



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN THE EXPERT FORUMS

Traditionalism: True and False

To be a Catholic is to accept Tradition, both Divine and ecclesiastical. **Divine or Sacred Tradition** comes to us from the apostles and is built up, by way of dogmatic development, by the Magisterium (teaching office) of the Church, exercised by the Apostolic College (the bishops in union with the Pope) or the Pope personally. Sacred Tradition requires the adherence of divine and Catholic faith and only the Magisterium has the supernatural charism to authentically interpret its content.

Ecclesiastical traditions, on the other hand, are not part of the Catholic faith but of the way of life of the Church, as determined by legitimate authority, in various ages and places. There is an ecclesiastical tradition for each of the over 20 Rites and Churches which make up the communion of the Catholic Church (Roman, Byzantine, Maronite, Ruthenian etc.). The ecclesiastical tradition of the Roman Church (the Latin Rite) encompasses such matters as the ceremonies and prayers of the Mass and sacraments (in those things not determined by Sacred Tradition), the Liturgy of the Hours, penitential discipline (laws of fast and abstinence), forms of sacred art and sacred music, clerical discipline (such as celibacy) and many other matters and practices that are mutable and which can thus be changed by the supreme ecclesiastical authority.

We can also speak of **pious traditions** which arise from the popular piety of the People of God. They often have some foundation in Sacred Tradition or ecclesiastical tradition, without having the authority of the Church behind them. An example might be the practice of sprinkling some holy water when taking it from a font as an act of suffrage for the Poor Souls. As expressions of the personal faith of the believer they have great value.

So being *traditional* in any of these senses is good not bad, as long as our practices are rightly ordered. Pious traditions must be subject to ecclesiastical tradition, which in turn must be subject to Sacred Tradition. In all cases it is the Magisterium of the Church which decides what kind of tradition it is and what the implications for Catholic faith and practice are. Today there are many who describe themselves as traditional Catholics in that they adhere to the Magisterium, as well as to ecclesiastical and pious traditions which many others seem to be abandoning. Such piety is the piety of the saints and doctors of the Church.

Answered by Colin B. Donovan, STL