

CONCLUSION

The original text was double-spaced, except for certain quotations and footnotes. The sexist language of the early 1970s remains along with the styles of punctuation, footnotes, etc. Misspellings have been corrected, and bracketed 2008 comments have been added to some footnotes. Hyperlinks have been newly inserted here and there.

The pagination conforms to the original text; this results in some awkward appearing places in this version.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that when this dissertation was researched and written, the author had no access to computers for word processing or internet searches; even copy machines were not common. His typewriter make and model are pictured below.



What follows is a 2008 edition of Chapter Six (pp. 205-210) of the 1973 New York University Ph.D. Dissertation
“The Significance of the Religious Thought of Edmond La B. Cherbonnier
for a Basic Objective for Religious Education” by Richard T. Nolan

THE SECTIONS/CHAPTERS OF THE DISSERTATION
(Available Within This Website by June, 2008)

Preface

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Introduction

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II. Cherbonnier’s Interpretation of Mystical Religion Or Perennial Philosophy

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III. Cherbonnier’s Interpretation of Biblical Religion

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While avoiding a relativism that regards more than one philosophy as equally and ultimately true, this study has shown that a philosophic position is, in Dilley’s words, a “confession of faith,” or, to use Hare’s term, a “blik.” The adequacy of a philosophy can be judged according to its own canons and its ability to account for the totality of experience.

The model a given philosopher might choose to build a philosophy upon is likewise not a task of raw objectivity. Rather, he may select suitable categories and concepts that deal with the vast range of human experience. In this study the model used by Butler has been helpful, because it satisfies the basic standard of comprehensiveness and, further, with some variation in terminology, but not in substance, Cherbonnier’s religious thought is compatible.

In the development of a basic objective for religious education, recognized as a primary issue in religious education theory and practice, it has been argued that a philosophical orientation (the consideration of epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology) is essential and consequential.

This investigation has shown that Cherbonnier's writings sort out what he claims to be the two basic philosophies, mystical religion (or perennial philosophy) and biblical religion. That perennial philosophy has influenced many Western systems of thought is supported by Huxley and further extended to education by Dupuis, who wrote:

Even though many of Plato's philosophical beliefs are not held by all conservatives, the educational theory and practices which they suggested became part of the warp and woof of Roman and early Christian education, the education of the Renaissance, and post-Renaissance eras as well as that of modern Europe and to some extent of America. The Platonic influence can be noted more or less directly in the following philosophical and educational beliefs. The major emphasis is placed on intellectual and/or spiritual goals . . .¹

That such perennial thought is at the heart of the Asian ideology is maintained by Cherbonnier, and its intrusion into biblical thought is a logical error.

Though Cherbonnier's loyalty is with the biblical, his explanation of this allegiance has not been the strong point of his analysis thus far. He is convinced that the biblical is true and the mystical is false, and that the former can be empirically supported. However, as Dilley pointed out, what is a supporting fact for Cherbonnier is not factual for a mystic. The canons he would use for

¹Dupuis, *Philosophy of Education*, p. 72.

testing the truth of a statement are unacceptable to the pure mystic.

However, Cherbonnier's analytical interpretation of mystical religion and biblical religion has been heralded by some recognized scholars cited in this study. The significance of his analysis rests both in the greater clarity of religious concepts and their implications; for example, for the basic objective for religious education.

In his essay, "Naturalism," Browning commented on "naturalistic theism."² The attempts of Wieman and others to view God within a naturalistic perspective reduces God to less than a personal being, and Browning has found no alternative. In Cherbonnier's thought, however, a biblical naturalism with a very personal being as God is at the heart. Clearly this is a significant departure from what has been offered thus far by philosophers of religion. Further, in an empirical age, the God of biblical religion as presented by Cherbonnier maintains both the awesome sovereignty of mystically based theologies and the reality of a temporal agent.

With the clarity offered by Cherbonnier's distinctions between mystical and biblical concepts, the philosopher as well as the lay person has a greater understanding of the choices

²Robert W. Browning, "Naturalism," *Westminster Dictionary*, pp. 455f.

open to him, both intellectual and personal. The impact upon one philosopher is captured in his own words:

It is difficult to write about someone's influence, what sort it was and how it occurred. When I went to Union it was as a student who was very good at assimilating the thoughts of others, but weak in critical analysis or problems. Dr. Cherbonnier "turned me on." I was ready to respond favorably to

smashing attacks on muddy and inconsistent thinking, and in the two classes I had with Ed this is precisely what I got. His ability to demolish the classical synthesis because of its inconsistencies was impressive and I am still persuaded of the rightness of his claims about Platonism. What he was saying and what I was learning in biblical studies and from neo-orthodoxy all fit together exceedingly well.

What has *not* stuck with me is his certitude about the viability of a biblical metaphysics. His claim is that this is the *only* view which can be responsibly defended, the only intellectual path free from inconsistency. He sees other positions as flat-out refutable and I think this is incorrect as my own book argues.³

This study sought to show that Cherbonnier's significance for a basic objective for religious education is with his distinctions between mystical and biblical perspectives and their respective implications for a basic objective. Though it is not the task of this investigation to develop a basic objective, it is clear that within a Christian perspective, the wording of a basic objective will focus upon relations between God and man and between man and his neighbor. If, for example, one were to propose that the basic objective of

³Letter to the author from Frank B. Dilley, August 6, 1968.

religious education is to nurture persons in "their growing relationship to God in Christ so to live that they may glorify him and effectively serve others, in the assurance that they partake of eternal life now and forever,"⁴ the real meaning of this statement will depend upon the philosophic context intended. What kind of relationship -- *eros* (caritas) or *agape*? What kind of God - an ontological Other analogically "personal") or a Sovereign Agent? What kind of life -- one with a hope for release or a joy-filled present? What kind of glorification -- solitary meditation or in assembled congregation of repentant celebration? What kind of eternal life -- absorption into Oneness or personal fellowship with God and others? The philosophic and theological clarity with which one understands such a basic objective will shape the curriculum and methods employed.

Further studies in the implications of the philosophical distinctions Cherbonnier posits are possible and needed. A researcher might well investigate the Christological problem (the possible influences of perennial philosophy upon traditional formulations as contrasted to the Christ within biblical religion) and its consequences for a basic objective. In addition, implications of mystical religion as contrasted

⁴Iris V. Cully, *The Dynamics of Christian Education*, pp. 29f.

to biblical religion for matters of curriculum and teaching methods would extend the significance of Cherbonnier's religious thought for religious education theory and practice.

This study has proposed that the answers to these questions are not merely for idle enjoyment of theorists, philosophical or educational; rather, the answers are pivotal for the development of a philosophy of religious education and its practice. Cherbonnier has offered in his religious thought clarifying distinctions, so that philosopher, theologian, and religious educator can understand more clearly available perspectives for nurture.

ADDED IN 2008

The writer of this doctoral dissertation is now age 70 and retired! Thirty-five years have passed since I received a Ph.D. from New York University! Nearly fifty-five years have come and gone since I first met Dr.

Edmond La B. Cherbonnier. Next month he will reach age 90! He and his spouse Phyllis divide their time between their London and West Hartford (CT) homes.

I am embarrassed to recall the hours he spent with me as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Hartford. A retired professor myself, I would never have offered so much of my time to one student as he provided me. Our office hour consultations were rarely for personal matters, but mostly for probing biblical thought and its ramifications for life. His firm, gentlemanly manner both inside and outside the classroom is a model for adult behavior.

Dr. Cherbonnier's impact on my life is incalculable. I am sure that I would have abandoned religion in all its forms, had it not been for his encouragement (given to all his students) to *think*. Furthermore, his grasp of biblical religion (purged of the multitude of post first century mystical/perennial intrusions) nurtured both my mind and heart. Moreover, my home/family life has been shaped by this world-view.

I am no longer able to travel, because of elder health maladies. Nonetheless, we continue to be in touch by e-mail and telephone. To have had Dr. Cherbonnier's paternal, fraternal, and collegial camaraderie all these years has indeed been a blessing!

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