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chapter one

CHICAGO'S PLACE IN WORLD EVANGELIZATION

WHERE GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY CONVERGED

RAY BAKKE

Introduction: The City of Chicago

It is widely believed that the name “Chicago” is a corruption of an old Indian word for “bad smell.” In its early days, the Indian trails converged at the brackish lowlands and skunk cabbage patches where the river meandered into Lake Michigan. This was the place of portage to the Des Plaines and Illinois River systems, which made it strategic for the British, French, and Americans. Fort Dearborn was founded on the high ground south, where the Tribune Tower now stands. In 1925 historian Herbert Asbury wrote, “Chickagou or Checagou . . . a bad smell, a symbolism which is kept alive by the politicians and the stockyards.”¹

Illinois, like the rest of the Midwest, was settling from south to north, for the earliest settlers came through the Cumberland Gap and up the Mississippi and Ohio River systems. To this day, everything in Illinois outside the Chicago area is called “downstate.”

In 1825 the Erie Canal opened, connecting the Hudson River and Lake Erie. That started the race between what historians called the “lake cities”—Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago—and the “river cities”—St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. Founded in 1837, Chicago came onto the scene as a scrappy town set down in

the midst of the middle west prairies. From the start it was raucous, entrepreneurial, and, above all, European.²

To the north lay the cheap ore for steel that could be floated down the lakes; to the south lay huge coalfields that could be inexpensively railroaded north. All was in place for the “cheap labor” from Europe to find a productive spot to settle. The “push factors” that led people to leave their homelands included famine, religious persecution, and political oppression in Europe. The “pull factors” that drew people to Chicago included the Civil War, the rail expansion providing passage around the lakes to the West Coast, the industrial revolution taking root across the U.S., and the political will to make it work.

Although as late as the 1840s St. Louis, Alton, and even Navoo (the temporary Mormon city) rivaled Chicago as the capital of the American inland empire, Chicago soon surfaced as the pre-eminent Midwestern city. Between 1860 and 1900, Chicago grew at an average rate of thirty thousand each year. In fifty years it went from being a “wild onion patch” to being the “second city” of the Western Hemisphere. The sheer scope of that growth was unprecedented in history.³

It is hardly accidental that the founding of the University of Chicago coincided with the establishment of the academic discipline of sociology. The burgeoning city of Chicago was ripe with social issues to be studied, and University of Chicago scholars—Park, Burgess, and Wirth, among others—guaranteed that Chicago would be used as the laboratory for urban research on all subjects.⁴

THE IMMIGRATION ERA: EUROPE ARRIVES (1837–1918)

The famous potato famine in Ireland compelled thousands of Irish to leave their country after 1837 to look for work to sustain them. Many came to the U.S. to help carve out the 4,400 miles of canals dug between 1800 and 1850 in the race with the railroads. The Illinois–Michigan canal, the stockyards, and industry provided low threshold entry for the Irish into the Chicago area.

The Irish, who settled primarily in the West and South Loop (Bridgeport) neighborhoods, were largely rural in background. However, their national identity had been forged by centuries of conflict with Britain. To survive, the Irish had learned two valuable political skills: the English language and ethnic networking/political coalition-building. That is why, against all odds, the Irish eventually captured three major urban leadership roles: police officers, pastors, and politicians (the so-called “urban trinity”).⁵

Very quickly the Irish learned political leveraging to affect political

change in their ancestral land, Ireland. Long before American Jews organized for the establishment and success of Israel, the American Irish organized Hibernian societies in 1925 to work for the liberation of Ireland from Britain. The Irish then became part of the mainstream society in Chicago and other U.S. cities.⁶

In the early 1800s Germany did not exist as a unified political entity. Instead, a patchwork society of some three hundred duchies, principalities, and free cities occupied Middle Europe. Culturally the region was unified by the publication of Luther's Bible in the German language after 1524. The desire to unify politically was felt both in the north and south regions. The Prussian militarist north and the culturally driven South Germans contrived to form a national ("professors") parliament in Frankfurt in 1840, but it collapsed in the European revolutionary climate of 1848. Thereafter, the movement toward unification proceeded rapidly. The impetus was not democratic; rather, the militaristic drive of the Prussians from the north into the southern regions provoked the exodus of large numbers of Protestant Germans from the Baden-Württemberg Southwest and equally large numbers from Catholic Bavaria in the Southeast. At least 250,000 Germans came to Chicago during those years. Cincinnati and Milwaukee also attracted multitudes of German immigrants, changing the social, political, and religious fabric of these cities in ways most Americans never really understood.⁷

A Tale of Two Cities

The earliest Chicago was constructed almost entirely of wood. The Great Fire of 1871 ended that era! As Chicago rebuilt, the city spilled over Western Avenue (originally the western boundary of Chicago) with the brick and factory look that exists today. The "two cities" that emerged were the "WASP" lakefront district (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant; but which might better be called "Wealthy, Alienated, Separated, and Protected") and the river wards, which Michael Novak described with the tongue-in-cheek term PIGS—Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slovaks.⁸

Visitors over the years have disparaged the architectural and social makeup of the riverward districts of Chicago. People who visit Williamsburg, Virginia, usually understand that the immigrants who built that city modeled it after the places they left in England. Likewise, Chicago was built to look like the old river cities of Central Europe. The Rhine, Rhone, Po, and Danube river cultures flourished everywhere outside the Loop and the lakefront. Outsiders, including most evangelical pastors, often didn't understand this dynamic. Unlike

missionaries, they almost never learned the languages or cultures around them. Protestant evangelism most often nibbled at the edges of ancient Catholic and Orthodox cultures, mostly ministering to the dispossessed and socially alienated among them—a ministry that expanded with the advent of World War I.⁹

Italians in Chicago

As with Germany, there was no unified nation of Italy during the nineteenth century prior to 1870. Italians who came to Philadelphia and Chicago did not come from the northern renaissance cities of Milan, Florence, Genoa, or Venice, but rather from the Apennine mountain and Sicilian regions. These were the *contadini*, or village Italians, with profoundly local cultures who practiced what some have described as “folk Catholicism.” They settled southwest of the Loop on Taylor Street, and at one time had the largest parish church in the world—Holy Family on Roosevelt Road with 73,000 members coming to about thirty-seven services a week.¹⁰

Polish Chicago

After the influx of Jews, Scandinavians, and Bohemians, the Poles were the last major group of nineteenth-century European immigrants to come to Chicago, the majority arriving between 1890 and 1914. They were also the largest group of immigrants. The Chicago area is now home to more than 800,000 Poles (actual numbers vary depending on how wide an area is included in the count). To put this in perspective, Chicago has more *Poles* than Seattle or San Francisco has *people*. Chicago functions culturally, politically, financially, and religiously for Poland like New York functions for Israel.

During the nineteenth century Poland did not exist as an independent state. Its regions were partitioned and ruled by the three neighboring states: Prussia to the west, Russia to the east, and Austria to the south. For a century Polonia was an idea kept alive in church basements.¹¹

The Polish pastors set out to build Poland in Chicago across the river, west of where Moody Bible Institute now stands, into the Nobel Square communities. St. Stanislaus Koska Catholic Church, the mother church of the Poles, had forty thousand communicants in 1895, but one thousand families broke off and founded Holy Trinity, just south of Division Street. Unlike the mother church, whose sanctuary faced east so worshipers could face Poland as they prayed for it, the daughter church’s doors faced east so these more upper-class Poles could depart and work for the liberation of Poland.¹²

DWIGHT LYMAN MOODY (1837–99) AND THE HAYMARKET RIOT OF 1886

D. L. Moody was the prototypical American evangelist in the line from Charles Finney to Billy Graham. A recognized giant, he tended to defy categories, and he “colored outside the lines” of traditional evangelicalism. A century after his death in 1899, he can be seen as the father of modern evangelicalism, and to a degree as a grandfather of the ecumenical movement stemming from his Northfield Conferences after 1883 that led to the Edinburgh Mission Conference of 1910.¹³

After early years in Boston, he arrived in a raucous, disease-ridden Chicago in 1856, just in time for the financial panic of 1857. It wasn’t long before he joined the YMCA movement and started his amazing Sunday school ministry that drew more than 1,500 kids. Moody watched Chicago institutions and most possessions burn in the Great Fire of October 1871. Shortly thereafter he became the world-renowned evangelist of many cities on both sides of the Atlantic.

After the Great Fire, Ashland Avenue became a cauldron of worker union organizing even as the Protestant industrialists of the Lakefront counties cranked up some of the world’s most powerful industrial empires. The city had risen like a phoenix from the ashes of the fire. Chicago became “The City of Big Shoulders” and “Hog Butcher of the World.” The ethnic newcomers, however, were known in the media as “the masses” or, even worse, as “scum.”

While Chicago rebuilt as a city, the church and mission activities expanded exponentially in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The YMCA, Salvation Army, and rescue ministries are too numerous to mention here.¹⁴

As early as 1873, D. L. Moody and Emma Dryer had discussed starting a Bible training school in Chicago to meet the growing need for ministry leaders. The idea remained undeveloped, however, until the Haymarket riot of 1886 heightened the urgency for such an institution.

On a warm May evening in 1886, police and the working class clashed near Haymarket Square, where labor and community leaders had been rallying in protest of police brutality against strikers and other injustices. When 176 armed policemen converged on the dwindling crowd of about 200 people (there had been as many as 2,500 observers earlier in the evening), someone lobbed a dynamite bomb at the police. This was the first time in U.S. history that such a bomb had been used for violent purposes. The bomb and the gunfire that ensued killed seven police officers and four workers and injured scores of oth-

ers.¹⁵ Chicago's lakefront was in fear and panic. This was a class war, not a race war, between ideologies, religions, and cultures.

Three months after the riot, Emma Dryer received an initial grant from Fourth Presbyterian Church to found what we know as the Moody Bible Institute to "train gap men who would stand between the church and the masses."¹⁶ D. L. Moody had moved back to Northfield, Massachusetts, a year after the fire, and by this time had begun his national and international evangelistic ministries. He returned periodically to bless the school until his death in November of 1899.

So Moody Bible Institute was founded in the aftermath of an urban riot to be salt and light in the city and to offer specialized training for lay and professional ministry. In fact, R. A. Torrey, MBI's second president, continued in this tradition by serving on public slum clearance committees in Chicago, as reported by William Stead in his classic World's Fair-era book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, published in 1894.¹⁷

CHICAGO ETHNICS RESPOND TO WAR

The 1893 World's Fair put Chicago on the world stage for good, but the class and race conflicts increased in the decades leading to World War I. The most recent European immigrants, the Poles, received the brunt of the animosity. Even the *Chicago Tribune* slandered them. The "Polish joke" is the vestigial remains of that lingering hatred. By and large, Poles stayed to themselves and out of politics.

When World War I broke out, the Poles decided what they would do to earn acceptance as Americans: Huge numbers of them traveled back to France by ship and train to fight on the front lines in American uniforms. Surely this would win over American opinion. To their horror, they discovered the Germans had conscripted large numbers of Poles to fight against them in the trenches. The American Poles were fighting their brothers, cousins, and uncles. The war became a Polish holocaust.

In front of Chicago's St. Hyacinth Church on Wolfram Avenue stands a huge obelisk honoring the 499 men of its parish who served in World War I, listing the names of those who died in battle. According to Professor Charles Shannabruch of Notre Dame, at least 40 percent of the U.S. soldiers in World War I were ethnic urban Catholics, earning their right to be American citizens by fighting on European soil.¹⁸

Most ethnic groups have a holocaust in their history that marks their collective psyche and leaves abiding scars. The pain in the Jewish community for atrocities committed against it during this century is well-known. But African-Americans, Armenians, Poles, Arabs, Greeks,

Palestinians, indigenous peoples in this country, and many other ethnic groups are shaped as well by histories of oppression and persecution. What kept these communities alive in the midst of hardship was their faith and kinship with one another. Unfortunately, American evangelicals, who tend to be individualistic and nuclear-family oriented about their life and faith, have often been very insensitive to such peoples and have minimized the significance of the churches, synagogues, and mosques to their communities.

Furthermore, while the Irish, Italians, Poles, and many Germans were all “Roman Catholic” in their faith, there were significant differences between their styles of spirituality and the ways their parishes functioned. Again, evangelicals have not always caught these nuances in their respective neighborhoods.

MIGRANT CHICAGO: 1914–60

After World War I, Americans hankered for a “return to normalcy,” and by 1925 they had closed many doors to immigration. During this time, however, there was a substantial movement of people from the South to the North. Demographers agree that more people came north to the cities during the twentieth century than went west during the nineteenth century, contrary to our “frontier” thinking.

Mexicans were brought to Chicago by Protestants and other groups “to help break up the unions.” This kind of “divide and conquer” strategy, a common experience among the city’s ethnic groups, certainly did not promote healthy and peaceful neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the cotton industry became mechanized in the South, and as sharecropping ended for many, throngs of black and white southerners were prompted to move north to live and work in the city built by, and now run by, European immigrants. By 1947 John L. Lewis was organizing the deep coal miners in the twelve-state Appalachian range from Binghamton, New York, to Birmingham, Alabama. However, when the northern cities began switching from coal to gas (from Appalachian fuel to southern and western oil), declining markets, strip mines, and increased usage of machinery put thousands on the roads heading north. It was said in the sixties: “The only kind of bussing George Wallace never opposed was putting the poor on Greyhounds and shipping them north.”¹⁹

And what did these miners, sugarcane workers, and sharecroppers find in Chicago? A European city in the midst of yet another industrial shift, where the old factories in the city were closing and reopening in the suburbs, the Sun Belt, or overseas countries. Chicago lost up to

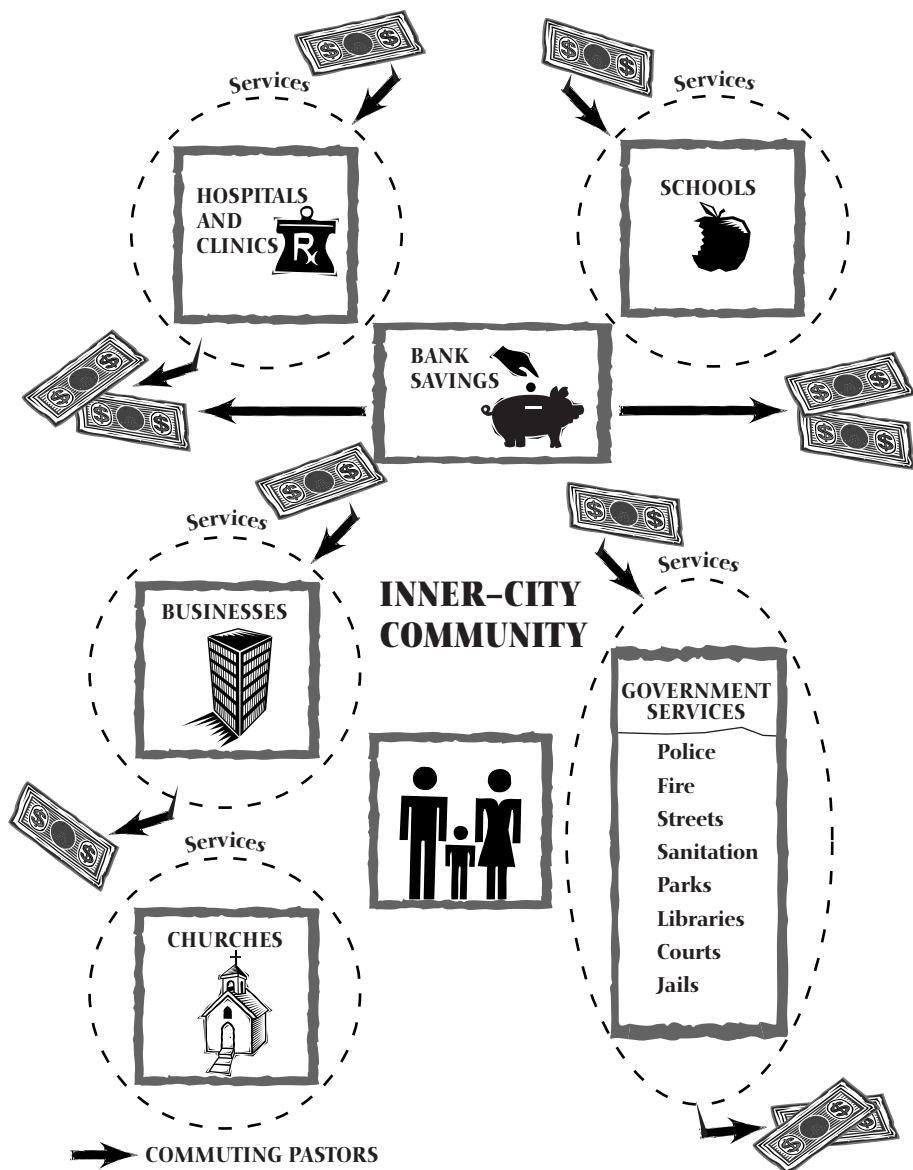
500,000 jobs in the 1960s, and few of the new migrant laborers had the job skills to compete in the shrinking-pie economy.

Although blacks had been in Chicago since the beginning with flourishing neighborhoods, churches, businesses, and robust culture, structural racism confronted the growing black community in ways from which other migrating peoples were exempted. For example, post–World War II public housing policy sent whites to the suburbs with VA mortgages and 90 percent federally funded expressways to support them. Blacks, on the other hand, got public housing apartments and services mediated by outsiders to the community. Often, that locked them into ghettoized neighborhoods.²⁰

The long delayed civil rights revolution led by Dr. King and the anti–Vietnam war movement converged in the Chicago riots of 1968, a watershed era for ministries in Chicago and elsewhere. Frankly, to the practiced eye of many of us who pastored churches or ran mission agencies in Chicago at that time, it seemed we lost both the war in Vietnam and the “war” in the inner cities of America for similar reasons. In Vietnam, when ground combat began to cost too many human lives, the U.S. military pulled out the ground troops and relied on air raids and other technologically driven strategies. Here at home, public and church officials tried to run programs and services for the city from the safety of the suburbs, substituting technology and technique for building relationships in the neighborhood. This kind of half-hearted battle rarely works, of course. While data on the period are still being analyzed, many of its strategies are being reconsidered today. Housing projects are being demolished, perhaps bringing problems of other kinds as communities are broken apart, and new philosophies and strategies are emerging at government levels as well as in the church and nonprofit sectors.

Many have questioned the effectiveness of the millions of dollars that have been poured into urban neighborhoods with seemingly few results. During the mid-seventies I participated in a study group that looked at the economic realities of a Chicago inner city neighborhood with this question in mind: What is happening to the money being spent in this community? What we found was that the money targeted for inner city communities does not remain in those communities. The poor are targeted for services; the money itself goes to the professional service providers.²¹ The economic benefits of the institutions operating in the community (hospitals, banks, schools, businesses, government services, and even the church) were going outside the community to the suburbs and prosperous neighborhoods that were “homebase” to the institutions and service providers.

THE ESCAPING URBAN DOLLAR



I've concluded that poverty is not so much the absence of money as the absence of power.²² Neither Republicans nor Democrats seem willing to admit this, for one group advocates shrinking the budget while the other calls for more funding. But without the corresponding changes that empower these communities to attract real money and not just services, little long-term change happens.

Many churches and mission programs have imitated the public sector's model. Doing little or nothing to change the system, their pattern of ministry is to have funders give them the money to provide services. Again, even though their motives may be wonderful and their work may even result in some personal spiritual conversions, these ministries often become codependent with the very people they purport to serve.

By contrast, the many ministries you will read about in this book have addressed these problems and operate with wonderful spiritual integrity in ways that empower the poor.

INTERNATIONAL CHICAGO SINCE THE 1960s

Between 1964 and 1965 the United States Congress passed three monumental pieces of legislation that dramatically changed Chicago, other cities, and the nation as a whole: the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Immigration Law. The last was least understood, but is having a most lasting impact on the metroscape we call Chicago.

Before 1965, most Asians, Africans, or Latins could not migrate here. We had biased the laws on behalf of northern European immigrants. That changed, and our formerly European city is now being pushed in Asian, African, and Latin directions. The consequences are phenomenal for ministry in the city. The nations of the earth are now in the neighborhoods of our cities. The poor and the lost are coming together here, and ministries must reach out with the gospel and with strategies that build healthy persons and communities.

Broadly speaking, urban ministry is developing five specializations in Chicago today beyond the traditional functions of the gospel ministry and pastoral care:

- Ministries with at-risk persons from cradle to grave, with a huge and growing population of street children, battered women, and addicted peoples in an aging nation
- Ministries focused on the retrieval of at-risk neighborhoods, including church-based economic development

- Multiethnic and multilingual churches with around-the-clock language ministries
- Lay witnesses in the marketplace with affinity-group evangelism in the arts, theater, sports, business, and academics
- Specialized congregations that keep all the traditional functions of biblical ministry, but adapt the *forms* creatively to meet their special contexts

We used to define cities as unique places, using sociological categories like population size, density, heterogeneity. No longer. Urban ministries have been influenced by social psychologists and communications theorists who define cities by roles, functions, or processes rather than places.

Today, for example, we see suburbs not as the escape from the city, but as the extension of it. Cities are the “catch basins of the nations” in a global economic era. The frontiers of mission are no longer across the ocean, but across the street as well.

We have also learned that although most ministries in Chicago are still very traditional, many new models and strategies are needed. Pastoring the traumatized in broken-down communities or pastoring the AIDS or crack-addicted populations is not a science, but rather an art. We now study urban ministry *not* just because it is so different from rural, small town, or suburban ministry. Rather, we are learning what ministry will be in all these places within a decade or two. Put another way, Chicago’s ministries are the “R&D” unit for the whole church. Chicago has been prophetic about the future of the nation, along with New York, Los Angeles, and other urban centers in new patterns of life and work for millions of people.

The city that brought us D. L. Moody and the Olive Branch and Pacific Garden rescue missions and launched Billy Sunday, Paul Rader, the Gospel Tabernacle movements, Torrey Johnson, and Billy Graham—along with social reformers Jane Addams and Saul Alinsky—continues to affect the world. The Christian Community Development Association launched here a decade ago by John Perkins and Wayne Gordon in Lawndale and Glen and Lonni Kehrein’s Circle Urban Ministries in Austin are just two of the ministries that are transforming Chicago’s neighborhoods and affecting urban mission throughout the nation.

Conclusion: Prospects for the Future

Our God has given the church yet one more opportunity to reach the world's nations here in Chicago. It is absolutely critical that the Moody Bible Institute continue to be a launching pad for ministry in this internationally integrated urban world of the twenty-first century. D. L. Moody came to the World's Fair of 1893 and ministered vigorously there, and he continued his ministry throughout this city until he died one hundred years ago. This Institute was created in 1886, in the midst of a riot-prone city, to proclaim the gospel and train "gap" or "bridge" people who would stand between the churches and the masses. What a glorious call and illustrious century it has been. Our Lord, the Divine Choreographer, has set the stage by creating a world-class laboratory and has kept Moody in the midst of it "for such a time as this." God help us to accept our call.

Reflection Questions

1. Why should urban pastors or missionaries study the history of their city or specific neighborhood? How can we go about such a study?
2. If most of the world's "far-off" peoples have migrated into our local city and neighborhoods, what might be some implications for the local church's evangelism, worship, pastoral care, and mission?
3. We know historically how God used the Babylonian exile to teach the Jews the need for synagogues (as portable teaching centers) and the Alexandria Jews the need to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. We also know how that influenced the spread of the gospel after Pentecost throughout the Roman world. What do you think God is teaching Christian Japanese in Chicago, Chinese in San Francisco, Koreans in New York, Cubans in Miami, or various nationalities in your city that may influence the evangelization of those countries in the next century?