**The Expansion of the Christian Movement: AD 33-2000 and beyond**

Good morning!

(Introduce self)

David Sorge and Family

Missionary Kid from South India.

Graduate student and occasionally an instructor at the Univ. of Pennsylania

Working on Sociology with a particular eye for seeing how politics and religion have shaped history here and around the world.

A difficult task, for all of us:

Nearly 2000 years, 5 continents, in 2 hours.

History is a difficult thing: little bits of information from people who thought and lived very differently from the way we do.

The realities of history are always interpreted through someone’s lens, so the same event often has multiple interpretations

So we need a framework and a viewpoint.

**Framework:**

Space: Clover leaf map, based on even older maps that thought of the world as having 3 continents, a way of seeing the world that goes back (at least to 636).

Time: Winter’s framework of 400 year “epochs”

**Viewpoint:**

1. Through contemporary missiology and missions history
   1. (Rooted in the European tradition of history-writing, but newly realizing how much of the story the Eurocentric, male-centered history has been missing.)
2. Attempting to see history through the eyes of people who lived there.
   1. It takes an act of imagination and empathy to try to understand another’s view of the world.
   2. Imaginative engagement: Fictional letters from historical figures write to ask for advice. I ask your groups to help them think through their decisions.
3. Whose stories?
   1. People who had unique insights into key moments of the spread of the good news of Jesus to the nations – missionaries, queens, explorers and nuns

**Round 1:**

Introduction: The world of the Apostles

The word gospel means “Good News.” And like any other news, it is about events that happened in a place, at a time, with a particular meaning for the world.

In this case, the events happened in a moment in history when large empires covered much of Europe and Asia, and trade routes were easily accessible by land and sea. The Roman roads, the silk road, the sea routes to Asia, and the route down the Nile to Africa were all roads that the gospel began to take. As the churches in these places began to grow, though, they started to run into some tricky dilemmas.

--------------------- letters -----------------

**Africa:**

The Gospel got there, tradition says through John Mark

It encountered a society split between the upper-class Greek and Latin speaking colonists and the lower-class locals who spoke Coptic, Punic, and Berber.

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

In Egypt, church leaders embraced the odd ascetics, translated the scriptures into Coptic, and allowed the church to indigenize. It is still with us today.

In Libya, church leaders violently suppressed the indigenous Donatist movement, and never translated the Bible in to Punic or Berber. As a result, the lower class people’s theology tended to follow whoever was in power: Christian under Rome, Arian under the Goths, Muslim under the Arabs. Only in later years did the Copts begin to gain a foothold, and only since the 1930s have there been attempts to translate the Bible into Berber.

**Europe:**

The gospel had already gotten quite a strong foothold in the Roman empire, especially in the cities, but the persecution was an ever present source of fear and sadness for the Christians.

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

If you know your history, you know that the general in question, Constantine, did become a Christian, and the church generally embraced his conversion. This led to some great things—the end of persecution and a political safe haven for Christianity.

But it also came at a price. It changed people’s ideas of what Christianity meant, from a movement following a Messiah killed by the empire, willing to die themselves rather than give him up, to a movement allied with the empire—an empire just as bloody, but now killing in the name of the Cross.

There was another consequence to this as well. When disagreements got heated, church leaders realized they could use the tools of the empire for their own purposes. So from persecuted, they became persecutors, and in the process drove away many of those who followed Jesus, but had a different understanding of Theology.

First to go were the followers of Arius, who emphasized the hierarchy between the Father and the Son. They went North to the Goths and Vandals.

Next to go were the Nestorians, who emphasized the separateness of Jesus’ divine and human natures. They found refuge in the Church of the East, and since that time Western Christians have tended to call the whole Church of the East Nestorian.

Then went the Coptic Christians, who emphasized the unity of Jesus’ divine and human natures—just the opposite of the Nestorians. In protest against political strongarming at some of the church councils, they decided to cut ties with the imperial church and focus on Egypt and Africa to the South.

**Asia:**

In Asia, the good news followed the trade routes, but the Church of the East had to become independent quite early because the war zone between Rome and Persia lay between them and the Church of the West.

In Persia, many received the gospel, and it was allowed to grow and prosper until about the reign of Constantine. Constantine’s conversion, and an ill-advised letter to the Persian Shah led to persecution so severe that some estimate that more Christians were killed in those 40 years in Persia than in the previous 250 in Rome.

After the persecution, the clergy was virtually gone. What remained were ordinary churchgoers and hermits, whose monasticism was not seen as much of a threat.

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

The hermits, like Aphrahat, did come down from the mountains, and “put the call to service above the claims of separation. Purified by prayer and privation they moved beyond the compulsions of self-discipline to the no less demanding task of reviving and leading the church.” (Moffatt, 123)

But they didn’t just become pastors—they gathered together into monasteries. Tradition has it that Aphrahat became bishop of the monastery of Mar Mattai, now in Iraq. These monasteries were the seminaries of the Church of the East, where the monks lived out their vows of celibacy, but also lived near to the congregations, and trained preachers and missionaries for service wherever God would take them.

**Summary:**

In this first epoch, the gospel spread rapidly, but questions that have recurred throughout history started to come up:

* Should we focus on unity and good theology, or allow for indigenous leaders, even if they seem a little strange?
* How should we relate to governments and politicians who want to use Christianity for their own ends?
* How do we balance the need to have theological specialists with the needs for everyday Christian life?

**Round 2**

This second 400 years was a lot more chaotic than the previous 400. Rome was torn apart between barbarian warlords. The long stand-off between the Byzantines and the Persians was disrupted when the followers of Muhammad rose as a new political rival, spreading from Arabia to Persia and across North Africa. These new situations brought new dilemmas.

------ Letters ------

**Europe:**

In 476, the Roman Empire collapsed in on itself. Overspending on the military, huge economic divides between the rich and the poor, an over-reliance on slaves and mercenaries, and a severe financial crisis left Rome vulnerable to attack by Goths and Vandals, who divided the territory between them.

Meanwhile, at the edge of the empire, missionaries working in Celtic Ireland ran into a question: how should they organize their monastic life? As outposts of civilization, as was common elsewhere in the Roman world, or in forms that made sense to the local Irish, but that didn’t fit the European mold?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Something somewhat paradoxical happened. The Irish monasteries developed their own way of organizing the church, and in so doing, saved the Roman heritage. Their monks copied Greek and Latin manuscripts, not just of the scriptures, but of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others.

Their model of a monastery as a village and center of hospitality worked so well that that missionaries from Ireland ended up planting monasteries all across Europe, teaching Latin to the Italians, and helping the church survive the hard times after Rome’s collapse, and eventually begin to thrive around 800, with a mini-Renaissance under Charlemagne. Monasteries became the centers of European Christianity, and the incubators of learning and philosophy.

**Africa:**

Before we get to the letter, there is a quick story that needs to be told. In the midst of everything else that had happened in the first 400 years, a young Christian man washed up on the shores of Ethiopia in a shipwreck. He was brought to the King, and ended up employed as the tutor to the young prince, teaching him the language and culture of the Roman empire to the North. Along with that, the tutor taught the prince about Jesus. When the prince grew up and became King, he made his Christianity public, and declared Ethiopia a Christian country. The tutor, when next he visited Alexandria, asked the church to send a bishop to evangelize Ethiopia. Their response was to name him a bishop, and send him back to continue the good work he had begun.

About 150 years later, a group of nine clergymen, seeking refuge from the church conflicts in Rome, arrived in Ethiopia, and were surprised to find it a nominally Christian country. But only a small part of the country had been reached. So they spread out, preached the gospel, and established hilltop monasteries.

In their outreach, they ran into a dilemma. People’s felt need was for a magical power that could protect them from the world of magic, evil, and spirits that surrounded them. They asked for amulets with scripture written on them that they could tie onto their wrists or necks to protect them.

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

As it stands, the Ethiopian church has a long history of using amulets with scripture, with pictures of angels, and other formulae on them. We don’t know specifically if the 9 saints (as these preachers came to be called) adopted the practice, but it became widespread. The church in Ethiopia has always been a little different—they recognize a few books as part of the Bible that the rest of the church doesn’t, and they emphasize the importance of Christ’s power as spiritual protection.

But the church has stood the test of time. The church has been a key presence in Ethiopia, witnessing for Christ, for the last 1800 years. And as many scholars have been at pains to point out, from the beginning, Jesus’ death was as much about a victory setting us free from the evil powers as it was anything else—after all, that seems to be why Jesus chose Passover as the time for that final confrontation with the Pharisees.

**Asia:**

One more quick story provides a bridge from Africa to the situation in Asia. Remember, as we discussed earlier, things always get messy when the gospel cozies up to imperial power. In this case, the close association between Christianity and Ethiopian Monarchy had some unexpected consequences. You see, several decades after the 9 sages had passed away, the Ethiopians launched an invasion of Arabia. They crossed the straits into Yemen, then marched north to destroy one of Arabia’s most famous shrines, bringing with them not only an army, but war elephants. In the Arab histories, the enormous army was miraculously stopped, the temple was preserved, and the year was ever afterwards known as the Year of the Elephant. It was in that year, the year of the Elephant, in that town, Mecca, that a man was born who would preach monotheism in Arabia. We will never know what might have been, if he hadn’t grown up in the shadow of an attack by a Christian kingdom.

What we do know is what happened next. He became first a religious, then later a military leader—the first to settle the divisions between the Arab tribes, and unite them into a military force that overwhelmed the neighboring empires. His followers conquered an empire that spread from Spain to Pakistan, creating a Muslim empire that redefined life for the many Christians who continued to live under their rule.

Being under Non-Christian rule was a new experience for the church in Egypt and Syria, but nothing new to the church in Persia. They had been under Zoroastrian rule from the start of the church. The instincts of some parts of the church were combative—calling Muhammad a false prophet, and Islam a forerunner of the Antichrist. Others saw not challenge, but opportunity. There was more common ground with the Muslims than there had ever been with the Zoroastrians. Perhaps emphasizing that common ground could help communicate the gospel?

Interestingly, missionaries who had reached China by this point had a similar dilemma. They found themselves working in the same place as Buddhist missionaries, both working to translate their respective scriptures into Chinese. Should they work alongside the Buddhists, and seek to find some common ground? Or should they take a competitive, combative stance?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Timothy the Patriarch took a very careful, respectful tone with the Caliph. His work should be read by anyone interested in reaching out to Muslims. He expressed genuine appreciation for Muhammad and for Muslim doctrine, but never strayed from emphasizing that belief in what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection is non-negotiable.

Ching-Ching ended up closely collaborating with the Buddhist Missionary, Praja, on translations. As a result, the texts that we have from the church in China in this period all have a bit of Buddhist and Taoist “flavor.” But similarly, there are concepts in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism like the Bodhisattva—one who is saved, and in compassion delays their salvation to save others—that are not Christian, but seem to at least rhyme with Christian concepts.

**Summary**

In this epoch again, questions arose that continue to haunt the church.

* How far should we adapt our ways of doing mission to local social structures, and how far should we try to change those structures?
* How far should our witness be shaped by the felt needs of the people we are reaching out to, and how far does that risk twisting the worldview that frames the Gospel?
* How should we approach other organized religions? How far is it helpful to act collaboratively or competitively?

**Round 3**

This third epoch reflects a time when new powers were rising, conquering and replacing the order established at the end of the last one. At this new turn in history, God’s people faced a new set of challenges.

**Africa:**

Many centuries earlier Nubian Kings had converted to Christ, having heard about him through Coptic missionaries.

Nubia remained beyond the control of the Muslim invaders, but continued to depend on trade with Egypt.

The Caliph’s representatives come back, demanding the sending of slaves, in fulfillment of supposed treaty obligations.

Should we negotiate down to selling a smaller number of slaves, and maintain good relations with Egypt, or should we take a more radical anti-slavery stance?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Nubia negotiated down to a lower payment, but did end up exporting enslaved people, stolen from lands south of Nubia, and selling them to the Muslim empire to the North.

We don’t know much more about the consequences, but we can speculate that this may be why the gospel did not naturally continue further into Sub-Saharan Africa before this period.

* Here’s the puzzle:  
  Why didn’t Christianity cross the Sahara?
* Speculative suggestion:
* To go further South, Christianity needed to pass through one of two places: Libya-Morocco or Nubia.
* Libya-Morocco, as we know, became mostly Muslim shortly after the Muslim conquest.
* Could it be that involvement in the slave trade kept Nubia from witnessing further South?
* We don’t know, but I’m sure it didn’t help.

**Europe:**

Viking raids have already weakened the church

Turks are attacking the Byzantines

Should we turn the other cheek?

Or should the church call together an army?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Against Vikings, no church-organized resistance, though plenty of petty wars.

Vikings officially converted for political reasons between 900 and 1100, slowly Christianizing.

Against Turks, crusades lasting 200 years.

Muslim-Christian relations have been poisoned by this for most of the last millennium.

**Asia:**

* The good news has reached many of the Mongol tribes!
* The widowed Queen Sorkhakhtani asks for advice

**Should she marry a violent, cruel, and foolish man to exert godly influence on the empire?**

**Or should she steward her provinces and focus on raising her own sons as wise, God-fearing men?**

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Sorkhakhtani turned down the proposal of marriage, and raised her 4 sons. Of those 4, one became Great Khan over all the Mongols, one became Ilkhan over Persia, one became Kublai Khan. Each was famed for their wisdom and their tolerant attitude toward other religions. Though none of them became Christians, all were married to Christian princesses. Christianity flourished in the Mongol period, though it never gained the dominance it had in Europe. When the traveler Marco Polo met with Kublai Khan, the great Khan even extended an invitation to send 100 missionaries to reinforce Christianity in his empire. In the end, one missionary arrived, 18 years later.

**Round Three Summary**

In this Epoch, we’ve dealt heavily with one question, in three different lights:

* When Christian people have power, how do we exercise that in a way that doesn’t compromise the message of Christ?

**Round Four**

This epoch sees immense changes around the world. Europe undergoes some profound challenges, while the Mongols fade, and seaborne trade brings new challenges.

**Europe:**

The upper classes are Christian, but most people relate to God transactionally

The church has become heavily corrupt, selling pieces of paper that supposedly grant forgiveness of sins.

Anti-monastic reformers say we need to get the monks out of the monasteries and get them preaching to normal people in their own language.

Other reformers see a need for a more profound monasticism, selling everything, living on alms, wandering the country to do the work of Christ.

Should we join the anti-monastic reformers?

Or do we need a new, more radical form of monastic devotion?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Both happened. The mendicant orders excelled at taking the gospel to places it had not yet reached

The reformed churches excelled at taking Christianity beyond the elite to the common people, using new translations, an increased focus on scripture, preaching, and rationalist theology.

But both spent a great deal of their energy and resources fighting each other

**Asia:**

In an anti-Mongol response, the Church of the East nearly disappears, persecuted by Muslims in Persia, and Confucians in China.

But just as Nestorian influence is fading, Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit missionaries begin to arrive from Europe.

Matteo Ricci arrives in Zhàoqìng, eager to proclaim Christ. Some expect him to open a church and start holding Mass in Latin right away. But he is thinking about it more deeply. He sees that the people in Zhàoqìng respect the Confucian scholars.

Should he spend the time to become a Confucian scholar, so that he can present the faith in Confucian terms, with that stature?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

Ricci did indeed become a Confucian scholar, and became a respected member of the intellectual life of the Chinese capital, Beijing. He was known for presenting the gospel not as a foreign concept, but as the fulfillment of Chinese, and especially Confucian worship of the Lord of Heaven (Tiānzhǔ). He gets in trouble with other Christians for his support of ancestor veneration

By 1692, the emperor had issued an edict of toleration of Christianity, elevating it to an equal status with Confucianism

**Africa:**

The last word we hear from the Nubian church is a request for for priests submitted to the King of Ethiopia, because they had lost contact with the church in Egypt, and were not training priests of their own.

At about the same time, on the Southwest coast of Africa, King Afonso I, aka Mvemba a Nzinga is wrestling with his own question about clergy. He’s been visited by Portuguese explorers and slave traders, but priests came along on one of the ships, and taught him about Jesus. He has become a passionate follower of Jesus, and wants to see the gospel spread throughout his kingdom. He is deciding between asking the Portuguese to send priests to evangelize his country, or getting locals, less well trained in the gospel, to spread the word.

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

* King Afonso is remembered for his commitment to bringing the message of Jesus to his country, and to educating his people
* The chaplain sent to assist him recalls him studying theological textbooks to find ways to merge Angolan religious traditions with Christianity until falling asleep over the textbooks
* He recruited and supported a large number of lay, Angolan teachers to spread the gospel throughout the country
* Despite anti-religious policies under communist rule from 1977-1991, Angola remains over 90% Christian, more or less evenly split between Catholics and Protestants

**Round 4 Summary:**

In this tragic epoch, we’ve engaged some other key missiological questions:

* Do we need sodality-like structures? Why?
* What happens when indigenous churches are not self-theologizing?
* What happens when churches are not self-governing, self-supporting, or self-propagating?

**Round 5:**

Shortly before this epoch begins, Europeans discover reliable sea routes across the Atlantic Ocean. This gives them access to North and South American natural resources. This, along with the labor of enslaved people from Africa provides Europe the economic boost that it needs to dominate and colonize most of the rest of the Old World—Africa and Asia, for several centuries. Europe’s colonial expansion posed a new set of challenges for European missionaries and for those they spoke with about Jesus.

**Asia:**

* In 1707 , the first Lutheran missionaries were sent out to a Danish colony
* They found Jesuits had already been at work there for 100 years
* Both emphasize local language and literature
* Jesuits preferred to adopt local styles and worship customs, while Lutherans preferred simplicity, but a bigger question loomed:

Should the new missionaries follow custom by evangelizing high and low castes separately?

Or should they insist on bringing different castes together in Christ?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

* Careful histories of the Catholic communities show that the Jesuit way:
  + They regarded caste distinction as a neutral, not idolatrous social division
  + Initially appealed heavily to upper-castes
  + Got caught up in the ritual-political world in ways similar to Hindu shrines
  + But eventually also became resources for lower-caste political assertion.
* Lutherans initially followed the Jesuit example, and permitted Caste distinctions, with some differences
  + Their mission appealed more to lower-caste Hindus
  + In the 1830s, attempted to insist on renunciation of caste
  + This resulted in a split in the church

**Europe and the Antipodes:**

* Moravian Missionaries sought to reach out to Iroquois, Mohican, Shawnee, and Lenape tribes in Pennsylvania
* English Puritan missionaries had attempted to extract Indian believers, disconnecting them from their tribes and teaching them English ways.
* French Catholic missionaries spread themselves out, becoming parts of existing tribe, seeking to convert tribes as a whole

Should we seek to extract new believers from their tribes into new Christian communities?

Or should we seek to let go of our European settlements in order to preach the gospel to tribes that already live here?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

* Zeisberger went to live with many of the local tribes, and brought many to faith
* Many, rejected by their tribes, ended up gathering into Christian Indian villages
* But in 1782, US Militiamen came upon one of the villages—Gnadenhutten, Ohio. The militiamen voted to massacre the Indians and burn down their village
* No criminal charges were filed

**Africa**

* David Livingstone writes for advice about disrupting the slave trade
* He has an opportunity in Zambia to attempt to open a new trade route to develop local farming and industry

Should he work with this community to usher in economic change?

Or is mixing economics with the gospel going to advance the cause of trade more than the cause of Christ?

*What was your answer?*

*Here’s what happened:*

* Livingstone decided to make the trip, and opened a river-based trade route from West Africa to East Africa
* The economies of African countries shifted profoundly. Slavery was eventually outlawed
* However, many parts of Africa became economically dependent on colonizing countries
* To this day, many criticize Christian missionaries for legitimizing imperial conquest and economic exploitation

**Round 5 Summary:**

In this epoch we get increasingly close to the modern day, and with it to some unsolved questions.

* How should the gospel be preached in societies divided by caste, race, language, and other divides?
* How do we preach Jesus to Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, and others whose lands were taken by settler colonists?
* Can it be helpful to mix business and preaching the gospel? When and how?