DIVERSITY IN UNITY?
THE MASONIC TRADITIONS IN USE IN THE DUTCH
FEDERATION OF ‘LE DROIT HUMAIN’

ANNE VAN MARION-WEIJER

Introduction

The International Order of mixed freemasonry ‘Le Droit Humain’ (IO LDH) was founded in 1893 in France and still has its headquarters there. Today, it has about 27,000 members world-wide, in 60 countries. In most of these countries the activities of the IO LDH are organised by a national federation. Those federations are to a certain extent self-governing. It should be noted, however, that about 60% (16,630 in 2002) of the members of the IO LDH nowadays belong to the federations in France and Belgium. In both countries most masonic organisations, including the IO LDH, have a strong tendency to a sheer secular approach to freemasonry. The Dutch federation of the IO LDH is special, because its lodges do not all work with rituals from one masonic tradition, as is usually the custom within other federations. Here we see three traditions, as a result of history and—nowadays—by choice. This paper is about the relations between the three groups of members of this federation, working in these different masonic traditions.

Freemasonry in the Dutch federation developed in a rather different way than in France and Belgium. At first, only a theosophical inspired theistic set of Craft-rituals (i.e., rituals for the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason) was used here: the so-called ‘English’ tradition. Today there are also lodges working in the Dutch or the French tradition. The Dutch federation has at the moment of writing 326 members, working in 21 lodges, of which 15 work in the Dutch, 4 in the ‘English’, and 2 in the French tradition.
The Three Traditions

The first tradition used in The Netherlands—and from 1904 to 1915 the only one—was the ‘English’, theosophical1 inspired, one. Today, however, only 19% of the members of the Dutch federation work in this tradition. Two of the four lodges working with these rituals are even struggling to survive, due to loss of members by death, and the lack of new recruits. Two of the ‘English’ lodges have made arrangements with lodges working in the Dutch tradition, to hold combined ritual meetings, which, however, are always held in the Dutch tradition. But both these lodges continue to have their own non-ritual meetings in the ‘English’ tradition.

Most lodges—representing 75% of the 244 members—are today using the rituals from the Dutch tradition. These are largely in accordance with those of the Craft-lodges of the Grand East of The Netherlands (the Dutch masculine Grand Lodge). They have their roots in the ‘Rite Moderne’ from 1786.2

In the period from 2002 to 2005 the first two lodges working in the French tradition were founded in The Netherlands. There is no sign, that there has ever before been any interest in the rituals of the French tradition in the Dutch federation. At a certain moment, however, the idea was born to give a demonstration of the original rituals of the French tradition as a homage to the founders of the Order, Maria De-raismes and George Martin. These secular rituals inspired several members so much, that they decided to found a lodge working with these rituals. The inauguration took place in January 2002 when the lodge received its official Charter.3 In February 2005 the second lodge working in the French tradition was officially opened in Terneuzen, a city situated in the province of Zeeland, near to the Belgian border. As a consequence this lodge has several Belgian members. Today, about 6% of the members of the Dutch federation work in the French tradition.

But the chronological order in which these traditions appeared in the Dutch federation does not reflect their appearance in the IO LDH as a whole. There, the French tradition is the oldest one, followed by the ‘English’ and the Dutch ones. Therefore, before analysing the

---

1 For the notion of Theosophy in this respect, see Godwin 1994; Santuucci 2005; Hammer 2004.
2 Snoek 1998.
3 Engel 2004 102-103.