

Robert Ellsberg  
**Blessed Among all Women,  
Women saints, prophets and  
witnesses for our time**  
ISBN 9780 2325 2675 2  
*DLT, 2006, £14.95*

"A Woman Faced with Two Alternatives. She Saw and Chose the Third."  
Many of the women gathered in this book could share that motto of Angela Merici, founder of the Ursuline order.

Robert Ellsberg tells us that while he has drawn on the list of official saints, he has reached much wider, recalling the lives of women whose way of faithfulness speaks to the needs of our time. Some might meet the requirements for canonization but others certainly do not: they are not Roman Catholics and some are not even Christians.

Thinking, at first, that I could review this book simply by exploring a few contrasting stories, I found myself compelled to read every one. As Wendy Beckett remarks: "This book ... in honouring women, honours humanity", and I found myself, like Beckett, often moved to tears by these tales of courage and daring compassion.

Included here are women from every age: from the centuries of the Hebrew scriptures; the years of the emerging Christian community of the first centuries, to women who died just a few years ago. They come from all lands: European countries, the USA, Central and South America, Russia and Japan. Among them are a photographer, a poet, a mother, a murderer, a rag picker and a millionaire. We meet political activists, social workers, a faithful prostitute, martyrs for civil rights, feminists, a holocaust witness, abolitionists and puritan prophets. Many emerge from long obscurity as pioneers of new schools of spirituality and alternative models of discipleship.

Traditional accounts of women saints - written almost exclusively by men - often stress feminine virtues" such as purity, humble service, obedience and patient endurance. But, as Ellsberg writes in his Introduction: "Seldom have women been recognized for questioning authority; for defying restrictive codes and models of behaviour; for audacity and wit in surmounting obstacles." Even the labels given to women saints reveal a narrow range within which their sanctity is expected to operate: "virgins", "founders of religious communities"; "virgin-martyrs"; "widows" and "matrons". These designations have revealed nothing of the gifts of these women as theologians, prophets, healers and visionaries, nor their struggle in contending with male authorities who were all too ready to condemn their desires as contrary to the will of God.

Ellsberg has grouped his stories according to the Beatitudes whose blessings, he reminds us, are not bestowed upon abstract qualities, but upon the people who embody them. By standing in the presence of such gutsy, passionate

women, one catches a renewed sense of what it means to be a human being.  
This is a book to convict, challenge and inspire.

***Catherine Joy CSF***

Among others are women who are vowed religious, well known by many Catholic Christians, such as Therese of Lisieux and Teresa of Avila, Clare of Assisi, and Hildegard of Bingen, as well as married women such as Catherine de Hueck Doherty and Evelyn Underhill, and single women such as Emily Dickenson, Edel Quinn, Caryll Houselander and Joan of Arc.Â Robert Ellsberg's 1997 book, subtitled "Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time," provides 365 brief biographies, beginning with Jesus' mother Mary on Jan. 1 and ending with St. Melania the Younger, a Roman wife, mother, monk, and friend of Sts. Augustine, Jerome, and Paula (also featured in All Saints) whose pilgrimage ended with her death in Bethlehem Dec. 31, 439. Blessed Among All Women: Reflections on Women Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time (Crossroad, 2006). The Duty Of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day. ISBN 0-87462-023-6 (editor) Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 2008. All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day. ISBN 978-0-87462-061-0 (editor) Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 2010. References[edit].

Among his titles are the following books: *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (Crossroad, 1997); *The Saints' Guide to Happiness: Practical Lessons in the Life of the Spirit*, Doubleday, 2005; *Blessed Among All Women: Reflections on Women Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (Crossroad, 2006); *The Duty Of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* (editor) Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 2008; *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day*. ISBN 978-0-87462-061-0 (editor) Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 2010. Watch more "Blessed Among Women" - apparently a popular title. I'm reading about one woman per day. The quality is uneven. It's hard for me to believe the same person wrote all these vignettes! Some of them are deep and wide; others read like fables. Their collective power sweeps one along into a new sense of women present. I especially appreciated his understanding of what it means to be "virgin" as a designation in the Catholic Church. My own understanding was that being virgin meant risking barrenness, "Blessed Among Women" - apparently a popular title. Blessed Among All Women is a great book, especially for use in devotional readings or small amounts of time (to allow for absorption and meditation). ...more. flag Like

see review. May 30, 2014 Anne rated it really liked it. According to Robert Ellsberg, in his book *Blessed among all women: women saints prophets and witnesses for our time*, In the story of Agnes the opposition is not between sex and virginity. The conflict is between a young woman's power in Christ to define her own identity versus a patriarchal culture's claim to identify her in terms of her sexuality. The Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes is a Roman Catholic religious community for women based in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, USA. It was founded in 1858, by Father Caspar Rehr, an Austrian missionary, who established the sisterhood of pioneer women under the patronage of Agnes, to whom he had a particular devotion.