

More People to Fight With

Unity among Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics will not end the fighting. Christians have been fighting with each other since the time of St. Paul. Conflict will not cease.

We already fight with each other frequently.

These difficulties are often about 'me'.

- Getting my way
- What I am used to from my upbringing
- The cultural values I live by

Over the years, Catholic pastor friends have reported conflict over such items as the Artist's depiction of the face of Jesus in the painting on the church's back wall and the type of organ for the new church.

'Pragmatic fights' are over items that are not central to the faith. These are the most common fights. Our Protestant and Orthodox friends will readily join in. They are used to such controversies.

More significantly, we contend with each other about prudential judgments. We differ as to whether the war in Iraq is a Just War. We differ on whether to vote for Senator Obama or Senator McCain. We differ on the best immigration law.

Since prudent judgment operates in gray areas, there will always be differences of opinion among fair-minded people.

In fact, differing judgments and cultural influences can lead to different schools of thought.

The many schools of Catholic thinking agree on basics drawn from Scripture, the Creed and the Tradition. They differ significantly on interpretation and relationships.

Thus the followers of Thomas Aquinas prefer to speak of the virtue of Prudence while Franciscans might well speak of Wisdom. Many Jesuits would say Discernment. There is great similarity but not identity between these concepts of decision making.

Followers of such schools sometimes take all of their views to be correct. They think everyone should agree with them—since they possess the truth.

Christian Unity will bring even more schools of thought into play. Ecumenical dialogue is precisely about what all must hold in common—and what can be a matter of interpretation and variation.

We contend with each other about serious doctrinal and moral matters.

I do not believe that full communion will necessarily include all Christian communities. Conscientious judgments on central issues will keep some of us apart. Questions such as the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist or the role of papacy in the church could keep us separate.

What is called for from everyone is humility. St. Paul held up the example of Christ—emptying Himself and humbling Himself. Humility is necessary for unity (Phil 2:1-12).

In humility, we admit 'I may not always be right' or 'I may not see the whole picture'.

The search for truth makes us look at our own presuppositions. I have to ask if my own training reflects Scripture and Tradition. Does my own personal understanding reflect some of the limitations of immigrant, American, Philadelphia Irish Catholicism?

More profoundly, how do my beliefs relate to my personality, my culture and my spiritual journey through life? **Is what is important to me necessary for all Christians?**

Humility sets us on the road to greater understanding of others. Why do others think the way they do? Why do they believe that there should be a fence along the Rio Grande, or that homosexuals should have the right to marry?

The ecumenical movement, in breaking down walls, calls for honest mutual understanding. The caricatures of the past give way to the honest search for the truth in past history and in present reality.

This search for truthful understanding will bring us to unity with some of our friends—and continue our separation from others.