



David O. Moberg

David Oscar Moberg (born February 13, 1922) is an American Christian scholar, who is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Marquette University. His areas of specialization included methodology in qualitative research, sociology of religion, sociology of American evangelicals, ageing and religion (gerontology).

Biography

Moberg was born in Montevideo, Minnesota in February 1922 to Fred L. Moberg and Anna E. Moberg (née Sundberg). [1] (<http://libguides.bethel.edu/Moberg>). He served in the US army from 1942-45. He was raised as a Christian and after World War Two he served as a pastor of a Baptist church. He graduated with a BA degree from Seattle Pacific University (1947), received an MA from the University of Washington (1949) and a PhD from the University of Minnesota (1952).^[1] He taught sociology for nineteen years at Bethel College, St. Paul Minnesota and in 1968 was appointed as Professor of Sociology at Marquette University until he retired in 1991.^[2] (<http://www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/faculty/moberg.html%20Duke%20University%20faculty%20page>) He founded the Association for the Development of Religious Information Systems (ADRIS), an organization dedicated to promoting a global network of religious information exchange. From 1962-64 he served as the editor of the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*.^[2] He has also been president of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Religious Research Association and the Wisconsin Sociological Association.^[3]

During the 1950s he wrote various academic articles that studied the role of religion and particularly of Christianity in the lives of aged persons.^[4] Moberg spent time as a Fulbright professor in the Netherlands and discussed sociological aspects of Dutch religious activities and Dutch society in the early 1960s.^[5] The 1960s witnessed the publication of his co-written book with Robert Gray *The Church and the Older Person* (1962). This book was based on the PhD research of both authors, and charted the sociological function of religion in the lives of older people. The book included a sociological survey of some 200 persons living in seven aged care facilities in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and interviews with older persons who participated in the activities of two large Chicago-area churches.^[6] Several of Moberg's later publications have concentrated the use of sociological studies into the role of religion in the lives of older persons in urban America, as well as the implications of the aging process upon the function of Protestant clergy and the need for theological curricula to include practical study in gerontology.^[7] In the 1970s and 1980s, he played a major role in developing the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging.^[1] His literary output in the sociology of aged persons prompted James Seeber to describe Moberg as the "godfather of the religion and aging research field."^[1]

Besides his contributions to the study of gerontology, Moberg also published works about the sociology of American religion, with a strong emphasis on the function of Protestant churches in American life. His first major study in this regard came in 1962 with the first edition of his textbook on the sociology of American church life *The Church as A Social Institution* (1962). This textbook was revised in the 1980s.^[8] This textbook synthesized research data regarding the demographics of religious affiliation for Roman Catholics, Protestants and Jews, and the effects that churches have both intended and unintended upon social institutions and individuals. He discussed the theoretical categories in the sociology of religion concerning the differences between church and sect, church as a missionary institution, the growth of churches, differences between liberal and conservative churches, the social psychology of religious conversion, interfaith conflict, role of clergy, and internal church conflict. In the second edition Moberg updated each chapter, included discussion

on the social conflict surrounding cults and new religions, the resurgence of evangelical churches, the role of the "electronic" church (i.e. broadcasts by televangelists), the ecumenical movement, theories about church life-cycles, and research methodology.^[9]

Other aspects of his work has touched on limitations in theory and method in the qualitative research of religion, particularly with the emergence of new religions, New Age spirituality, and the category "spiritual but not religious."^[10]

During the 1960s, Moberg emerged as an evangelical intellectual who urged fellow evangelicals to grapple with the tools of the social sciences.^[11] He held genuine concerns about the need for social reform and wrote books addressing American evangelicals about the legitimate contributions that Christians may make in the public square.^[12] His book, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century*, presented an argument that evangelism and social action were twin legitimate activities and he insisted that it was "a sin not be concerned about the needs of suffering mankind."^[13] In his retrospective study of American evangelical political thinking, Robert Booth Fowler described Moberg as a "reform-minded" evangelical who was "especially concerned about the poor and the need for active welfare programs."^[14]

In the early 1970s, John Warwick Montgomery edited a series of seven books presenting evangelical perspectives on various current issues.^[15] Moberg contributed to this series his book *The Great Reversal* which carried forward his argument among evangelicals about the dangers of confusing theological conservative beliefs with conservative political beliefs. He rejected the dichotomy that evangelicals had become divided over to emphasize *either* evangelism *or* social concern:

Some Christians may see the issue of relationships between evangelism and social concern—or, if you prefer, the personal and social dimensions of the Christian gospel—as an old and settled matter ... Each side suspects the Christian credentials of the other. The internal dispute threatens to complete the ruinous work that it has begun. The unresolved polarities in current Christendom are like dynamite; they have the potential for either constructive or destructive explosions.^[16]

Moberg insisted that evangelicals were obliged to take action against a range of social evils.^[17] Moberg revised his work in 1977 and again in 2006.^[18] He also charted the sociological differences between Protestant Fundamentalists and Evangelicals.^[19]

His interest in the subject of church conflict led to a series of lectures about the tensions raised between the individual versus society that were subsequently published as *Wholistic Christianity*. In this text he examined the causes of dissent in churches that may be sorted as both internal and external factors. In his analysis he described internal dissent as a reflection of both theological and institutional factors that act upon individual church members, while external factors are understood as stemming from social change and shifts in social values on controverted topics such as peace-violence, ecology, poverty etc.^[20]

As a practicing Christian, Moberg has had a long interest in the importance of a faith-commitment in the sociological work produced by religiously-oriented sociologists. He has been interested in cultivating a distinctly Christian approach to sociological work.^[21] Moberg, together with some like-minded Christian sociologists, has been interested in going beyond the traditional secular values that have been foundational in the discipline of sociology to include greater sensitivity to the researcher's personal world-view about the transcendent.^[22] In recent years, Moberg has addressed various critical challenges to Christian belief from the standpoint of an apologist integrating faith with insights from sociology.^[23]

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