We live in a world driven by material possessions and comfort, fueled by marketing and laser-guided by data. They know what we like—literally! This has radically changed how we perceive the world. What people want (not just need) is fueled by media. A major force creating this shift began just after silent films—though now it is so pervasive that the movie industry is only one, still influential force in this direction. One historic example is how many people decided to try smoking because they saw it in films and it looked cool.

The Church is also greatly impacted by its history and leaders—for an even longer period. This has been good and bad. We all know stories, which opponents to the gospel flaunt in our faces, where the Church and/or its leaders were not being true to the gospel—to say the least. But since the end of the NT times, the Church has been guided by its history, reflected (in part) in the creeds. We sometimes wonder what would have happened if some of those key decisions had been decided another way.

Rarely, however, do we wonder what might have been left out or ignored. How would you “edit” the creeds to include something they missed that is crucial?

For example, what might have happened if any (or all) of the main Christian creeds had included Jesus’ last command—to make disciples of all ethné? How different might it have been if everyone who wanted to pass on solid biblical truth included this? Suppose those mentoring young Christians or training pastors and leaders had seen the sentence below, inserted right after—“On the third day he rose again from the dead…”

• He commissioned his Church, beginning with the Apostles to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations.

This is the reflection of Don Richardson—who is both a former missionary to the Sawi people, and mission statesman who has studied a wide range of issues like this very deeply. Don has probably taught in our Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course more than anyone else (other than Steve Hawthorne, author of the Perspectives Study Guide).

In chapter sixteen of his book titled Incomplete Creeds as Symptomatic Warnings, Don outlines why the command of Jesus should be included in the creeds, namely that God’s plan for the world can be traced throughout the Scriptures. And, he ties that together with Jesus teaching at the end of Luke and Matthew—just before the ascension.

Just last week, I was asked by a friend who works with a mission-sending organization if I had something he could use to answer the question: “Is the Great Commission (from Matthew 28:19-20) for us or just for the apostles?”

I would have suggested this chapter in Don’s book, but I hadn’t read it yet.

But if you think just a little about it, it would be foolish to think it could reasonably be meant just for the apostles. If it were, they sure did a lousy job. Even Paul only got so far himself.

Historically then, instead of seeing this Commission as a foundational part of the Church and her calling, it is relegated to a fringe group in the church, or in a department in a few seminaries. Usually, smaller schools do not even have a class in “world missions” or “intercultural studies.” Instead of talking about reaching people with little or no witness when we disciple people, we wait till that younger believer “gets a sense of calling”—and then we pass them off to one of those “fringe” missions people in our churches. Many pastors are too focused and busy to strongly push the church to go beyond their walls/neighborhood to reach out where the gospel has yet to go.

How are you applying the clear teaching of Jesus and the entire Bible on this issue? How central is it to you and your church?

Please share your thoughts on www.missionfrontiers.org. 🌍