

The Development of Sociology in Canada : From the “Early Days” to the 1970’s*

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The Theme

In Western societies, cultural and technological change have involved both religious and non-religious (secular) responses as well as combinations thereof. Secular responses in the form of unionization, the co-operative movement, and the Chartists and the Luddites arose before Marx. The Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists also had earlier origins, and with the developments during the Industrial Revolution, they too responded to the changing conditions. In this analysis, I attempt to look at the ways in which religious and secular responses to both rural and urban change were involved in the development of sociology in Canada. For those of you familiar with the literature on professionalization, it is possible to identify elements of the structural-functional model, the process model and the power-conflict model, models identified by Ritzer (1986). The more recent ideas of ecological struggle as characterizing relationships among and within the professions is also of considerable relevance. However, I do not use these models explicitly because I prefer the history to speak for itself.

Canada : Some Parallels between sociology and religion in the 19th Century

While Auguste Comte, who of course coined the term *sociologie*, was busy in France writing his volumes on the subject, the Methodists and Presbyterians in Protestant Ontario were busy founding universities, namely Victoria University and Queen's University, to educate their clergy¹. Both Comte and the two religions saw new requirements for a new country and a new age. In Montreal, the classic study by Booth in England was followed by a similar study by Herbert Brown Ames, a wealthy Montreal industrialist. The first Canadian sociological study, *The City below the Hill (1897)* in the tradition of the studies in London, attempted to document the lives and living conditions of the urban poor in Montreal, then Canada's largest city. Ames, of American origin, had been influenced by “the social gospel movement” when he studied at Amherst College. In the United States, Albion Small left Cornell University to found the first Department of Sociology at the newly founded, Baptist inspired, University of Chicago in 1892. No sociology department was founded in Canada until after 1920 when the McGill department was established. Sociology was, however, taught just after the turn of the century, but predominantly at Baptist colleges such as Acadia in Nova Scotia², and Methodist colleges such as Wesley College in Manitoba³. At this juncture, such courses were likely to be in schools of theology.

Key Words : Canada, sociology, development

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