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Edmond La Beaume Cherbonnier

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The **Rev. Dr. Edmond La Beaume Cherbonnier** (when used, middle name's initial "La B." is the family preference)^[1] is an [American](#) scholar in the field of [religious studies](#), [Professor \(Emeritus\)](#) of [Religion](#), at [Trinity College](#), and an [Episcopal Church](#) [deacon](#). He is most known for his scholarly work on [Christianity](#) analyzing [idolatry](#) and distinctions between [mystical](#) and [biblical](#) thought, his efforts on developing and advancing [religious studies](#), and for founding the [Religion](#) Department at [Trinity College](#) in 1955.

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Early Life

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The Rev. Dr. Edmond La Beaume Cherbonnier was born on February 11, 1918, in [Saint Louis, Missouri](#). His father, Edward Goodwin Cherbonnier, was a vice president of the [Ralston Purina Company](#).^[2]

After graduation from [St. Louis Country Day School](#), Cherbonnier entered [Harvard University](#), where he majored in [geology](#).^[3] In 1939, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts *cum laude*.^[4] During his undergraduate years, when associated with Harvard's [Winthrop House](#), (one of twelve undergraduate residences)^[5] he was elected President of the [Phillips Brooks House Association](#) (a student-run public service organization).^[5] He was a member of the [Winthrop House](#) Committee and the Harvard [Glee Club](#) as well as an active participant for several years in social service work at the [Phillips Brooks House Association](#).^[5]

Professional Career


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Cherbonnier held a brief post as teacher of [Latin](#) at [Avon Old Farms School](#) in [Avon, Connecticut](#).^[1] Shortly thereafter, Cherbonnier enrolled at [Union Theological Seminary](#) in [New York](#); his graduate studies were interrupted while he served as a naval aviator during [World War II](#).^[4] After his wartime service, he resumed his [theological](#) studies and in 1947 received the degree of [Bachelor of Divinity](#) from Union. In the same year he was ordained a [deacon](#) by the Episcopal Bishop of Missouri.^[6] Subsequent study on a Fiske Fellowship from Harvard^[7] led to the degrees of [Bachelor of Arts](#) (1948) and [Master of Arts](#) (1952) from [Cambridge University, England](#). Additionally, from 1948-1949 Cherbonnier was in residence as a Union Seminary Traveling Fellow at the [University of Strasbourg](#) and the [University of Zurich](#).

Cherbonnier entered the doctoral program at [Columbia University](#); while studying during the 1949-1950 school year, Cherbonnier was a tutor-assistant to Henry P. Van Dusen at Union. He held a one-year appointment as assistant professor of religion at [Vassar](#) (1950-1951)^[8] which resulted in a [Ph.D.](#) degree in religion conferred by Columbia. His doctoral thesis was entitled "[Freedom and Time: A Study in Some Recent Contributions to the Problem](#)".

From Vassar, Cherbonnier joined the faculty of [Barnard College](#) of [Columbia University](#),^[3] where he remained until the spring of 1955 as assistant and associate professor of religion. In addition, from 1952 to 1955 he served as Deacon at the nearby [Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine](#), during the Deanship of the later controversial Bishop of California [James A. Pike](#). On May 31, 1954, the [New York Times](#) highlighted one of his cathedral sermons in an article "Worship Of Ideals Held Destructive".^[9]

Cherbonnier received praise for his efforts early in his career. In 1952, [Reinhold Niebuhr](#) expressed gratitude to Cherbonnier in his Preface to *The Irony Of American History* "for careful reading of my manuscript and for many suggestions for its improvement".^[10]

In 1955, Cherbonnier's book [Hardness of Heart](#)  was published by [Doubleday](#). A volume in the "Christian Faith Series" edited by [Reinhold Niebuhr](#), the study provided a contemporary interpretation of the doctrine of [sin](#). During the next year it was also published by London's [Victor Gollancz Ltd.](#) Psychiatrist [Karl Menninger, M.D.](#) presented a synopsis of the book in his *The Vital Balance*: "Cherbonnier in his beautiful essay, Hardness of Heart, describes the forms of [idolatry](#) indulged in by the hardhearted. He lists the hidden gods of cynicism as [nationalism](#), [humanism](#), [phallicism](#), [promiscuity](#), the glorification of money, and the various [euphemisms](#) such as [frugality](#), shrewdness, and sound economy. Cherbonnier also lists [iconoclasm](#), existentialist despair, and a so-called state of "adjustment" and "relatedness" toward which some [psychiatrists](#) are believed to steer their patients."^[11]

In the fall of 1955, Cherbonnier was invited by [Trinity College](#) in [Hartford, Connecticut](#), to establish a religion department. After serving two years as an associate professor, he was promoted to full [professor](#) and was then joined by a second department member, Dr. Theodor Marcus Mauch.^[12] Under Cherbonnier's chairmanship, the department was enlarged to a staff of five full-time professors plus adjunct faculty.

Professor Cherbonnier was awarded the degree of [Doctor of Divinity](#), *honoris causa* by the [University of Vermont](#) in 1959. He took a sabbatical leave in 1962-63 to London, England, which was partially underwritten by a Lilly Post-Doctoral Fellowship. He spent his sabbatical performing further work on distinctions between mystical and biblical thought. Dr. Cherbonnier took another leave for the 1970-1972 academic years plus the first semester of 1972-1973, which he also spent in [England](#). He retired from his [Trinity](#) position in 1983.^[2]


Edmond La B. Cherbonnier



American scholar of religious studies and professor

Born	February 11, 1918 (age 91) Saint Louis, Missouri
Nationality	American
Education	Harvard University Union Theological Seminary Cambridge University Columbia University
Home town	Saint Louis, Missouri
Religious beliefs	Episcopalian
Spouse(s)	Phyllis White
Parents	Edward Goodwin Cherbonnier Adelaide Alice La Beaume



Cherbonnier in the 1970s 

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