

## Pastor Stef's Book Review – November 2015

A friend of mine from Edmonton regularly surprises me by gifting me with a good book. And that, of course, makes him a good friend! The latest to end up in my mailbox was ***60 People who Shaped the Church: Learning from Sinners, Saints, Rogues, and Heroes (2014)*** by Alton Gansky. Though I was familiar with all but one of the people in the book, it is good to review, and so I started reading about one person a day for 60 days.

The book puts the “sinners and saints” in chronological order from the apostle Peter to Billy Graham. Each chapter is about six pages long and gives you a synopsis of their life and influence. As Christians we should recognize, in books like this, that we belong to a spiritual family tree. Unfortunately, too many in the family only know about Peter and Billy Graham, as if we have no ancestors in-between - and our knowledge of Peter and Billy is often spotty as well. In fact, to not know this history is to not know how we got the 27 books we have in the New Testament, or why we believe in the Trinity, or what our creeds are. This then leads to a lot of superstitious and sloppy reasoning, as if the Bible just fell out of the sky and we approach it as “blank slates” not influenced by anyone but the Holy Spirit. If this is how God chose to do it why did he give the church the gift of teachers? And why wouldn't we want to know about and learn from the best-of-the best?

Knowing our history also reminds us of how much good the church has brought to the world. Where would health care, education and even democracy be today without the church's influence? But it also protects us from making the same mistakes, like slavery, anti-Semitism, colonialism and mixing state and religion.

One criticism I have of the book is that only one woman (Fanny Crosby) is mentioned. Certainly Gansky could have done better than that. Either take Crosby out and make it a book about “60 Men” or even it up a bit. There are also very few people mentioned who are not of European decent. This perpetuates the stereotype that Christianity is a white man's religion (which is far from the truth) and the book only lets us hear from a white man's perspective. So, as a kind-of detox, I've decided to continue reading about one person a day by reading Michelle DeRusha's *50 Women every Christian Should Know*.