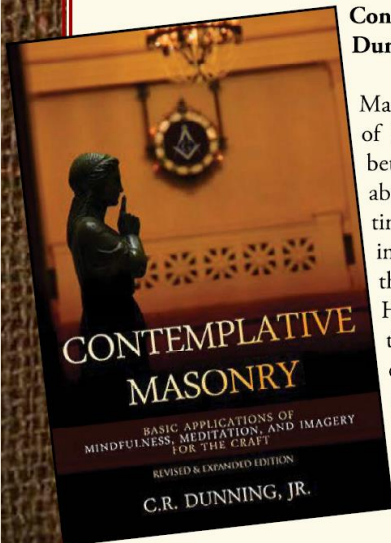


IN PRINT

BOOK REVIEWS: *Current***Contemplative Masonry by Chuck R. Dunning Jr.**

Masonry is often presented as a system of Morality, which makes good men better, and much of the literature about the Craft spends significant time explaining the symbolism, interpretation of the degrees, and the overall lessons of Freemasonry. However few books deal with how these lessons should be applied, especially within a spiritual and contemplative approach to Freemasonry, which makes the segment where *Contemplative Masonry* places itself slightly unique.

The author, Brother Chuck Dunning, has been engaged in various forms of contemplative practice for over three decades and has also spent significant time in higher education, which is clear throughout the book from how it formulates its lessons. He is one of the founders and current Superintendent of the Academy of Reflection, a part to the Guthrie Scottish Rite formed as a group for Scottish Rite Masons to pursue contemplative interests within the context of the Rite's symbolism, ritual, and literature. In his book *Contemplative Masonry*, he is making some of those same lessons and practices available to the Freemason in the Blue Lodge setting.

The wording on the front page: "Basic applications of mindfulness, meditation and imagery for the Craft" is an excellent and very precise stipulation. The book starts out with a general introduction to what contemplative and speculative Masonry is by touching on the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual requirements and intersections, before moving on to a deeper debate on the inner workings of the three degrees. A significant portion of the book is spent on the psychological aspects of Freemasonry, and especially how they apply to the work on contemplative Masonry.

The first third of the book is rounded out with a very good hands on and straight forward explanation to the approach of working with spiritual Masonry. There are clear proposals to how the author suggests to approach the areas of study, meditation and virtues to be successful.

The last two thirds of the book covers the three degrees, and goes through not only the general lessons to be taken from each stage, but has very specific examples and suggestions on how to go about and institute them. Brother Dunning gives us a number of clear exercises that are described in detail, ready to be implemented. These are generally of a reflective and meditative nature, some to be carried out while at lodge and others for reflections afterwards. They are all interlinked, and are intended to be carried out in sequence as they build upon lessons and realizations gained earlier.

The book rounds out with a specific routine: suggesting which exercises to incorporate into your own schedule, how often they should be done, and how they can be combined. It's an excellent hands-on way to make it easy for the Mason to not only get started, but also keep a routine going. The lessons are easy to carry out, but I would say that they most likely require some familiarity and a basic skill level with meditative practices, in order to really become successful.

Looking at the book it is clear that it isn't for everyone, and many Masons will not find the content to be of interest, as they simply do not seek contemplative practices and spiritual growth from lodge or Freemasonry. However with this being said, it is at the same time an extremely important and useful book for the Brothers seeking to either get started or deepen their contemplative practices. It is one of the first books I have seen that gives clear exercises, and suggested routines through which to work. And that is both useful and valuable, compared to the many books that only touch on the spiritual symbols, but give little advice on how to use them. Here we are given a clear tome to work from. These things alone make a book worth recommending, but the fact that the lessons found inside are clear, relevant and possible to implement, makes this a must-read for any brother seeking to deepen his pursuits and practice of contemplative Masonry.

Reviewed by Christian M. Christensen

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