

THE OLD PAST MASTER COIL'S DEFINITION OF MASONRY

I want to share with you a definition of Masonry promulgated by Henry Wilson Coil, 33°, which I read this Summer, and would like to know what you think:

“Freemasonry, in its broadest and most comprehensive sense, is a system of morality and social ethics, a primitive religion, and a philosophy of life, all of simple and fundamental character, incorporating a broad humanitarianism, and, though treating life as a practical experience, subordinates the moral to the spiritual; it is a religion without a creed, being of no sect but finding truth in all; it is moral but not pharisaic; it demands sanity rather than sanctity; it is tolerant but not supine; it seeks truth but does not define truth; it urges its votaries to think but does not tell them what to think; it despises ignorance but does not proscribe the ignorant; it fosters education but proposes no curriculum; it espouses political liberty and the dignity of man but has no platform or propaganda; it believes in the nobility and usefulness of life; it is modest and not militant; it is moderate, universal, and so liberal as to permit each individual to form and express his own opinion, even as to what Freemasonry is or ought to be, and invites him to improve it if he can.”

Each premise contained in that definition affords a subject for study and discussion. Using this, and other definitions, perhaps our Masonic Studies Group might put together some presentations suitable for Lodge education talks at stated meetings.

When I reflect on the moral, philosophical and ethical lessons taught in the degrees of the Blue Lodge, the Scottish and York Rites [from which the above definition, or perhaps description, was drawn] I am constantly reminded of those words which are found over the door of Babcock Lodge No. 322 in Highland Springs, Virginia – and which should be graven over the entrance to every Masonic Temple and on our hearts – “Practice without that which Ye have learned within.”

Indeed, we close Blue Lodge with a prayer which states the same thing. We do not exist in a vacuum. Masonry is defined in the eyes of those outside the Craft by the actions of each of us out of the Lodge in our everyday life – as a father, husband, or in our usual vocations. While we may not always live up to those principles [to err is human], we should always strive toward them – and by doing so, show the world that, on becoming a Mason, each of us has become a better man.

FRATERNALLY AND FONDLY,
JOHN D. NELSON, P.M.