

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH BOOK REVIEW

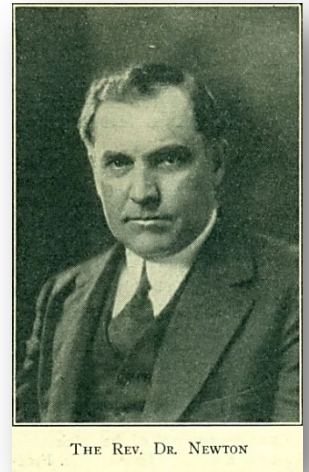
THE RELIGION OF MASONRY

Joseph Fort Newton

Reviewed By: Warren Heaton, Lexington Lodge No. 1

The title of Joseph Fort Newton's work, *The Religion of Masonry*, itself encompasses the conflict in the minds and beliefs of many. That is certainly relevant today as in the early years of Masonry. The book is not designed to deal with religious thought, but with true religion. Faith and acknowledgment of the love and power of the Great Architect of all that exists is of necessary focus to all.

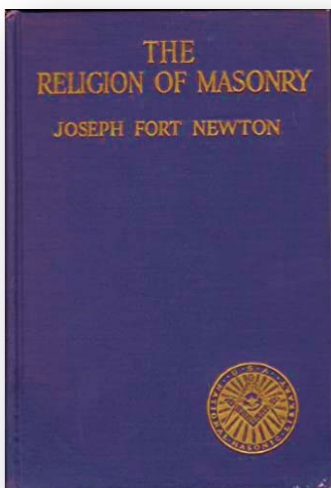
As Newton points out, in the year 1390 Masons were, definitely and exclusively Catholic. In 1723, just as in the Reformation, Masonry severed its connection from the Catholic Church. Afterward, there were born two Grand Lodges. They called themselves "Ancient" and "Modern" Masons. The "Moderns" finally won, disengaging Masonry from specific allegiance to any one religion. In 1813, the Universal Charter of the Craft was affirmed. No longer included was the urging that Jews, Hindus, and Mohammedans might be allowed to have Lodges of their own, if they wished, though not within (or, at least, not entirely within), the regular fellowship of the Fraternity. There came to be, "the center of union, and the means of conciliating true friendships. Not only among persons but among faiths."



Newton's *The Religion of Masonry*, though written in 1927, is as fresh today as then. So let us start with the basics of why this is timely by gleaning from what is considered religion as defined in this writing, refuting Cultism and without being irreligious.

There is a clear separation of definition between religion and being religious. If I say the words "deer" and "dear," they sound the same, but one is animate and the other inanimate or abstract. Quoting Newton, "Religion is no abstract thing; it is a life by itself, the life of God in the soul of man." Newton went on to write, "The Church has no monopoly of Religion, nor did the Bible create it. Instead, it was a religion that created the Bible and Church."

Often "religious" people, as in the earliest years, separate themselves by theology and not by religion. One is the truth of life in its warmth and joy. The other is a system of reasoning. Practicing religion is taking the lessons given and having a life of forgiveness, love, service, and endeavoring to overcome oneself and grow daily. Temples, altars, creeds, feasts, and solemn ritual words are not religion. They are theological beliefs.



The religion of Masonry is not a defiance of our Masonic belief, or how we need to view Masons, Christians, or any other religious belief. It is pure religion undefiled.

As we progress through the book, we continue to be challenged to understand that Masonry is not designed to deal with religious thought, but with true religion. Newton writes of faith and acknowledgment of the love and power of the Great Architect of all that exists. One is free to glean what is applicable to each individual.

Newton begins the book with the most legitimate question, “What is Religion and what is Masonry?” He addresses, essentially, the noble practice of its faith and obligations, and answers the question of what the Great Light is. He asserts that Masonry will never again be the servant of one religious dogma or creed – its aim is expressing faith in God and becoming a better man.

Next, he addressed the Mystic ties. This is drawing the line between religion and theology, or substance rather than a system of reasoning. Even in scripture we can eliminate details by human reasoning and draw many conclusions that become apparent in the many splits among religious institutions.

Now we are introduced to the Builders. Newton does not deal with the attitude of Masonry toward organized religion, but as a study of the Craft as itself an expression of faith, life, and hope – a kindred life, as it were. There is then a Religion of Masonry – old, simple, wise, and profound as it is practical. Such religion allows each man to read and interpret those truths as his heart elects. Each of us has a particular path and each path is different from another’s.

Last, as we progress through this understanding of Masonic Religion, we come to our foundation in beginnings – the Corner Stone. Just as the corner stone is worked and shaped for the foundational start of a building, the Bible lies open as every Mason takes vows of chastity and charity. The Great Light is the cornerstone of the will of God. Newton’s faith is not the fruit of logic, but of the experience of life. Truth is not a theory, but freedom and meaning of life.

Expanding next on, “The Book of the Holy Law,” we are reminded that the Holy Book is the wisest teacher and best friend of man. It is our guide to brotherly love, relief, and truth. We learn that a Mason knows a certain secret almost too easy to be found. The Holy Book is light and power; and it encompasses moral law. It has to do with realities, not dogmas. It is a symbol of truth, the will of God and faith being hope in things not seen.

Character is a result of bringing together the symbols exhibited to our personal life – as Newton call it, “the geometry of character.” As in all creation, geometry is present everywhere in nature. Life comes, not by chance, but by design of the Great Eternal Designer. You are not an accident. We learn, through our Degrees, morality, then the great freedom of mind and, from there, other great lessons. We are only scratching the surface of the knowledge to come. We are only *becoming* Freemasons.

We speak of the Temple of Brotherhood. The Masonic view of life means that we are here in this world to build something – to become something – to build on the will of the Eternal. We can’t know His will without His help. Now, we learn that we build with the unity of Brotherhood. Forgiveness, and ridding ourselves of selfishness and vanity are essential. By doing so, we concede that each brother has something special to give.

Moving on we arrive at “The Last Landmark.” It is the Temple, and its rituals are not ends in themselves, but a divine means to the end that every workman, however humble, may be a sanctuary of faith, and a

shrine of love – an altar of purity, and truth. We all share in the beauty and the raising of the symbolic building. We toil now for the real promise of eternity.

The commitment and work to which we are obligated is to become a Freemason – to grow in knowledge and understanding. As Newton puts it, “Happy is the man who has learned the truth, not so a petty theory but as the meaning of light- he is free indeed.”

We all struggle to reform our paradigm of thought because we have learned our personal beliefs from youth. Change and acceptance of new direction and understanding is refreshing and important.

We are rough stones being shaped and smoothed to a usable and beautiful part of an eternal plan. We are part of the Temple of the spiritual building. As Newton summarizes simply, “The Religion of a Mason is to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

Our rituals begin with invoking the Great Architect to guide us and be present in our meetings. In our Holy Book, we are told that where two or three are joined together in His name He is present as well. So mote it be!

First Published in 1927 by the Masonic Service Association of the United States, later editions and reprints of *The Religion of Masonry* are available through online booksellers.