

EDITORIAL

One of the most intriguing questions to ask in any community — and one of the hardest to answer — is how those who belong to that community hand on their traditions from one to another. The question is hard because tradition is a complex term, made up (at the least) of attitudes, symbols and definitions. And it involves (at the least) words, rites, and signs.

Trying to make sense of how religious faith is handed on within the Christian community, I asked the question of thirty different people in a Virginia city four years ago: “What was the one most memorable act of worship you have experienced, and why?” Their answers, not surprisingly, varied widely, but two responses predominated: worship at a camp or conference ground and the Christmas Eve service of holy communion.

At the first, the worshippers were strongly aware of the natural beauty around them. They appreciated the informality which a camp encouraged. At the second, darkness and light, candles and colour, came to have a profounder meaning for them. But in both, respondents testified to their feelings of awe and their awareness of being close to God.

The responses may also help those who have the responsibility of leading worship in a congregation. The Christian faith is handed on, supremely perhaps, in acts of worship, Sunday after Sunday. But walls and pews may not always permit the free flow of this tradition, and it may help the worshipping community to go out *en masse* and remember, at least for a time, that by origin they are an Exodus people. And Sunday mornings may not always permit the full symbolism of the Christian tradition. The light of Christ has shone in the darkness, and it takes real darkness to help us adore that real light.

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