

What traditions will you pass on?

BY FATHER THEOPHAN BUCK

One day a mother was cooking a ham for Easter with her daughter, and before she put the ham into the roasting pan she cut the ends off as she had always done. Her curious daughter, with a puzzled look, mustered up the courage and asked her mother, "Mom, why is it you cut the ends off the ham?" The mother, having never asked the question herself, told her daughter, "That is the way my momma always did it. If you really want the answer, you will have to call your grandmother." The determined little girl decided to call her. Her grandmother, after hearing the question, chuckling to herself said, "Well back then the pan we had was too small, so we had to cut the ends off the ham so that it would fit."

This story, and all its many variations, presents a popular picture of some of the issues surrounding the concept of "tradition." For many the word tradition conjures up images of people mindlessly following rules and customs of generations past without

knowing exactly why. Tradition is usually portrayed as a blind allegiance to an antiquated bygone era. In religious terms tradition is often looked at as a commitment to religiosity and rituals.

The Greek word used in the New Testament which is translated "tradition" is paradosis.

Paradosis means a handing down or over, which is done by example,

word of mouth or in writing. Many of the references to tradition in the New Testament are negative such as when Jesus condemns the Pharisees who understood the letter of the law but not its spirit or when the Apostle Paul condemns those who follow the "traditions of men" (Col 2:8). However, there are also some positive verses in Scripture about tradition. The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians to "keep the traditions, as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor 11:2). He tells the Thessalonians to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or epistle" (2 Thess 2:15) and to avoid those who are disorderly and "not after

the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess 3:6).

Based on the definition above and the various Scriptures, we see that "tradition" is actually a neutral word that can be used to describe positive things or negative things. Unfortunately, in our modern context tradition is more often seen in a negative light, and within Christian circles it is even portrayed as somehow being opposed to the Scriptures.

In fact we are all part of some tradition. This should make sense to us; we know that if we want our children to have certain values then we have to impart or pass down these values to them. We pass down our values through our words and our examples which our children can eventually either accept or reject. Just like the family, each church family exists to pass on its values to its members. The style of worship, the words of the hymns, the preaching and teaching, the interpretation of Scripture and the prayers are all things that the church is trying to "tradition" to each congregant. As a person grows in the faith they absorb not only

the words of the faith but also many of the unstated attitudes and dispositions.

This is where we should ask an all important question to ourselves. As Christians who are joined (or not joined as it may be) to our respective church communities, what is it that we want to pass down, to "tradition" to others? The truth is that we will all pass down something whether we want to or not. Some may pass down a profound faith in Jesus Christ; others may pass on a profound worldliness. Some will pass down the virtue of worshiping in a community on Sundays; others may pass down the importance of sleeping in on Sundays. Some will pass down positive family traditions enriched by faith and others may pass down negative family traditions enriched by human brokenness. Again, we have to choose what it is that we are going to pass down with our words, actions, attitudes and behaviors.

As we "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" in our respective traditions, may God bless us to grow ever deeper in what has been handed down to us in the Christian life. May He

also bless us to pass down all the life giving and awesome things of life in Christ. Finally, may God enable us, like the Apostle Paul, to boldly tell the generations after us to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught."



Fr. Theophan Buck

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