

Traditional

To be traditional is to affirm some line of behavior or belief that comes down to you from the past. This could be the tradition of one of the major religions, that traces its development from a founder and a line of believers. It could be the tradition of jumping into icy Lake Michigan at the end of January, a practice followed for fifteen years by the Lakeview Polar Bear Club of Chicago. Or it could be the family's tradition of celebrating Mardi Gras in the Big Easy. In all such cases, tradition is different from convention, which is 'more hallowed in the breach than in the observance.'

Examples

1 Christmas presents

It was a tradition in my family, for Christmas presents to be opened Christmas morning under a tree in the living room. (This tradition held until I was ten or so. As I had no siblings, the tradition ended at that point.) Sometime on the night before Christmas, as my mother was upstairs reading me *The Night Before Christmas*, my father would assemble the family gifts in a large basket, cover it with a sheet, and turn off the lights. My parents would get up before me the following morning, decorate the living room, then call me down for the present-opening ceremony. Bit by bit my father pulled back the sheet covering the presents, took them out, checked the card to determine the recipient, and distributed the gift where it belonged. I was thrilled by the process, especially between ages four and nine. No tradition has ever meant more to me. This one was simple, unvarying while it lasted, and almost all about me.

2 Historical tradition

As a Roman Catholic I pin part of my faith on historical tradition. That tradition asserts that a Savior we call Jesus Christ entered human history at a certain point in time, winning a significant body of followers who succeeded one another, in a complex, tumultuous sequence of events—wars, apostasies, corruptions—that continues in our own day to enshrine the memory of an epoch making eruption into history. This historical tradition is in my mind. I can't lay it out and examine in on a table. If one thinks this tradition dubious or fraudulent, it is nonetheless a tradition. My faith in this tradition is precisely not documentable, though it rests on documents. It is the way I have decided to look at documents. It is the way I have decided to interpret the maze of conflicting developments that have led us to the present moment.