

"Glory to God" is new favorite in Oprah's Book Club

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It's difficult to look directly at a helicopter while it hovers a few feet over your head. It's even harder not to look away when you know Oprah Winfrey is on board. The 60-year-old television personality and official spokesperson for the third world flew in last Friday to meet with Dr. Mary Louise Bringle and talk about her new book "Glory to God," which was chosen last month as the favorite book in Oprah's Book Club.

I was lucky enough to stand behind Winfrey and peek over her hair to listen in as she sat down with Bringle for an interview.

Oprah: Mary Louise, or is it just Louise? Can I call you Louise? What about just Lou?

M.L. Bringle : Actually I prefer Mel.

O: How about Doctor Lou? My viewers love it when I talk to doctors

MLB: Whatever you're comfortable with.

O: Let me just begin by saying Doc that your new book "Glory to God", I like to call it G2G, immediately reminded me of a book I think I've read before.

MLB: You're referring to the Bible?

O: Yes! That's the one.

MLB: Well, certainly "Glory to God" contains texts that are biblically inspired, yes.

O: Biblical inspiration, that's deep. Tell me, who is your favorite character in your book?

MLB: I don't think you understand. This is a hymnal.

O: Yes, but you have characters too. I'll tell you mine is in chapter 163 where the wild and lone prophet is yelling in the desert and no one hears her. It's so existentially romantic, don't you think?

MLB: Oprah, you know these are songs, right? They aren't "chapters" either.

O: But isn't the wild and lone prophet in your book a symbol for the wild and lone prophet or prophetess in all of us?

MLB: No, it's a reference to John the Baptist

O: I thought you were Presbyterian

MLB: Well, yes, but baptism isn't a denominational thing. We baptize in the Presbyterian Church too.

O: It has to be a full dunk or it doesn't count, right?

MLB: It depends on what you believe.

O: I had an alcoholic uncle fall in the river during a baptism ceremony. He drowned. Do you think he's in Heaven?

MLB: I can't say one way or the other.

O: But surely you can communicate with him? Can't all religious people talk to the dead? Don't you do that every Sunday anyway?

MLB: (Sighs) Do you really believe that?

O: Oh, I believe in the power of positive thinking, healthy eating, and Tom Cruise.

MLB: ...

O: Off the record, you originally intended to release this as an autobiography. What changed your mind?

MLB: (to me) Is she serious?

K: I think so

MLB: On the record, I never intended to release this as an autobiography.

O: What about chapter 223 when you surveyed the Wondrous Cross? Surely that came from personal experience?

MLB: I didn't write that.

O: Oh Lord Jesus, not again. You know James Frey did this to me a few years ago.

MLB: "Glory to God" is a collection of hymns, some that span back hundreds of years and written by people all over the world.

O: So it's a book of short stories.

MLB: In a strange, non-sequitur way, yes.

O: You know, I read another book like that not too long ago called "The Waterhouse" published by Press 53. Have you heard of it?

MLB: Yes, my colleague, Dr. Jubal Tiner, authored it.

O: I hated it.

MLB: Me too.

O: You've been on tour for months promoting the book. How long has it been on the New York Times bestseller list?

MLB: Never. "Glory to God" isn't reviewed by the New York Times.

O: What about your Pulitzer nomination?

MLB: Again, that's for authors who write literary works. I chaired a committee that put



together a hymnal.

O: Doctor Lou, who do you imagine your typical reader to be for a book like this?

MLB: Well, "Glory to God" is the newest incarnation of the Presbyterian hymnal, so I'd imagine quite a few have seen it and use it in their weekly congregational worship services.

O: Fascinating. I didn't know Presbyterians believed in reincarnation.

MLB: We don't.

O: Yes, but you just said your book is the newest incarnation of the hymnal. Tell me, what do you imagine it was in its past life?

MLB: Trees, I suppose.

O: Really? I swear I could feel the aura of Zora Neal Hurston radiating from the pages when I read the chapter "Their Eyes were Watching God."

MLB: That's not in the text.

O: Sure it is. Chapter 354.

MLB: (to me) Do you have any idea what she's talking about?

K: I think she means, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory."

O: You also delve into the gothic and macabre at one point in chapter 278, "Come, Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire." Who are some of your early gothic influences?

MLB: Lazarus.

O: Is he Russian?

MLB: Are you stupid?

O: I think we're about out of time. Thank you so much Doctor Lou for sharing some insight into your new book "Glory to God." I'm sure your readers will be looking forward to the sequel, due out next fall, right?

MLB: There won't be a sequel, Oprah!

O: Well not with an attitude like that, Lou.