuous criticism, insults, denigration and humiliations. About Pe. the founder writes that he has a familiar spirit and he's looking after power, he's foolish, he has mental problems and he's possessed by the devil. About Vi., who has decided to leave the group, he writes that she wants to control other people, she has driven to madness every brother who had worked with her and that she is possessive. About Ab., he says that she is too permissive. On Mi., he says he had seen a devil coming out of him a few years before when they were praying. He describes Gio., a little boy of 10, as being spoilt by his grandfather in Italy. According to Elias the boy was possessed by a malicious spirit who was a channel for the devil disturbing God's works. At the age of 13 Gio., decided to leave his mother Ru., and went to stay with his father out of the group. The opinion of the charismatic leader on the deserters was never addressed directly and it seemed to be only a mean to justify their desertion to the rest of the group.

9) Derision and humiliations

More aggressive and violent are the critics addressed directly to the yielded disciple who accepts discipline. These reprimands occurred during group meetings open to children and adults.

Ag., 10 yrs old, has to pray to ask for forgiveness because of her unfaithfulness (DA 144: 31,34,35,53; DA 185: 21), Em., is disturbing because he is praying too loudly (SD 145: 7), and Mar. has got a self-righteous spirit. It is quite emblematic the way in which he deals with Gio., a 11 yrs old boy. Gio. was asked to confess a sin he was guilty of, because two years

before he had eaten chocolate and Ag., another little girl, had been punished in his place². The boy is asked to write a letter on the event and to confess his sin in front of the community (SD 179: 27-35).

10) Devaluating the person

Data reveal a damaging environment for the emotional and psychological well-being of members. The group is an elective and selective place where the person becomes an instrument for reaching the interests of the community by assuming the role decided by the founder.

“As a consequence for surrendering to the will of God, submitted while lifting meekness, humbleness, divine inspiration and forsaking one self to assume the role which God has called us for...To allow this, it is important that we learn how to put us aside. So the Lord is calling everyone to interpret a role...This will cause changes in the work that we have done up to now and in other places where we are working- not only at a spiritual or theoretical level, but mainly physical changes, in the way the staff has been working up to now...” (“Crazy for Jesus” SD 176:11-30-31-32-33).

The calling for discipleship involves also the children and there are a number of paragraphs that stress the same point. In fact referring to the children the founder writes:

“The most potential ones, those that surrender and humble the most to be anything, to grow and live for training; the same happens with adult members. (“At the School of the Prophet” SD 133: 47)

“It is hoped that children and adults learn everything they can, because if they are potential leaders, they have to be willing to do anything...” (“Adversities: Blessing or Curse” Da 153: 42)

11) Blaming the person for difficulties arising in his/her children

² In orizzonti Nuovi, like in the Family, eating white sugar and ailments that contain it is considered to be poisonous and it's forbidden.

Any problem the child experiences are always spiritual and caused by the shortcomings of his parents and teachers, according to the author. The following paragraph is a comment he writes to Hei., after the birth of her handicapped child, who dies right after his birth.

“Hei’s experience is a painful event which I pray will definitely close the old things, and start a new day with a new hearth and a new mind open to God’s callings...it seems like the Lord has always tried to talk to Hei., through her pregnancies, but sometimes we misunderstand the kindness of His voice as fragility and the goodness of His wisdom as infidelity” (God’s kindness” DA 102:13, 14).

We also learn in some readings that parents are often physically separated by their children and compelled to feel them not as their own, or in other times they are stressed to feel guilty because they don’t spend much time with them or because they can’t develop an emotional link with them. The inconsistency of these different messages seems to be a strategy for confusing the parents and control them and their parental ties more effectively.

“He has asked a question to a sister: - [question] Do you spend time at night to read with your son?- [answer] “I’ve never got time!- [question] How come you don’t have time?- [answer] there are always too many things to do! [assumption of the founder] This is just an excuse, because I’m sure that when you like something you always find time to do it, sometimes there isn’t the right vision” (“Emotional contact” DA 132: 55).

“...it may result fruitful even for other brothers, despite it is something which we have told since a long time and that it is written in many writings; and I would say that it is also a natural maternal instinct. It may be possible that for many reasons or situations one may not have given the proper value and consider how much influence and responsibility and priority lays in the relationship between adult and child, parent and son.” (“Emotional Contact” DA 132: 19)

12) Excess of work in the family organisation

It can be assumed that the founder is using the natural loving relationship and family ties to help the manipulation of children, who are usually upraised by the community, and at the same time he is trying to exercise his control on the parents through the introduction of fears, phobias, sense of guilt and deprivation of a loving tie. We should remember that these groups are elective and rest on individual callings.

The case of J., a 7 yrs old boy, son of Es., an unmarried woman, can be brought to illustrate this concept. Mother and son have always been living in different places, since Es. has been travelling most of the times to accomplish the group's tasks while J. was in the community's school. Finally the woman is asked to move in another country where she would stay far from her son for years, up to the time when the woman and the boy, who becomes of age, will decide to leave the community and start a new life outside. In a personal letter to the school's director, and later published for the whole community with the name of "Report on a child", the founder analyses the difficulties that J., was facing at the age of 7:

"The child has suffered a lot for the lack of solid references in the emotional field. Es.'s past experiences and their poor relationship, moreover the wrong decision of directing the boy to consider me as his father, have been extremely significant in his education...J. is among those children who has lacked love. The boy is really capable, he's got tremendous potentiality but at the same time he is lacking motivation...It seems that these difficulties are rooted in the lack of a loving relationship and mutual understanding that connects parents and their kin. ("Report on a Child" SP 143: 3, 11, 13).

13) Interferences in husband and wife relationship

Faithfulness to the principles and discipleship can't come after anything, much less after a spouse, a son or a parent.

"I believe in an affectionate relationship but it shouldn't be a priority of life. In fact it could even cloud your mind and your ability of seeing God's hand in your life...As a consequence

of this you can find yourself weaker when the situation is requiring your complete devotion and dedication... (“*Spiritual Willingness*” AP 110: 18,19)

A recurring situation arises when one of the spouses of a couple doesn’t accomplish everything he is asked to and becomes a problem for the community.

THE CASE OF MI. AND HEI. Mi., the husband, is asked to leave the community and satisfy some conditions due to his continuous problems in the group. Mi. leaves the group and Hei., his wife, stays in with lots of children. The following is an excerpt from a personal letter the founder writes to Mi.:

“From what I have been told, you have been a bad channel for Hei. and driven her out of the right path...Upon receiving this letter you will be told how to take your time with the Lord: you will be given enough time to devote yourself to prayer and to the study of the writings I’m going to supply you in this letter” (“*No More Time To Waste*” SD 187: 23, 28)

THE CASE OF DAV. AND AB. She (AB.) has decided to leave the group and she is hoping her spouse will follow her, but he wants to stay. In this personal letter, later published for the community, Di Maio praises Dav. for his decision to stay. The couple will split and AB will leave the group with their daughter.

“During these years in the Family, I ‘ve often considered that a marital relationship can become a hindrance rather than a blessing, a slip and a deceit...A good principle one should never forget is to stay in touch and linked with the leaders...”[referring to AB., he continues]
“The mouth of the corrupted women is a deep pit and those who are an abomination for God will fall inside” (“*Openness and Loyalty*” SP 135: 17,19,21)

THE CASE OF PE. AND VI. - PE. has been sent away for his continuous criticism of the group and the leaders and goes to Italy. PE. and VI. have several children. The founder wants to convince VI. to forsake her husband.

“In this case the only one who has to make a choice is VI:- and her decision will bring her either to stay and work with us or stay with PE...If VI. wants that PE. keeps on being such a bad influence on her and their children, we can’t do anything...” (“*The Fruits of the Doubts*” AL 175: 46, 75).

VI. chooses to stay with PE. and together they leave the community, nevertheless PE. has got two more daughters with MA, whom he hasn’t been able to see since a long time as they live in another country where the community has a home. Referring to PE., Elia continues saying: *In this case it is better to have an enemy outside than to have him close...he won’t be allowed to have any influence on other children of the group or any other brother...* [PE. will never see his two daughters again since they have been kept hidden somewhere in a third world country] ...” (“*The Fruits of the Doubts*” AL 175: 63, 65).

14) Interferences in the parental relationship

When a group member is considered an enemy all his/her ties with other members inside are hindered or forbidden and the policy doesn’t change even though they may be relatives involved:

“Never as in the time being, we need to slip away leaving no clues, especially for those that hate us; we can work out to make this happen because there isn’t any reason for which they have to be aware of what we do, even of the whisper of our movements” (“*Wrong Desires and Wrong Mates*” SD 167: 18,54)

THE CASE OF PE. AND MA. – MA. is PE.’s first mate, whom he has had three children with. PE. is sent in a mission by the charismatic leader and he takes one of his three children with him. MA. is supposed to reach PE. with their other two daughters, but she accepts the will of the founder and doesn’t leave. Some times earlier MA. had chosen to leave the community with PE. and, according to the founder, she had paid for her wrong decision:

mental illness, physical afflictions which almost brought her to death and the neglect of her son whom the woman was forced to forsake (SD 186: 33-35).

“If A. [son of PE. and MA] is staying with PE. at the time being, it is the toll for MA. ’s wrong choices in the past and I don’t think that she will be able to get him back... (“Rewinding the Thread” SD 186:36).

To hinder the relationship between relatives, the community keeps homes’ addresses and telephone numbers secret to outsiders, and relative can maintain contacts through a mail box address although personal letters are collected by leaders only. A strong withhold is exercised on families living in the community and ties between parents and children are usually hindered in many different ways:

“I have verified many times that parents abuse their role as a parent holding their children as if they were their properties and something to own, and feeling important just because they have somebody that follows them” (Love and Unselfishness” DA 122:1).

There are mothers who are usually away from their children. Talking to Ru., a mother, he writes:

“I have received for Gio. [Ru.’s son] that it would be good if he could stay closer to you. I think he’s the right age [the boy is 9 yrs old] to have a closer relationship with you and you could be a good influence in his emotional area (“He Wants Our Love” AP 137:25).

There are mothers who live in C. [another town] away from their children and Elias addresses to them saying:

“A couple of children [he doesn’t necessarily refers to the women’s own children] could take turns in coming and staying with you, the main reason we have already shared about is: help you to be more responsible in the care of the children. Otherwise it could be possible that one day in the future when the situation will require it, you may have grown too far away from your children” (The Bell of the Conscience” AP 125:37).

15) Deprivation of social contacts (friends, social environments)

The community controls all the communication from the outside to the inside and vice versa and forbids any contact with the so called enemies, that means those people who don't accept the community.

16) Blackmail and threat

Group members are so manipulated in their emotions to be influenced even in the way they think or act. The community makes use of different ways of control like fears and induced phobias, but also divisions from loved ones and other kind of punishments (*Mental Manipulation in the Cult "Orizzonti Nuovi": a Survey on the Internal Sources"* Caparesi, 2006)

17) Coercion

The community exercises a strong hold on the behaviour, thought, emotions and information of its members (*Mental Manipulation in the Cult "Orizzonti Nuovi": a Survey on the Internal Sources"* Caparesi, 2006).

Sexual Abuse:

18) Forced sexual practices

No data emerge from this category. The quotations of MO letters and other publications of the Children of God/the Family indicate that Orizzonti Nuovi practices the same sexual practices as in the Family like FFing [flirty fishing] and the sexual sharing between group members.

19) Forced witness of sexual practices

No data

20) Exposure to obscene readings, words and drawings (particularly for children)

No data emerge, although it has to be reminded that Orizzonti Nuovi shares the same obscene drawings and readings of the MO letters and other Family Publications.

Conclusions

The analysis I have carried out on the primary sources of Orizzonti Nuovi reveals a violent, abusive and coercive environment.

Members are hindered in their choices and human relationships; they are usually underestimated as a person by a strong, overwhelming and leading chain of command. It can be observed that there is a continuous interference in parental relationships who are usually seen as an obstacle to the prosperity of the group, due to the emotional ties they create, even though in time of need they are used to satisfy internal requirements engendering confusion and inconsistencies in the emotional life of the individual.

Children are often separated from their parents and lack a significant relation which is needed for a healthy growth. Moreover the devaluation of their personality, the physical and psychological abuse practiced on them, the isolation they are kept in leaves many questions about the possibilities of recovering the past once they become adults. Educational bonds shaped on obedience, submission and fear of chastisement are an example of a strict and authoritarian pedagogy , which is so far away from the idea of love and charitable service the group is stating to practice.

The study of internal and primary sources, when it is possible to recover authentic copies, reveals to be a sure source of information. They can supply valid documents especially in the cases of controversial and coercive groups. Social researchers make a large use of questionnaires and interviews they administer to members of cults but they aren't so keen on taking into consideration the disillusioned ex-members (Wilson, 1990). In the case of extremely manipulative groups, who are interested in presenting an image, I am convinced that this method of research would offer another prospective of the actual situation. The analysis of authentic documents (internal writings, personal letters, judicial documents, exc.)

can supply additional information that allows researchers to compare data from other sources (direct observation, questionnaire and interviews of group members) and get a more precise knowledge of group.

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