

Masonic Philosophy

By: Joseph Fort Newton

Dr Joseph Fort Newton was a clergyman and Masonic author. He lived from 1880 until 1950. Bro. Newton was raised in Friendship Lodge #7, Dixon, Illinois later affiliating with Mt. Hermon Lodge #263, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He is the author of one of Freemasonry's classics, The Builders from which this STB was taken. A list of Joseph Fort Newton's books still in print and available for purchase is on pages 7-8. This STB is dedicated to the memory of Joseph Fort Newton, one of Freemasonry's greatest philosophers. – Editor

Because the human soul is akin to God, and is endowed with powers to which no one may set a limit, it is and of right ought to be free. Thus, by the logic of its philosophy, not less than the inspiration of its faith, Masonry has been impelled to make its historic demand for liberty of conscience, for the freedom of the intellect, and for the right of all men to stand erect, unfettered, and unafraid, equal before God and the law, each respecting the rights of his fellows.

What we have to remember is, that before this truth was advocated by any order, or embodied in any political constitution, it was embedded in the will of God and the constitution of the human soul. Nor will Masonry ever swerve one jot or tittle from its ancient and eloquent demand till all men, everywhere, are free in body, mind, and soul.

Some day, when the cloud of prejudice has been dispelled by the searchlight of truth, the world will honor Masonry for its service to freedom of thought and the liberty of faith. No part of its history has been more noble, no principle of its teaching has been more precious than its age-long demand for the right and duty of every soul to seek that light by which no man was ever injured, and that truth which makes man free.

Down through the centuries – often in times when the highest crime was not murder, but thinking, and the human conscience was a captive dragged at the wheel of the ecclesiastical chariot – always and everywhere Masonry has stood for the right of the soul to know the truth, and to look up unhindered from the lap of earth into the face of God. Not freedom from faith, but freedom of faith, has been its watchword, on the ground that as despotism is the mother of anarchy, so bigoted dogmatism is the prolific source of skepticism.

Not only does Masonry plead for that liberty of faith which permits a man to hold what seems to him true, but also, and with equal emphasis, for the liberty which faith gives to the soul, emancipating it from the despotism of doubt and the fetters of fear.

Therefore, by every art of spiritual culture, it seeks to keep alive in the hearts of men a great and simple trust in the goodness of God, in the worth of life, and the divinity of the soul – a trust so apt to be crushed by the tramp of heavy years. Help a man to a firm faith in an Infinite Pity at the heart of this dark world, and from how many fears is he free!

Once a temple of terror, haunted by shadows, his heart becomes "a cathedral of serenity and gladness," and his life is enlarged and unfolded into richness of character and service. Nor is there any tyranny like the tyranny of time. Give a man a day to live, and he is like a bird in a cage beating against its bars. Give him a year in which to move to and fro with his thoughts and plans, his purposes and hopes, and you have liberated him from the despotism of a day. Enlarge the scope of his life to fifty years, and he has a moral dignity of attitude and a sweep of power impossible hitherto. But give him a sense of Eternity; let him know that he plans and works in an ageless time; that above his blunders and sins there hovers and waits the infinite – then he is free!

Nevertheless, if life on earth be worthless, so is immortality. The real question, after all, is not as to the quantity of life, but its quality – its depth, its purity, its fortitude, its fineness of spirit and gesture of soul. Hence the insistent emphasis of Masonry upon the building of character and the practice of righteousness; upon that moral culture without which man is rudimentary, and that spiritual vision without which intellect is the slave of greed or passion. What makes a man great and free of soul, here or anywhither, is loyalty to the laws of right, of truth, of purity, of love, and the lofty will of God.

How to live is the one matter; and the oldest man in his ripe age has yet to seek a wiser way than to build, year by year, upon a foundation of faith in God, using the Square of justice, the Plumb-line of rectitude, the Compass to restrain the passions, and the Rule by which to divide our time into labor, rest, and service to our fellows.

Let us begin now and seek wisdom in the beauty of virtue and live in the light of it, rejoicing; so in this world shall we have a foregleam of the world to come – bringing down to the Gate in the Mist something that ought not to die, assured that, though hearts are dust, as God lives what is excellent is enduring!

Joseph Fort Newton (1880-1950)

Clergyman and Masonic author. b. July 21 1880 in Decatur, Texas. Graduate of Coe Coll. (Ia.) in 1912; Tufts Coll. in 1918; and Temple U. in 1929. Ordained to Baptist ministry in 1893.

Pastor in Paris, Texas, and St Louis, Mo. Founder and pastor of People's Church, Dixon, ILL., 1901-08; pastor of Liberal Christian Church, Cedar Rapids Iowa, 1908-16; The City Temple, London England, 1916-19; Church of the Divine Paternity, N.Y.C., 1919-25; Memoria Church of St. Paul, Philadelphia, 1925-30 St. James Church, Philadelphia, 1930-35; St. Luke and Epiphany, Philadelphia from 1938 He was raised in Friendship Lodge No. 7 Dixon, Ill., May 28, 1902, and later affiliated with Mt. Hermon Lodge No. 263, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was grand chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Iowa from 1911-13. In 1944 he dimitted to Lodge No. 51, Philadelphia Received 32ø AASR (SJ) in Iowa Consistory, Cedar Rapids, Iowa in Oct. 1909, and 33ø, honorary, Oct. 20, 1933 Grand prelate of Grand Encampment, K.T U.S.A. in 1929. His Masonic book, *The Builders*, stands as the most notable writing of the century. He also wrote *A Story and Study of Masonry* (1914); *The Religion of Masonry* (1926); his autobiography *River of Years* (1944) contains many Masonic references. He produced a score of other non Masonic books. d. Jan. 24, 1950.

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