

Aaron Tyler

Religion, Politics and Peacebuilding : "the Method of Sant' Egidio"

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Aaron Tyler*

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Anstract

This article addresses the theoretical and practical contributions that international religiously-affiliated organizations (IRAOs) can make in preventing and transforming violent conflicts in many of today's geopolitical contexts. Following an overview of the contemporary, multi-tiered field of conflict management, this article will proffer the synergy model of intervention used by the Community of Sant' Egidio as a noteworthy example of how IRAOs, working in the politically charged field of conflict management, can positively affect the multidimensional processes of intercommunal conflict transformation and facilitate the most difficult work of reconciliation.

Keywords

Onternational, religious, conflict, reconciliation, dialogue, peacebuilding.

78



The political geographic parameters of violent conflict are limitless. Recent interstate examples include Russia's invasion of Georgia, Ethiopia's war with Eritrea, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. While the potential for interstate conflict remains, the majority of violent conflicts at the close of the twentieth century and into the first decade of the twenty-first century are taking place within states and between groups distinguished by ethnic, tribal, or religious identities. Hutu and Tutsi violence in Rwanda and Burundi, Tamil and Sinhalese violence in Sri Lanka, Muslim and Hindu fighting in Kashmir, Kurdish and Arabic tensions in Iraq, Russian conflict with Ingush and Chechen peoples in the Caucasus, Ser-

* **Aaron Tyler** is the Chair of the Graduate International Relations Department at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. His work has appeared in such journals as the *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, the *Journal of Church and State*, and *Fides et Historia*. He is also the author of *Islam, the West, and Tolerance: Conceiving Coexistence* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2008)

bian and Albanian skirmishes in Kosovo, and Burmese and Karen violence in Myanmar are only a few of the more publicized intrastate conflicts occurring between identity groups in recent years. What is more, through the ubiquitous, interdependent mechanisms of globalization, the implications of these conflicts are no longer borderless. Indeed, such sociopolitical, intrastate conflicts are replete with regional and international ramifications.

In many of today's violent intrastate conflicts, grievances may ultimately be political or economic, but often they are couched in contrasting narratives of "us" and "them." From tribes to civilizations, identity offers individuals a framework for community. It is when this identity framework is used to stereotype or, at worst, dehumanize the Other that the potential for violent conflict increases and lasting peace becomes a difficult, often elusive prospect. Nonetheless, as this author has argued elsewhere (Tyler 2009), despite the difficult challenges associated with resolving violent inter-communal conflict, a normative framework of reconciliation or "deep peacemaking" must be part of any lasting peace arrangement between identity groups who have experienced violent conflict and developed competing stories of victimization and vendetta.

This article is a continuation of this author's research on the systematic and hermeneutical contributions that religious ideas and organizations can make to the contemporary politics and processes of conflict management. It addresses the theoretical and practical contributions that international religiously-affiliated organizations (IRA-Os) can make in preventing and transforming violent conflicts in many of today's geopolitical contexts. Following an overview of the contemporary, multi-tiered field of conflict management and a brief conceptual analysis of the peacebuilding phase of reconciliation, this article will proffer the operational strategies and *synergy* model of intervention used by the Community of Sant' Egidio as a noteworthy example of how IRAOs, working in the field of conflict management, can positively affect the multidimensional processes of intrastate, intercommunal conflict transformation and facilitate the most difficult phase of reconciliation.

79

Assessing the Field

Over the past two decades, the field of conflict management has struggled to adjust to a shifting global context where statist conceptu-

alizations of power, politics, and peacemaking are no longer sufficient for addressing the majority of violent intrastate encounters dominating the global conflict landscape. John Paul Lederach, a scholar and practitioner in conflict transformation, has pointed to two overarching characteristics attributable to contemporary intrastate conflicts: identity and proximity (1997: 12-14). In many recent conflicts, religious, ethnic, or tribal identities—or combinations thereof—have subordinated Westphalian loyalties to citizenship. What is more, these identity conflicts are rooted in long-term animosities and mutually destructive narratives. In a 2009 article in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Jonathan Sacks concluded, “Whereas the 20th century was dominated by the politics of ideology, the 21st century will be dominated by the politics of identity.” The Western foundations of science, economics, and politics “are more procedural than substantive,” he writes. While these institutions address the “What” and “How” of things, they fall short of answering “Who” and “Why.” It is these latter questions of self-perception and purpose that identity seeks to answer, challenge, and accommodate (Sacks 2009: 1).

80

In addition to identity, geographical proximity is another common concern for the field of conflict resolution today. Localized violence between adjoining communities, bordering clans, or the next-door Other is the norm. Unlike conventional Cold War patterns and characterizations of interstate war, today’s intrastate, intercommunal conflicts are distinguished by the “immediacy of experience.” Lederach explains, “This immediacy arises from the close proximity of conflicting groups, the shared common histories of the conflictants, and the dynamic of severe stereotyping coupled with radically differing perceptions of each other” (1997: 13).

Despite these shifting trends in conflict typology, traditional institutions and mechanisms for resolving violent conflict continue to dominate the field. What Lederach observed over a decade ago is still instructive for the field today:

Contemporary conflict has underscored the reality that in many parts of the world, the identity of people is not organically tied to citizenship in the state, yet the defining paradigm that informs the approaches for understanding and dealing with these conflicts remains that of international—in other words, interstate—diplomacy. Thus, intervention in internal conflicts is restricted not only by the charters of the major regional and international institutions but also by the lack of appropriate and adequate concepts, approaches, and modalities of intervention. We persist in relying on traditional statist diplomacy, despite its inadequacies in responding to the nature of conflicts today (1997: 16).

Of course, this does not mean that a state-centric approach to preventing, managing, and resolving violent conflict is no longer relevant. Geopolitical tensions in parts of South Asia, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Eastern Europe indicate otherwise. Diplomacy and cooperation between state leaders, militaries, and economies are essential in today's international context, and official international and regional organizations have pivotal roles to play in facilitating interstate cooperation, mediating hard power deterrence, and navigating the exigencies of *realpolitik*. However, for the majority of intrastate, inter-communal conflicts today, "where a multiplicity of fluid groups and alliances exist, and where decision-making power is diffuse, a rigid statist approach" will benefit few and achieve little in the way of peacebuilding and reconciliation (Lederach 1997: 16).

Multi-track Peacebuilding: A Bottom-up Approach to Deep Peacemaking

Evolving to address the prominence of identity, proximity, and asymmetry in many contemporary violent conflicts, a number of scholars and practitioners in the field of conflict management have begun to incorporate a more expansive schema for conflict transformation that 1) further distinguishes and expands the range and strategies for intermediary participation and 2) considers the efficacy of a "bottom up" approach to facilitating conflict de-escalation—reconciliation, in particular. To begin with, this innovative paradigm expands the traditional Track I and Track II characteristics of conflict management to include a Track III component, which emphasizes the critical importance of grassroots leaders, local resources, and indigenous mechanisms for peacebuilding.¹ Whereas Track I and II initiatives utilize elite and mid-level peacemakers, respectively, Track III emphasizes "seeing the conflict in context," underscoring the role of "internal 'third parties' or indigenous peacemakers" in the difficult work of intercommunal normalization and reconciliation (Ramsbotham et al. 2007: 22-25). This contemporary, multi-track framework offers a constructivist

² Track I diplomacy includes the high-level negotiations and power politics of Elite Peacemakers—international, regional, and national political and military leaders and organizations. Track II diplomacy involves mid-level actors—Multinational businesses, international NGOs, parliamentarians, academics, media celebrities, major religious leaders, and prominent activist organizations—and may include such initiatives as problem-solving workshops, mediation training, national and regional peace and reconciliation commissions.

approach to conflict transformation, as it accentuates the important, contextual roles that local identities, norms, and cultures play in causing and transforming intercommunal violent conflict. All three tracks have important parts to play in preventing and ending violent conflict. Just as violent conflicts are often “hybridized”—infusing the international, dyadic, and intrasate levels of political encounter—a successful conflict management approach will be equally malleable, coinciding with a conflict’s fluidity, operating “at all these levels, including vertical relations up and down across the levels from the grassroots up to the international, and horizontal relations across and between all the social actors involved” (Ramsbotham et al.: 26).

For the deepest levels of inter-communal peacebuilding—namely, reconciliation—this multi-track model stresses the primacy of Track III initiatives. For many of today’s violent inter-communal conflicts, “indigenous empowerment,” to borrow Lederach’s terms, is essential to building sustainable peace. Recognizing the criticality of psychosocial healing, local peace commissions, and day-to-day human security issues, Track III initiatives focus on grassroots leadership and indigenous reconciliation mechanisms. A witnessing of the daily animosities and rival narratives of hatred between warring communities and an awareness of local politics, divisive identities, and post-war trauma, make local actors—community leaders, houses of worship, indigenous NGOs, etc.—well placed to address empathetically the fears, vendettas, and psychological injuries that are proscribing the possibility of reconciliation between communities in or escaping violent conflict (Lederach: 42-43).

Lederach describes reconciliation as the “meeting point” between the realism of international relations and the innovation of conflict resolution. Reconciliation recognizes the “‘real politics’ of hatred, manipulation, and violence,” which require political, short-term solutions; yet, it also recognizes the need for subjective listening in order to respond innovatively to long-term perceptions of deep-seated resentment and insecurity that may characterize warring groups (Lederach: 24-25).

Reconciliation is a deep peacemaking concept that “envisions protracted conflict as a system and focuses its attention on relationships within that system” (Lederach: 26). The taproot of reconciliation is relational dialogue, which is central to Track III peacebuilding. Relational dialogue is the normative scaffolding of reconciliation designed to facilitate through mutual understanding the transformation from rival to shared narratives of community. Sustainable peace begins

and ends with long-term relational dialogue, where once violent antagonists reveal and acknowledge the physical sufferings and psychological traumas of the past and strive to create a shared vocabulary for the future.

While violent identity-based conflicts require significant peacebuilding initiatives at the grassroots level, necessary political solutions will require considerable effort at all levels of conflict management. In the current international Westphalian system, state and interstate actors must be part of any long-term solution. Oftentimes, the deep peacemaking at the local level is contingent upon the political failures or successes taking place at state, regional, or international levels. Just as most violent intercommunal conflicts are hybrid in causality and dimension, conflict transformation will require concerted, cooperative efforts at multiple levels of conflict management—official and unofficial, private and public, temporal and spiritual. However, though diplomats, UN Peacekeepers, and the International Criminal Courts play important roles in compelling ceasefires and peace agreements, none is particularly well-equipped to facilitate the normative, deep peacemaking processes of reconciliation.

The salient relevance of IRAOs to peacebuilding is their morally-infused capacity to percolate all tracks of diplomacy, participating within, though not confined to, the juridical, economic, and political strictures that may otherwise restrict elite and mid-level contributors, while at the same time offering a normative, trustworthy partnership with localized Track III actors. This paper argues that an IRAO's strength of contribution lies in its ability to participate effectively and impartially at all stages of conflict management and in all three tracks of diplomacy and peacebuilding. The Community of Sant' Egidio is indicative.

An IRAO Case Study: The Community of Sant' Egidio

To comprehend fully the motivations and trajectory of a particular IRAO, one must endeavor to understand how its beliefs, rituals and institutions are interpreted and communicated. Why does it do what it does? What are the foundations of its commitments? An IRAO's visions of community and praxis are shaped by its particular charism. This charism is rooted within a distinctive spiritual orientation and is percolated through unique geographical and historical contexts. For the Community of Sant' Egidio, which was birthed in Rome and ba-

sed in the Christian rooted district of Trastevere, its charism is grounded on three overarching commitments: communal authenticity through prayer; solidarity with the poor and oppressed; and advocacy of nonviolence and dialogue between peoples, regardless of context or identity. These simple, but foundational, principles undergird the broader Catholic identity of Sant' Egidio and sustain its multifaceted contributions to peacebuilding across the globe.

Inaugurated in Rome in 1968, the Community of Sant' Egidio began as a Roman Catholic youth-driven movement led by Andrea Riccardi. Undoubtedly influenced by the contemporary declarations of Vatican II, the early community sought authenticity with the Christian Gospels, envisaging itself as a volunteer lay movement, committed, through prayer and religious purpose, to serving the poor and facilitating peace through ideas of non-violence and inter-communal dialogue. Over the past four decades, this confessional volunteer lay movement has grown exponentially, with over 50,000 members in 70 countries and across four continents.²

The charism of Sant' Egidio not only shapes its global orientation to service and social justice, but informs and encourages the contextually contingent *caritas* of its many local communities as well. International communal solidarity through religious identity—principles, rituals, and institutions—amplifies the effectiveness of IRAOs like Sant' Egidio. Commitments to sustainable development and peacebuilding in Rome are easily transposed upon corresponding community initiatives at the local level. And its unifying, international charism, reinforced through rituals of prayer and sacramental traditions, intensifies and augments the diverse work of its varied indigenous communities.

IRAOs such as Sant' Egidio are able to cultivate a central, religiously imbued vision that, while sensitive to the exigencies of local context, is not limited to a particular culture, language, or state. Rather, the strength of such IRAOs rests in their translatability into the local vernacular and their mutually dependent confessional identity and commitments at the global level. Relationships at all levels of society are nurtured through borderless religious rituals, such as prayer, pilgrimage, and sacramental commitments. This unique character makes IRAOs well-placed to participate in multiple ways and at all levels of peacebuilding.

³ The Community of Sant' Egidio has produced an expansive, regularly updated website outlining its past and current peacebuilding ministries and the collaborative work of its global and local communities in different parts of the world. Available at www.santegidio.org.

"The Method of Sant' Egidio": A Synergy Paradigm

In 1999 UNESCO awarded the Felix Houphouët-Boigny peace prize to Sant' Egidio for its conciliation work in different parts of the world.³ Following its remarkable success in places like Lebanon, Iraq, and Mozambique, the Community of Sant' Egidio has been solicited to participate in the mediation and transformation of a sundry of other intractable intercommunal conflicts, from Guatemala to Kosovo.

As discussed above, conflict management is multidimensional, involving a wide variety of actors and resources, and reconciliation between warring communities requires a bottom-up approach. Over the past two decades, the Catholic Community of Sant' Egidio emerged as a potent force at all phases and levels of conflict management. Its potency lay in its adaptability, able to participate in the three major tracks of peacebuilding figured above. IRAOs like Sant' Egidio are organized in a horizontal framework, whereby local and global members participate as *volunteers* in a spirit of communal equality, able to work within a vertical framework with actors and approaches to peacebuilding at elite, mid-, and grassroots levels of society. Rather than committing itself to a single track of peacebuilding, working in tandem with, but nonetheless independent from other levels of diplomacy, Sant' Egidio espouses a *synergetic* model for conflict resolution that permeates the fluid boundaries of multi-track peacebuilding. Recognizing the convoluted nature of many inter-communal conflicts to-

⁴ See http://www.unesco.org/prixhboigny/le_prix/laureats/1999/ang/1999.htm. For an insightful recounting of Sant' Egidio's peacebuilding legacy at the end of the twentieth century, see the address given by Mr. Jean Foyer, Vice-President for the 1999 International Jury for the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, available at http://www.unesco.org/prixhboigny/le_prix/laureats/1999/ang/foyer.htm (accessed 25 October 2009). The Sant' Egidio Community has engaged in mediation and reconciliation work in a number of violent conflicts: "LEBANON (1982): lifting of the siege of the village of Deir El Khamar by the Druze and agreement on the protection of Christians in the Chouf. ALBANIA (1987): agreement on elections under international control. IRAQ: successful rescue of 800 Chaldean refugees (Christians in Kurdistan). MOZAMBIQUE (1992): conclusion of a peace agreement after 27 months' negotiations. ALGERIA (1995): drafting of the "Rome platform" together with all the political forces (except the government), including the Islamic Salvation Front. GUATEMALA (1996): contribution to the restoration of relations between the guerrillas and the president of the republic. KOSOVO (1996-98): negotiations with the Serbian authorities on the reopening of schools and universities. CONGO (1999): Sant' Egidio sounded out to organise "national dialogue". BURUNDI (1997-2000): participation in the Arusha peace negotiations." Recounted by *Le Monde diplomatique*, available at <http://mondediplo.com/2000/09/06trastevere>. See also Philippe Leymarie's "God's Own United Nations," in *Le Monde diplomatique* (September 2000), available at <http://mondediplo.com/2000/09/04sane-gidio> (accessed 27 October 2009).

day, Sant' Egidio has created a malleable, contextually contingent framework for peacebuilding:

The work of peace in a multipolar and disorderly world, different than the one many were accustomed to during the cold war, makes necessary the collaboration of all available energies. In this sense, Sant' Egidio, rather than a parallel diplomacy, would prefer to speak of a synergy of efforts among all levels: institutional and non-institutional, official and from civil society (www.santegidio.org).

Sant' Egidio's synergy paradigm was illustrated in Guatemala, where civil war had been plaguing this Central American country for more than three decades. Utilizing a multi-track operational strategy, Sant' Egidio "put itself in synergy" with a United Nations led peace effort that was long underway but unmoving "because of the lack of direct contacts between the government and the UNRG guerillas." Sant' Egidio resuscitated the peace process through its coordination of Track One dialogue and mediation between Guatemalan adversaries in San Salvador, Paris, and Rome in 1996, which helped to facilitate the peace agreement, signed that year in Mexico City (www.santegidio.org). At the same time, recognizing the importance of humanitarian, "bottom up" concerns inhibiting reconciliation, Sant' Egidio conducted concomitant meetings with local leaders and community organizations physically and psychologically traumatized by decades of violence.

86

In an interview with this author, one of Sant' Egidio's long-time members and peace activists, Claudio Mario Betti, was asked to reflect on the Community's successes in civil conflicts like Mozambique and the setbacks in places like Algeria and describe how the peacebuilding method of Sant' Egidio has changed over the past three decades. He stated emphatically: What we have learned is that there is no one model for our Community. What worked in Mozambique will not work in Algeria, Kosovo, Guatemala, or El Salvador.⁴ The overarching characteristic of the synergy paradigm is its flexibility, not confined to particular issues or tiers of peacebuilding.

Recognizing the complexity of contemporary communal conflicts, the synergetic paradigm employed by Sant' Egidio is a multidimensional framework, whereby three faith-based operational strategies—relationship building, dialogue, and contextualization—are nested within a sophisticated, multi-track effort between institutional and non-

⁵ Based on author interview with Sant' Egidio volunteer Claudio Betti in Rome on 16 July 2009. I am most grateful for the time and insightful information proffered by Claudio during this interview.

institutional participants from all relevant levels of local and global societies. Figure One illustrates this author's summative understanding of Sant' Egidio's synergy paradigm for deep peacemaking.

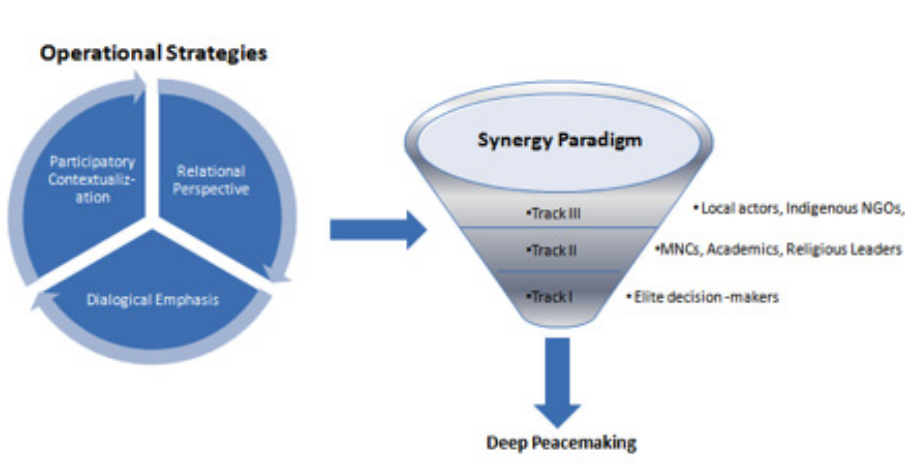


Figure 1: Sant' Egidio's Synergy Paradigm for Peacebuilding

It is important to understand that this IRAO's operational strategies (Relationship-building, Dialogue, and Contextualization) are neither sequential nor independent. Rather, they occur simultaneously and overlap considerably to provide a mutually supportive framework for engaging actors at all levels of violent conflict and intervention. Despite their interdependent nature, however, Sant' Egidio's operational strategies merit brief particularization, as they illustrate well the distinctive faith-based contributions unique to IRAOs participating in the difficult work of deep peacemaking.

Relational Perspective

Communication of the Christian Gospel, solidarity with the poor, and ecumenism are three spiritual principles undergirding this Catholic lay association. These three faith-based reference points are, at their essence, relational, and it is relationships that represent the means through which these practices are realized. This IRAO emphasizes relationship-building with the young and old, homeless and impr-

soned, hungry and helpless, and the disenfranchised and wounded (<http://www.santegidio.org/en/solidarieta/index.htm>). To cry with the suffering and work in relationship with both victim and perpetrator for the causes of peace and reconciliation require trust-building rapport at all levels of society. Through the development of mutual, trust-building relationships, Sant' Egidio endeavors to create and foster a hospitable third-party framework for addressing past, present, and potential issues and identities causing violent conflict. These relationships help create a foundational trust required before *real* mediation, dialogue and reconciliation between warring groups can begin.

Intercommunal reconciliation cannot be realized through cease fires advocating segregation, negotiations encouraging political amnesia, or treaties mandating absolute retribution. Reconciliation—i.e., deep peacemaking—between communities who have either caused or encountered physical violence and psychological trauma can only occur through relational encounters, whereby differences are no longer requisites for division. As Lederach makes clear, reconciliation “is built on mechanisms that engage the sides of a conflict with each other as humans-in-relationship” (1997: 26). IRAOs like Sant' Egidio can help mediate divisive differences through the formation of relationships with influential international and national political leaders and organizations as well as with local leaders and indigenous NGOs active in conflict management processes. From this relational vantage point, IRAOs are well placed to help reconstruct opposing perspectives of combatants, re-humanizing the framework for peacebuilding.

Like many other IRAOs working in the field of conflict transformation, members of Sant' Egidio are tasked directly with creating and maintaining transparent relationships with stakeholders in current and post-conflict arenas. In October of 2009, for example, a contingent from the community of Sant' Egidio arranged a meeting with Pakistan's president, Asif Ali Zardari, cultivating a state-level relationship through which to express formally its steadfast dedication to poverty alleviation and interreligious coexistence within the state of Pakistan. During the meeting, President Zardari expressed gratitude for Sant' Egidio's commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation, and he requested the Community's assistance in fortifying “Pakistan's Conference for Dialogue between Religions.” At the same time, Sant' Egidio's resident communities within Pakistan continue to reiterate—through local relationships—these same concerns for the poor and for religious tolerance (www.santegidio.org).

The Sant' Egidio leadership in Rome works exhaustively to identify, initiate, and coordinate relationship-building partnerships with its

members in different parts of the world (especially in regions experiencing violent conflict), thus providing a more amplified contribution to local conflict management and reconciliation initiatives. For instance, the global Sant' Egidio community has a vibrant relationship with its local chapter in San Salvador, El Salvador, which is actively participating in the "Escuela de la Paz" (School for Peace), created for impoverished children in the capital city's Apopa district. In September of 2009, one of Sant' Egidio's local members, William Quijano, was murdered by violent "mara" gang members who coerce new young members into their ranks from the same slums in which William worked. The global Sant' Egidio community mourned this loss, decried the "logic of violence," and reiterated its relational solidarity with the local community and the state's commitment to confronting violent juvenile crime and improving overall human security in the capital and across the country (www.santegidio.org).

A chief component, then, to this IRAO's commitment to conflict resolution is the cultivation and advocacy of long-term, restorative human relationships. By developing relationships with heads-of-state, regional leaders, and local actors in different parts of the world, Sant' Egidio is attempting to influence deep peacemaking at all levels of diplomacy. When a state or region is ripe for conflict prevention or peacebuilding, Sant' Egidio relies on its on-the-ground relationships as a basis for meaningful intervention. Through its extensive network of individual and communal relationships, many international, national, and local actors involved in violent crises in various places around the world (especially in the Southern hemisphere) continue to seek the advice and participation of this IRAO (www.santegidio.org).

89

Dialogical Emphasis

Dialogue is essential for the prevention of violent conflict, as well as transforming conflict once violent disagreement has occurred. According to Ramsbotham et al., the objective of dialogical conflict resolution "is to open channels of communication in order to overcome prejudice and misunderstanding and to build trust" (2007: 288). Especially in the case of inter-communal conflicts—where conflicting narratives have made mutual respect an impossibility—constructive discourses are essential for dismantling competing narratives of violence and recreating and nurturing a shared narrative of coexistence and tolerance.

Concomitant with Sant' Egidio's commitment to relationship-building is its strategic emphasis on dialogue. Dialogue for this IRAO is "a way of life and . . . a means for resolving violent conflict" (www.santegidio.org). Sant' Egidio has advocated and facilitated dialogue for conflict prevention and peacebuilding at all levels, from international and national political and religious leaders to local combatants. Its most notable success in conflict transformation and reconciliation through the official channels of Track I dialogue was in the Mozambican civil war, which lasted sixteen years (1976-92) and caused immeasurable infrastructural destruction, created widespread starvation, displaced countless families, and cost nearly one million lives. After 27 months of undulating dialogue and negotiations, encouraged and mediated by Sant' Egidio, a peace agreement was reached and "the Community asked different governments and the United Nations to send their representatives in the final phases of the negotiations, as observers, guarantors of the peace accord" (www.santegidio.org). With tremendous credibility established inside the country, Sant' Egidio's global and local members continue to encourage a transparent discursive environment in Mozambique, where shared, democratic narratives of coexistence and cooperation continue to be communicated.

90

In most regions of the world, religious beliefs and institutions stand as credible mechanisms for change in the public square. In *Liberty and Power: A Dialogue on Religion & U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World*, editors E.J. Dionne, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Kayla Drogosz conclude that, in contemporary international relations, "it is not possible even for the clearest-eyed realist to avoid grappling with the importance of religious forces in shaping the world as it now exists" (2004: 9). The paradoxical role of religion—to both exacerbate and assuage violent conflicts—is recognized and emphasized by Sant' Egidio. To combat religion's violent propensities, Sant' Egidio has coordinated countless forums for interreligious dialogue, which have become staple contributions to all three tracks of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Whether at Track II levels, with major religious leaders from around the world, or in Track III initiatives in local villages confronting interreligious tension, Sant' Egidio emphasizes the capacity of conversation to strengthen interpersonal and intergroup relationships and foster "coexistence between diverse cultures, religions, and ethnicities" (www.santegidio.org).

For more than twenty years, Sant' Egidio has coordinated an annual global dialogue between mid- and elite-level religious and political leaders. Its 2009 cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue was held in

Krakow, Poland. At its inaugural event, Sant' Egidio's founder Andrea Riccardi issued a plea for transformative dialogue as an alternative to distrust and aggression between communities:

Dialogue was pointed out as the way of the weak, a way for losers. But aggressiveness produces more aggressiveness. And despising makes walls of hatred rise again, which were buried only a few decades ago. We have held fast in these recent years, trusting that dialogue writes a better history. We have held fast when we were asked what use is dialogue or what are its results? Dialogue, like prayer, is something that cannot be measured by short-sighted criteria. ... Dialogue weaves together the threads of unity (www.santegidio.org).⁵

IRAOs like Sant' Egidio operate within a framework of interactive conflict transformation, recognizing the criticality of conciliatory dialogue before, during, and after violent conflict. This operational strategy is an important consideration when examining the success of this IRAO's synergy paradigm for conflict intervention.

Participatory Contextualization

To be effective in the work of intrastate peacebuilding (in particular, inter-communal reconciliation), third-party participants must endeavor to understand past experiences, current negotiating positions, and the stories of all parties involved in a violent conflict. The goal is not to *bring* expertise to conflict resolution; rather, the objective is to *participate*, from a perspective of mutual understanding, with current or former combatants and with sensitivity to the potency of indigenous mechanisms for peacebuilding. One appropriate contextually sensitive approach to conflict resolution is the elicitive method of intervention. Michelle LeBaron, law professor and director of the University of British Columbia Program of Dispute Resolution, describes the focus of this operational, contextually contingent, strategy:

This approach focuses on gathering information from parties to the conflict about processes that make sense in their cultural context. Parties are invited to consider the setting or forum, appropriate procedures, forms of contact or communication to be used, kinds of outcomes that are desirable, and the roles for outsiders or intervenors in the process. The elicitive process is important because it allows for the emergence of a fit between parties, processes, and intervenor (1997: 327).

⁶ The quotation above is an English translation from the original Italian transcript.

The “Method of Sant’ Egidio” clearly embraces this elicitive approach to conflict resolution, placing local particularities at the center of effective peacebuilding. This culturally responsive, “bottom-up” model enables the Community of Sant’ Egidio to better understand the identity of conflicting groups; the cultural, political, or religious contexts of said conflict; the past and current stages of violent conflict; the competing stories and stereotypes formed about the Other; religious or tribal rituals or symbols that may affect violence or peacemaking; and important religious, social, or political authority figures who may accelerate the processes of reconciliation.

The elicitive and relational field work of Andrea Riccardi and the volunteers of Sant’ Egidio in places like Mozambique, Uganda, and the Balkans enabled the Community to participate effectively alongside local peacebuilders and with a moral authority not available to traditional Track I actors. Translating the stories of conflicting parties, learning and appreciating “cultural patterns of communication (verbal and nonverbal) of specific groups” (LeBaron: 333), and an ever-growing awareness of cultural- and religious-specific norms appear to be important criteria for Sant’ Egidio and other IRAOs working in conflict transformation. Sant’ Egidio’s Claudio Betti concludes that local relationships remain the soil and reason for this IRAO’s work, as it is the grassroots context (those experiencing the conflict) that informs and enriches its peacebuilding contribution and, most importantly, motivates its preference for the poor and disenfranchised. Not only do these indigenous, elicitive relationships lend greater understanding to local context, but they also reinforce Sant’ Egidio’s solidarity with the “sorrow of the world” and “walking wounded.”⁶

92

Conclusion

In most regions of the world today, religion and politics are not easily separated. Indeed, they are often inextricably linked and mutually informing. In the complex field of conflict transformation, one finds a growing recognition of this religio-political reality and a greater appreciation for the significant roles IRAOs are playing in deep peacemaking. Integrating spirituality with praxis, Sant’ Egidio’s synergetic paradigm for peacebuilding is consistent with its charism, relational in nature, dialogical in emphasis, and elicitive in its appro-

¹ Claudio Betti interview, 16 July 2009.

ach. The method of Sant' Egidio can be characterized as contextually flexible and principally consistent.

The field of conflict management is dynamic, constantly confronting new contexts of violent conflict. This evolving field requires dynamic, creative, and responsive mechanisms for effective intervention. IRAOs like Sant' Egidio are providing the field with innovative approaches to peacebuilding, which are not inhibited by shadow agendas of national interest, economic incentive, or international law. For IRAOs such as Sant' Egidio the first and last purpose for intervention is peace. Indeed, as one international admirer stated, "Sant' Egidio's diplomacy is in fact not determined by interest or by vanity but by the love of peace, love of the poor and love for one's neighbor. ... Unlike states, Sant' Egidio has no aircraft-carriers and, unlike international organizations, it cannot threaten embargoes or blockades. Its logistics are to be found in prayer and its force – if I dare use the word – lies in conviction and reason applied in a spirit of fellowship. 'The power of the human approach, the ability to inspire trust.'"

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Aaron Tyler jest kierownikiem Katedry Stosunków Międzynarodowych na Uniwersytecie St. Mary's, w San Antonio w Teksasie. Jego publikacje ukazały się m. in. w „Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law” (UCLA), „Journal of Church and State” oraz „Fides et Historia”. Jest autorem książki *Islam, the West, and Tolerance: Conceiving Coexistence*, PalgraveMacmillan, New York 2008.

Streszczenie

94

Religia, polityka oraz budowanie pokoju: metoda wspólnoty Sant' Egidio

Artykuł analizuje pozytywny wpływ międzynarodowych organizacji wywodzących się z danej społeczności religijnej (IRAO) na przebieg konfliktów, które mają miejsce w dzisiejszym świecie. Autor porusza wielowątkową problematykę współczesnego zarządzania konfliktem oraz proponuje synergiczny model interwencji stosowany obecnie przez Wspólnotę Sant' Egidio w Rzymie. Model przez nią wypracowany jest ważnym przykładem na to, jak organizacje typu IRAO, działające w politycznie uwarunkowanej sferze zarządzania konfliktem, mogą pozytywnie wpłynąć na wielowymiarowy przebieg konfliktu międzywspólnotowego oraz ułatwić trudne dzieło pojednania.

Słowa kluczowe

Międzynarodowy, religijny, konflikt, pojednanie, dialog, budowanie pokoju.