Evolution of Co-Masonic English-Language Blue Lodge Freemasonic Ritual

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I will begin by telling you this paper I will deliver today is a pale comparison to the published paper that is coming. Today I will be brief. The published paper will not be.

The Blue Lodge ritual worked in the Order to which I belong is called “the Lauderdale”, at times called “the British Ritual”. It is a revision of “the Dharma”. The Dharma was compiled well more than a century ago, mostly from British but also a variety Continental European ritual traditions, with some Theosophical influence that blends well with the pre-existing Judeo-Christian elements.

These are facts but they remain little known, even by most Co-Masons and certainly the vast majority of gender-based Masons. Stories that for generations circulated about Co-Masonic, stories that have been told, retold and are much cherished, very often do not stand up to scrutiny. Over time, scholars quote these stories, often because it’s all they have to go on, and thereby allow themselves to be convinced the stories are true. There’s an old movie line that says, “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” I can tell you from my own experience that there are many who don’t want to give up these stories.

Roots of Co-Masonic Ritual

The roots of Co-Masonic ritual grow deep into the Malecraft ritual that came before. While many Malecraft Rituals were adapted in the beginning, in general most Co-Masonic Ritual bears a strong resemblance to what is called “Emulation-type ritual” but there are many other influences as well.

First Co-Masonic Rituals

In the beginning, there was the French Rite. The first female Co-Mason was Maria Desraismes, initiated into an otherwise all-Male Lodge "Les Libres Penseurs" (The Freethinkers) at Le Pecq in France. She is initiated into the Craft in a Lodge working some variation of the French Rite. In the next decade, she would co-found the world’s first Co-Masonic order, Le Droit Humain, with George Martin, who himself came up through Masonry working a variation of the French Rite.

George Martin, sometime before the turn of the 20th Century, created a unique variation of the French Rite for use in LDH Lodges, the "Rituel Des Trois Premiers Degrés".

This ritual, with its successive revisions over more than a century, is still worked in LDH-French Federation Lodges today. It is not the only ritual being worked in LDH-French Federation Lodges but, for the purposes of this paper, it’s the only one I’m going to talk about. This was the ritual worked in LDH in 1902 when the first English-speaking Lodge formed.

At the heart of that first English Lodge and the wider spread of Co-Freemasonry throughout the English-speaking world is Annie Besant. She was a woman of many titles: orator, writer, socialist, women’s rights
advocate, union organizer, politician, supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule, atheist turned Theosophist, and a great deal more.

Besant and her followers were initiated, passed and raised in Paris into Co-Freemasonry in 1902. It was they who founded the first British Co-Masonic Lodge, Human Duty No 6 in London, consecrated in the autumn of that year. Besant, almost thru sheer force of will, transformed the formerly largely French phenomenon into a worldwide movement that she herself spread throughout the British Empire. In these very early days, Human Duty used an English translation of LDH’s *French Rite* ritual, which continues to be used today under the name “*George Martin Ritual*”. However, the Brothers of Human Duty decided very early that they didn’t like it. And they didn’t like it because the French Rite ritual wasn’t British. Male members of Human Duty had previous experience with English, Irish and Scottish Malecraft Lodges and understood those ritual forms. The translated French Rite ritual was alien to them. They informed the female members of their Lodge that this ritual was not British, that British rituals were available and, in this way, made total the dissatisfaction with the translated French Rite ritual.

So the Brothers of Human Duty asked for, and in about mid1903 got, permission from LDH headquarters in Paris to develop a ritual that they preferred. Given how quickly their new Ritual was developed, they likely began before they got permission.

The ritual they developed certainly has much in common with the “*Text Book of Freemasonry*”, of which the latest edition had been released in 1901. I’ve had marvelous opportunities, for years, to study this topic with ritual scholars who are better at this than am I. The prevailing opinion among us is that this English-language Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual has much more in common with “*The Perfect Ceremonies of Craft Masonry*” and its companion text, “*The Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft Masonry*”. In particular, the earliest Co-Masonic Blue Lodge Tracing Boards in this first ritual’s second edition, with a few additions, most closely resemble those in “*The Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft Masonry*”. Also, this first ritual’s habit of referring to a Candidate as “A.B.” could likewise have been borrowed from either or both the “*Text Book of Freemasonry*” and “*The Perfect Ceremonies of Craft Masonry*”.

It likely is from these sources that the bulk of *Emulation*-style ritual enters this first English-language Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual. There are, however, elements that are not quite so easy to track down but generally look like they come from Irish, Scottish and French traditions. There also is the barest overlay of Theosophical influence that in no way intrudes upon the Judeo-Christian elements present in British ritual forms.

**English-language Ritual Compilers**

It is natural to wonder who the editors were. First I’ll say who they were not. It wasn’t Annie Besant. She never claimed she did and she really didn’t have enough experience to pull off such an editing job in the
very short amount of time in which it was done. This is an error that has too often repeated by modern Masonic scholars who’ve looked into this history.

A bit of scrutiny makes this error all the more obvious. Besant was surrounded by Brethren who did have this experience and it was her habit to delegate jobs like this. And there’s plenty of evidence she never became especially well versed in the history of Ritual development. Even after the newly compiled Ritual was complete and in its first few revisions, Besant habitually confused “Scottish ritual” with the “Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite”, the latter of which isn’t Scottish. Whoever produced this first English-language Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual not only understood that distinction but also had considerable Masonic ritual experience.

Two other Brothers I am quite certain were not involved in the initial development of this first ritual were Charles Leadbeater and James Wedgwood. I realize these two are darn near everyone else’s favorite suspects but it just isn’t possible. Neither man was a Co-Mason in 1903 nor neither had much prior experience in Freemasonry. Wedgwood did not even meet Besant until the following year. Both became Theosophists soon enough but Wedgwood was not initiated into the Craft until 1912 and Leadbeater not until 1915. Both men very likely knew, by association, who the editors actually were and likewise were in a good position to know details about the editing process; but they were not arbiters of that process. Within about ten years, their time as ritual editors certainly would come but neither Leadbeater nor Wedgwood had a hand in compiling this first ritual.

Another “person” who was not a compiler is the Theosophical Master, the Comte St. Germain, with whom Leadbeater said he had been, since 1901, communicating as “Prince Ragozcz.” Schorals of Masonry, Co-Masonic and otherwise, very often have claimed involvement of Theosophical Masters in the development of Blue Lodge ritual. Influence by the “Masters” can be verified for the higher degrees in Co-Freemasonry but not in the Blue Lodge.

In fact, Leadbeater himself found, very late in his career, that he had to explain why there had been no such influence in the development of Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual. He explained it by describing a conversation he said he had with Prince Ragozcz in a paper published 17 months before Leadbeater’s death 1 March 1934. Leadbeater said he didn’t ask Prince Ragozcz about his thoughts on the development of Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual until after Leadbeater’s Initiation in 1915. By that time, the oldest of Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual was about 12 years old and headed into its fourth revision. According to Leadbeater, Prince Ragozcz was satisfied with the way the Blue Lodge ritual had developed without any help from him. I quote Prince Ragozcz, via Leadbeater, at length in the published paper.

In addition to having figured out who didn’t compile this first ritual, I do indeed have my own suspects for who did. Francesca Arundale, one of the first British Co-Masons and she who introduced Besant to Co-Freemasonry, was herself a ritual expert, as was her nephew, George Arundale. The Arundales both were members of Human Duty. The Arundales also produced the English translation of the French Rite ritual LHD was already using. They also moved to Adyar at the time the new ritual was developed. It seems perfectly logical that the Arundales were up to the task of producing a more British-flavored Co-Masonic ritual.
Dharma

Whoever developed the first English-language Co-Masonic Blue Lodge ritual, it was developed specifically for Dharma Lodge in Benares City, in Adyar, India. This is how the ritual got its name, from the name of the Lodge where it first was worked. It soon was in use in Human Duty as well.

A general understanding soon was reached at LDH headquarters in Paris that the Dharma would be used in any other English-speaking Co-Masonic lodge founded in the world. However, almost immediately, there was a glaring exception.

Across the Atlantic, in 1903, Antoine Muzzarelli, a French Freemason operating under the direction of George Martin, established Co-Freemasonry in the US. Muzzarelli decided very early that the ritual US Masonic Lodges were not going to work was the Dharma. He was a French Freemason, familiar with the French Rite and, upon seeing the Dharma for the first time, announced himself “at a loss to understand” it.

Muzzarelli dealt with that lack of understanding by ignoring the Dharma. His successor, Louis Goaziou, continued that policy well into the next decade and struggled to fend it off into the 1930s. Consequently, in this very early period in the history of worldwide Co-Freemasonry, US Lodges turned elsewhere for their rituals. As these lodges worked in multiple languages, including English, Italian and French, it likewise was natural that they worked ritual of different languages. They used the French Rite, a translation of the French Rite or any ritual they could get their hands on, including US-based Preston-Webb-type ritual.

This ultimately would lead to US Co-Masons developing their own ritual, as we will see, called “the North American Ritual”, which I'll discuss here shortly.

So with US lodges excepted, the Dharma workings were introduced into many English speaking Co-Masonic lodges.

Most of the Dharma would have been quite familiar to early Anglo-centric Co-Masons with previous experience in Malecraft Masonry. Wedgwood later reported that a total of 52 Craft rituals were consulted for this first compilation. Francesca Arundale later said that all the rituals consulted were of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. Mabel Besant-Scott, the daughter of Annie Besant who often acted as her mother’s deputy, said “several rituals were used, English, Scottish and French”.

The Dharma was complete and in use by late 1903, though its official first edition date is 1904.

Producing this ritual had to have been a major challenge and it soon became clear that there were problems with the 1904 edition of the Dharma. The ritual itself was very brief and barebones. There were no tracing boards or other illustrations included. More than that, the workings were not arranged in the order in which the ceremonies would be worked, which required quite a lot of flipping back and forth in ritual books. There also was considerable rubric lacking, including instances in which a portion of the ritual was simply announced and then dismissed as “This is done” without any explanation of how it
should be done. This would be very confusing for any new Mason. In 1904, there were a considerable lot
of new Masons in Co-Masonic Lodges worldwide.

In 1908, the Dharma’s second edition was issued with additional rubric, instruction and the first of the
Harris-inspired Tracing Boards so similar to those in “The Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft
Masonry”. There also is, on the second edition’s title page, an indication of how much the 1901 edition
of “Text Book of Freemasonry” may have influenced the Dharma. Both list the author as “Compiled by A
MEMBER OF THE CRAFT” in the same, or at least very similar, font. The first edition of the Dharma
did not list an author. xxiii

As if to crown this ritual as uniquely Co-Masonic, “the whole [was] adorned by the beautifying hand of
The V. Ills. Bro. Annie Besant with ‘Mystic Charges’”, Arnold Banks later wrote. xxiv However, these
“Mystic Charges” of Annie Besant in the Blue Lodge, one for each of the three degrees, were not
originally so-called. Instead, they appear to have been Besant’s impressions of those degrees written
specifically for Dharma Lodge. In the 1908 edition of the Dharma ritual, they were inserted at the end of
each degree with the words “It may be read”. In later editions, the name “Mystic Charge” was used, likely
because they were inserted after the traditional charges.

Harrison

In 1908, there also appeared another revision of the Dharma now known as the Harrison Ritual, named
after its primary compiler, Frank D. Harrison. Harrison served was Grand Secretary of LDH-British
Federation, quite some time after he left the Golden Dawn “because he disliked its Masonic ethos.” xxv
I have never seen a copy of the Harrison nor do I know anyone who has. It could well be that no copies
have survived. I talk a bit more about the Harrison in the published version of this paper.

Lauderdale

It is at this point that Wedgwood enters as a ritual editor. In 1913, Wedgewood was responsible for a
revision of the Dharma called the “Lauderdale”. Not that it was called Lauderdale at the time. When it
first was released, it was referred to as the “third” or “1913” revision of the Dharma. However, it is with
the 1913 revision that another ritual begins to develop and to become something distinct from the
original Dharma. This distinction would, sometime after 1923, be referred to as ”Lauderdale”. That name
comes from the LDH-British Federation’s Headquarters established in January of that year at 2
Lauderdale Road in London. xxvi

It seems Wedgwood did not get all the revisions he wanted in his 1913 edition. We don’t have a lot of
details but Goaziou, almost two decades later, referred to this period as when “Bro Wedgwood began to
meddle with the ritual.” Goaziou explained that Wedgwood “tried to bring too much of the Church
influence into it.” xxvii

Goaziou made that observation later when Brothers of LDH-American Federation were considering
whether to accept the, by then, latest revision of the Lauderdale and there was some suspicion there were
unwarranted Theosophical elements in Wedgwood’s original revision. Goaziou pointed out that it
wasn’t Wedgwood the Theosophist so much as Wedgwood the former Anglican who, in 1913, was beginning to lay down the ground work of the Liberal Catholic Church. It seems what Wedgwood wanted to add to this 1913 revision involved considerable smells and bells more often associated with church services.

For all his so-called meddling, Wedgwood was allowed to retain in the 1913 revision three elements that actually have their roots in Freemasonry but, pleasantly for him, were very church like. These three elements were processions, incense and candle lighting. Processions and candles can be found in many Masonic orders, sometimes in public and they certainly continue to feature in many continental European Orders. The censuring ceremony established in the 1913 revision seems to have been lifted, complete with the same number of thurible swings, from the Malecraft Grand East of the Netherlands.

Most pointedly, these additions are placed not during the ritual itself but just before the Lodge is opened. This was done to avoid any accusations of innovation in the ritual itself, which doesn’t begin until the opening of the Lodge.

The next revision of the Lauderdale followed in 1916, likely by both Wedgwood and Leadbeater, to add Masonic hymns commonly used in Emulation-based English Lodges, in addition to "certain verses from the V.S.L." also used in Emulation-based ritual. It was with this revision that the hymn “Closed is the Solemn Hour” was added as a recessional.

The fifth edition of the Lauderdale, issued in 1925, provided greater explanation of what, by then, actually was being called the Lauderdale, setting it apart from the Dharma and other revisions. By this time, Lodges were given a choice among sanctioned rituals with "some preferring the more ornate, others the plainer rituals," the notes of the 1925 edition explained. However, this revision also noted other additions that were making their way into some Co-Masonic Lodge rooms, including “the placing of any picture or pictures on the walls, or of the symbolic chair in the North.” These additions, the notes pointed out, “are all non-essential” and that "Lodges should observe towards each other the old rule: 'In things essential, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; in all things, Charity."

There have been further revisions to the Lauderdale over the decades but since 1925 they have mostly involved improved rubric. Co-Masonic ritual was largely set by the mid1920s and the very vast majority of ritual worked in Co-Masonic Lodges today look very much like what developed in the first decades of the 20th Century. Of all of them, the Lauderdale is the most commonly worked.

**Other British Co-Masonic Rituals**

While the Lauderdale is the most successful revision of the Dharma, it is not the only one. There is the "Verulam Workings", issued in the early 1920s as a sort of compromise between the elaborate Lauderdale and plainer English and Scottish workings. There also is the Sydney, produced in 1916, that has much in common with the Lauderdale and is so-called because it was printed in Sydney, Australia.
There also are rituals in use in the LDH-British Federation that are not descended from the *Dharma* but, instead, form branches grafted onto the ritual tree. These include the “Scottish Standard”, “Irish Workings” and “Glasgow Ritual”. In the published edition of this paper, I explain more specifically how those Rituals arrived in Co-Freemasonry.

**North American**

In all these ways, LDH-British Federation seeded the rest of worldwide English-speaking Co-Freemasonry with ritual developed in that jurisdiction but, as mentioned earlier, it was not universally accepted. In North America, it was an especially hard sell. The Brothers there initially wanted ritual of a North American flavor and for US-based Co-Masons, this was an especially tricky proposition. They were surrounded by a Malecraft Masonry that worked, and still works, a multiplicity of Preston-Webb types.

However, early US Co-Freemasons also were often immigrants who almost as often brought Masonic traditions with them from throughout the world. For them, local was very broad. Muzzarelli and Goaziou certainly rejected the *Dharma* as being too British but they also wanted ritual that would please their heterogeneous brethren.

Both of them left this task to a ritual expert, Alida de Leeuw. Born in Holland in about 1855, she was widowed while still quite young and then decided to enter the education field. A proponent of the Froebel method of Kindergarten, she worked her way to the top of her field. She was among the first Theosophists to become a Co-Mason in North America and she quickly studied her way to ritual perfection.

By 1904, Muzzarelli had soundly – if unilaterally – rejected the *Dharma* and assigned de Leeuw the task of helping him develop a ritual for North American Lodges. It had largely taken form when Muzzarelli died in the fall of 1908. Goaziou, himself not yet especially expert in ritual, was quite impressed with de Leeuw’s work. He gave her “full charge of ritual matters” for the next decade. The ritual she produced is now called “the North American Ritual” but in her day, it was “Ritual of the Symbolic Lodges in America”. The earliest editions were printed in Goaziou’s own print shop in Charleroi, Pennsylvania.

The ritual de Leeuw produced is rather busy. However, for all of Muzzarelli and Goaziou’s decision not to use the *Dharma*, the *North American* has quite a lot in common with the *Dharma*. For instance, the first editions of the *North American* use exactly the same tracing boards as had been introduced in the second edition of the *Dharma*. There also are elements from other traditions, including the barest whiff of Preston Webb and some remarkable elements in the floor work that are reminiscent of Continental European workings.

While the *North American* was, initially, the ritual used in a majority of US Lodges, it was never the only ritual used. It existed alongside the *French Rite* and other foreign language rituals in Lodges where English did not prevail.
It was not until 1934 that the Lauderdale was approved for use in North American Lodges. I have no record that the Lauderdale ever was so-called by US Co-Masons. Instead, it was called the “English” or “British” ritual. Over the next few decades, this British Ritual gained greater acceptance over the North American. The British ritual finally assumed totality in the 1990s when the last Lodge of the Order still working the North American ritual went dark.

When I was initiated, the ritual was just “the ritual”. Very few Brothers called it “the British ritual” or even the “Lauderdale”. Most never knew it ever had those names.

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Endnotes

1 “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” (Paramount Pictures, 1962)
3 “En un mot, j’ai apporte a la lettre des anciens Rituels toutes les modifications qui, sans nuire a l’esprit Symbolique general dans lequel ils avaient ete concus; les simplifient ou qui s’imposaient a leur redaction par suite du large esprit philosophique de notre Obed.. et de l’introduction de la femme dans l’Ordre Mason.”
5 A very important document that provides a handy timeline for the evolution of LDH-British Federation Blue Lodge ritual is Arnold Bank’s article “Masonic Workings” published in the first quarter 1945 edition of The Morning Star: Journal of the Eastern Federation of the British Empire Order of International Co-Freemasonry, pages 14 and 15. By 1945, Banks was Most Puissant Grand Commander of LDH-British Federation and was in a position to know the order of Co-Masonic ritual development. Unless otherwise specified, I am using his timeline.
6 Some Masons unfamiliar with “Text Book of Freemasonry”, “The Perfect Ceremonies of Craft Masonry” and many other Malecraft rituals available at the turn of the 20th Century have speculated to me that this use of “A.B.”, which continues in modern Co-Masonic ritual, is a reference to Annie Besant. While those are, indeed, her initials, in this case “A.B.” is just “A.B.”
7 It’s important to point out that the Emulation-type ritual these early Co-Masons worked with was Emulation-type as it existed in 1903. In addition to a great deal of variation in all these types that can claim to be “Emulation”, the United Grand Lodge of England didn’t assign a ritual type at the time. In any case, there have been many revisions in those rituals that Co-Masons have not accepted. And, as we will see, Co-Masons have revised their own ritual and those other Emulation types have not accepted those revisions. For these reasons, it is irrelevant to too-closely compare modern Co-Masonic ritual with modern Emulation-type ritual.
8 As an example, see the introduction written by Jan Snoek, specifically page 12, of Snoek and Alexandra Heidle’s "Women's Agency and rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders" (Brill, 2008).
9 As examples, see Besant’s 27 February 1908 letter to Ursula M. Bright, written from the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Madras, when she writes, "Ours is the Scottish ritual with a few modifications. . .". British Library, Folder 1 of MS 88999; and “Transactions of the Dharma Lodge of the Supreme Council of Universal Co-Masonry, Second edition” issued in 1907 by the Lodge then meeting in Benares, in which Besant describes the Dharma as "... the Scottish Craft ritual - properly appertains to the Grand Lodge of Scotland. While differing to some extent from the French ritual, it nevertheless bears a close resemblance to the ritual authorized by the Grand Lodge of England and was adopted, with certain modifications, as more convenient for the purposes of intercourse with the Orders of Freemasons with which Co-Masonic Lodges in British Dominions would probably come into contact."
13 For an example, see Andrew Prescott’s “Builders of the Temple of the New Civilisation’: Annie Besant and Freemasonry”, specifically page 367, of "Women's Agency and rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders" (Brill, 2008).
14 October 1932 Adyar Theosophist, Leadbeater’s article "The Origins of Modern Masonry", as "recorded by Rt. Rev. C.W. Leadbeater" under the listing "QUESTIONS PLACED BEFORE THE MASTER the Comte de St. Germain"
15 The cover of the first edition reads "Privately Printed for The Dharma Lodge, Benares City".
16 First quarter 1945 The Morning Star: Journal of the Eastern Federation of the British Empire Order of International Co-Freemasonry. By 1945, Banks was Most Puissant Grand Commander of LDH-British Federation and was in a position to know the order of Co-Masonic ritual development.

See Muzzarelli’s 22 March 1905 letter to Alida de Leeuw, preserved in the archives of the Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, the American Federation of Human Rights in Larkspur, Colorado.


Francesca Arundale’s report to the Supreme Council 8 October 1923, at the British Library, Folder 3 of MS 88999.

Besant-Scott’s 7 February 1923 letter to Bro N. Fairclough of Stability Lodge, at the British Library, Folder 3 of MS 88999.

See Esther Bright’s 12 December 1903 letter to Muzzarelli, preserved in the archives of the Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, the American Federation of Human Rights in Larkspur, Colorado. Bright states, "The ritual I sent you is exactly what is used in this (Human Duty) Lodge." The ritual Bright sent to Muzzarelli was the Dharma, which means the Dharma was in use by Human Duty by that date.

The printer of the Dharma ritual’s second edition was Marsden and Company in Manchester while the 1901 edition of “Text Book of Freemasonry” was printed by William Reeves Bookseller in London.


Headquarters was established there 2 January 1923. See letter from Besant-Scott to all RWMs 2 Jan 1923, British Library, Folder 5 of MS 88999.

Page 9, October 1931 Circular No 122, preserved in the archives of the Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, the American Federation of Human Rights Headquarters Archives in Larkspur, Colorado.


Goaziou’s Circular 141 November 1934


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Goaziou’s Circular 140 October 1934