



Robert Choiniere
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Victoria Rue
Discussants

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Editor

Forum

Devised Theatre as Activism in a Religious and Spiritual Context

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Introduction

The inaugural Forum for this first issue of *Performance, Religion, and Spirituality* brings together three professional theatre artists with a variety of backgrounds in scholarship, education, and ministry. They are all American artists, and they all work within and alongside the Christian community, using theater to create connections and bridges between religions as well as within the Christian church writ large. I think it is important to highlight the fact that in a secular, Western society that considers itself “post-religious” but is obviously deeply invested in Christian culture and ethics, these artists are creating dialogue and shaking up the institutions of both government and church in ways that directly contradict the prejudices of the so-called “Christian right” of post-Obama United States identity politics. And even though various “alt-right” movements (not only in the United States but across the globe) would seem extreme exceptions, they are the exceptions that prove the rule of an ubiquitous Judeo-Christian cultural

imaginary. The reality of Christian belief, practice, and identity is much more nuanced and complex than it is often portrayed, both by those inside and outside the Christian church. Understanding the dynamics of this identity is part of a greater process of healing the rifts of religiously motivated hatred within, between, and beyond religious communities.

The transcript below is an edited version of a conversation that took place between Catharine, Victoria, and Robert via e-mail over the course of about one month; I listened in with the intent of shaping the conversation into a publishable document that would act as a sounding board as well as a spur to further conversation. We ask that our readers approach this transcript as an invitation to dialogue. *PRS* will gladly welcome letters to the editor in response to the forum, which will be published in the next issue. Letters can be sent to clairemariachambers@gmail.com.

Artist biographies

Robert Choiniere is currently a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education at Fordham University. He holds an MA in Pastoral Ministry from Boston College and a BA in Theology and Theatre from DeSales University. He has served as a lay ecclesial minister in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Brooklyn as the Director of Pastoral Planning. Robert is also one of the founders of Stages on the Sound, Inc, a nonprofit theatre education company serving over 16,000 students weekly in over 40 schools across New York City and surrounding areas. He currently acts as the Managing Director.

Catharine Christof Dada received her Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. The focus of her research was on modern experiences of spirituality in Western theatre. She received her first degree in Theatre from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and subsequently trained as a classical actress at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in England. She also holds an M.A. in the Study of Mysticism and Religious Experience from the University of Kent at Canterbury. Catharine has acted in several productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, performing at theaters at Stratford-upon-Avon and at the Barbican in London, as well as playing leading roles in many theaters throughout the UK. She was Artistic Director of the Sacred Performance Project. Her company's work has been seen at festivals at Pari in Italy, and at Canterbury and Oxford in the UK. She is the author of *Rethinking Religion in the Theatre of Grotowski* (Routledge, 2017).

Victoria Rue is a feminist theologian and a writer, director and teacher of theatre. She received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in New York. Her dissertation focused on how feminist theatre enacts feminist theology. Victoria has taught in the fields of Religious Studies and Theology for fifteen years. She has taught at the Pacific School of Religion, Starr King School for the Ministry, the California Institute for Integral Studies and St. Lawrence University. She is currently a lecturer in the Women Studies and Comparative Religious Studies Department of San Jose State University. Victoria's book, *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies*, was published in 2005 by Pilgrim Press. She is a frequent pedagogy consultant to university departments and individual professors. Her work as a theatre director has been seen in

Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. Victoria is the co-founder of *A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist* in which Roman Catholic women publicly celebrated a monthly feminist Catholic Mass. The group began in 1997 and celebrated for seven years. Victoria was ordained a woman deacon in the Roman Catholic Church in 2004 and a woman priest in 2005. For further information, please see www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org.

Artist Position Statements

Robert Choiniere

Full of Grace: Journeys of LGBT Catholics and Theatre as a Catalyst for Theological Reflection in the Catholic Church

In 2012, the late Catholic bishop, Joseph Sullivan from Brooklyn, New York, invited me to develop a new outreach for and with gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) Catholics using the medium of theatre to gather and share the faith stories of this most excluded and marginalized portion of the Catholic community. Bishop Sullivan was a staunch supporter of a compassionate and inclusive ministry to LGBT Catholics and their families. He believed that a conversation among Catholics regarding sexual identity and faith was overdue and absent from Church discourse and wondered with me if a coordinated performance piece could be a catalyst to such a conversation. As a lifelong Catholic, I took the Bishop's request as a commission and began to create a plan to shape such a performance piece.

In collaboration with Scott Barrow, a member of Tectonic Theatre Project, we organized a group of interviewers who met with over 50 LGBT Catholics and family members to inquire about their experiences of faith and church in relationship to their own sexual identity. After transcribing hundreds of hours of recorded conversations, we began to highlight critical stories that we believed were central to shaping a conversation about this highly polarized issue within the Church.

The stories are powerful accounts of an excluded and misunderstood minority within the church who struggle to remain connected to the Catholic community even as their own identities and desires are consistently discounted and silenced by Church leaders. We organized the interviews thematically into a 90-minute play entitled *Full of Grace: Journeys of LGBT Catholics*. Diversity was a primary goal of our project, therefore our interviewees include students, retirees, married couples, clergy, conservative Catholics living in accordance with Church teaching and those who have chosen to leave the Church, fired church leaders, priests sharing the theological positions of the Church and theologians offering an alternative understandings of Catholic sexual ethics that are more inclusive and yet faithful to the teachings of Christ.

As we reviewed the interviews, specific themes emerged. For instance, coming out stories were recounted as powerful moments of spiritual development. Interviewees reported a great sense of inner peace, integrity and honesty within themselves, with family members and friends and in their relationship with God. Such disclosures were seen as acts of conscience where the need to reveal to others and themselves their own truth became a necessary step to the deepening of their spiritual lives. In the play, these coming out stories are presented as a pastiche, a quick series of related stories that build upon one another, each a witness to the power of authentic, vulnerable disclosure despite the fear of rejection and exclusion. Such courageous self-revelation

becomes a testament to truth-telling, a practice of disclosure that deepens self-acceptance and understanding.

Theatre and performance provides a sacred space where unheard stories can unfold before a receptive audience. These compelling witnesses then challenge or confirm previously held convictions while seeking to connect to the experiences of the audience. The stories of non-celibate gay priests describing experiences of intimate relationships with other priests are perhaps some of the most taboo of experiences presented in *Full of Grace*. The struggles between sexuality and service, vows and desires, necessary deceptions and the need for authenticity form a difficult and highly compelling scene where audience members are confronted with conflicting values of deeply human men seeking integrity within a structure that demands their bifurcation as part of their own loyalty. These untold stories are the very witnesses that the wider community must hear if the Church is to remain an authentic representation of the extraordinary compassion of Her founder.

Within the debate over sexual identity and Christian faith there are polarized factions with conflicting views on God's own motives and desires, on self-understanding and on the appropriate response of the Church. Such polarized viewpoints are seldom represented on the same stage. As conflicting and opposing views galvanize, these camps within the larger Church stay within their own comfort zones and rarely, if ever, dialogue with one another. Interview-based theatre has the ability to bring these opposing voices together on the same stage at the same time. *Full of Grace* intentionally brings together conflicting voices to dialogue with one another leaving the audience to sort through the viewpoints, arguments and self-perceptions. In one powerful interchange, a very conservative celibate Catholic gay man is placed into conversation with a married Catholic gay man who chose to leave the Church based on his moral conviction to not participate in a community that could not accept him and his choices. What unfolds is an empathetic and supportive conversation between deeply ethical men who arrive at exactly opposite conclusions based on their faith convictions. This is where discernment is necessary for every audience member. If nothing else, perhaps the telling of such diverse stories can challenge the comforting or frustrating conviction that there are simple answers to these complex questions.

Full of Grace is designed as a performance piece to make the conversation more complex and to dispel the idea that issues of sexual identity are settled questions. *Full of Grace* seeks to unsettle and in so doing it becomes a catalyst to a deeper conversation between and among Catholics to see beyond the edges of our own comfort, consider how God is working on the margins to call all to the deeper truth of solidarity as one people seeking to be evermore authentic children of God through the witness of their lives.

Staged readings of *Full of Grace* were held between 2014 and 2017 at Fordham University, St. Francis College in Brooklyn, Ascension Church in Manhattan, Martha's Vineyard Playhouse and Christ Church, Philadelphia in conjunction with the US papal visit in 2015. 3 staged performances were also held as part of the Rough Draft Festival at LaGuardia College in March 2017. Our current goal is to tour the play to Catholic universities to foster a deeper conversation on faith and sexual identity among students and faculty. More information about *Full of Grace* can be found at www.fullofgraceplay.com.

Catharine Christof Dada

Performance as Activism: *The Voices of Justice Class* at Loyola Marymount University

“We were more than just students in this process; we were advocates of social justice.”

—*Voices of Justice Class Student*

Two dynamic theatre professors at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles are using the modality of performance to inspire social activism in a class called *Voices of Justice (VoJ)*. This course covers all aspects of performance work and provides a forum for community engagement, taking theatre out of the ivory tower of university education, and simultaneously allowing an additional space for the voices of the marginalized to be heard. The *VoJ* class uses applied theatre to illuminate theoretical understandings of social justice issues and provides a compassionate forum for dialogue and peaceful activism. For both professors Dr. Judith Royer, C.S.J. and Dorie Baizley, the work is recognized as deeply personal and transformative. Royer, who is one of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange in California, notes that the CSJ sisters have a long history of providing an open forum for dialogue, giving voice to issues of faith and social justice as they impact and inform each other. She is the Director of the CSJ Center for Reconciliation and Justice at LMU, and is an acclaimed faculty member at LMU’s Theatre Department. Baizley is an award-winning director, writer and activist, and is the co-teacher and co-creator of this program. This statement explores the rationale behind their work, and provides a blueprint for the potential replication of this process at other colleges and universities.

Baizley had worked with this unique version of the dramatized narrative process in several outreach programs, initially at senior centers. Because of the powerful impact this format of documentary theatre has on both the client and on the interviewer/author/performer, this work is completely in line with the mission statement of the CSJ Center for Reconciliation and Justice. Baizley and Royer realized they had the same vision for the transformative potential of this work, and a class was born. The course makes use of this practice of applied theatre as the locus of interconnection between theatre and social change, sharing stories that inspire social awareness. The whole process can be described as a form of peaceful activism, bridging the student community with groups that focus on issues of social service.

Both women are quick to acknowledge that they did not invent this work; various forms of it are known by a host of names, including theatre of testimony, documentary theatre and dramatized narrative. Anna Deavere Smith’s one-woman documentary dramas and Moises Kaufman’s work with the Tectonic Theatre Project have used such methods to great critical acclaim. While the format itself is well-known, the work done in the *VoJ* class maximizes the benefits of documentary narrative storytelling, aiming to provide a space for transformation and understanding for both students and the client body being served. It becomes a form of engaged social and theatrical activism.

Through outreach to the local community, students are paired up with different groups of people, in sync with the agency that represents them, including people who are homeless, victims of human trafficking, those recently released from long-term incarceration, and at-risk youth. All aspects of performance are used. Students are trained in techniques of dramatized narrative in order to craft, and later share, a dramatized version of the social issue being collectively explored.

The process, which involves journalism, creative writing, and performance, begins with listening to the story of the client. Both women note the deceptively simple and yet powerfully transformative role of being present to the client: “Just listening, as a real spiritual practice—it’s one of the basic things that happens when our students interview people,” Baizley notes. The meeting is recorded, and students transcribe that interview word for word. The act of transcription becomes an additional experience of really hearing the person’s voice. The story is taken down without judgment, and then, with permission, given back to the person who told their story in a theatrical presentation.

Between the interview and the creation of the full performance draft, another meeting is arranged in order for the client to approve the student’s telling of their story. The *VoJ* work is different from other types of documentary storytelling work, in which the storyteller and the performer are the same person. In the format used by the *VoJ* class, the storyteller has the opportunity to have their own words performed for them by one of the students or a professional actor. This act of having another performer tell the client’s story in front of an audience removes the pressure of pleasing an audience from the experience, allowing for the client to have some objectivity with their own story. One client noted that hearing her story of cancer treatment told in this form not only helped to objectify the experience, but also elevated the experience itself. She was pleased to see that something so challenging could be transformed into a work of art.

The *VoJ* class is now a core class at LMU, and many students decide to do a Master’s Degree in social work following their participation in this class. Students frequently describe both the class and the process as life-changing.

Victoria Rue

Interfaith Performance as Activism: *Mary/Maryam* in Christian and Islamic Traditions

We live in a heightened time of Islamophobia in the U.S. This is of great concern to me as a professor of comparative religious studies, a theatre writer/director and feminist/lesbian Catholic. My recent theater work focuses on the need to help educate Americans about Islam, especially Christians. Because Islam is often accused of being misogynistic, I felt it necessary to offer a more complicated view of Islam using the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, known as Maryam and her son Isa in the Qur’an. Mary is a neutral bridge, a beloved figure in both Christianity and Islam, and perhaps a foil for arguments about women in Islam.

The roots/routes that led to the play *Mary/Maryam* reach through my work as an educator, interfaith minister, and artist. In my teaching of the Abrahamic traditions at San Jose State University for the past twelve years, the classroom has been a laboratory for enacting scriptures, playing out contemporary applications, using theatre as a catalyst for lectures and spirited discussions of texts. Working with scriptures in these courses has also inspired recent theater work. In 2015, teaching, research, and theatre intertwined when I adapted a play for the Islamic Networks Group (ING), *Halqa/Seder: Muslim and Jewish Perspectives on the Exodus Story*. The 2016 interfaith performance of the play in a synagogue in Los Gatos, California, brought together an audience of Jews and Muslims. ING’S format interwove the play with table conversations about the similarities and differences of the Exodus story in Judaism and Islam.

Both the rehearsals and performance of the play revealed interfaith theater as activism. The actors were from a Reform synagogue and a Sunni mosque. Jews played Muslim and Jewish roles. Muslims did the same. We rehearsed and performed in the synagogue. Wanting the Muslims to feel comfortable in the synagogue, I asked the woman rabbi if the flag of Israel might be put away while we were there. She said, "Of course, anything else?"

The format of the play was key to its activism: an adapted scene from the Torah's Book of Exodus, then an adapted scene from Islam's story of Moses, followed by 10-15 minutes of audience table conversations with guiding questions in the program. Jews, Muslims, and others were at each table. Music brought the audience back to the play. Then the audience again witnessed two more scenes from each religious tradition, and another table conversation, etc. The play was interrupted four times for conversations. General audience comments afterwards included: this was the first time for me as a Muslim in a synagogue, the first time for me as a Jew to be in conversation with Muslims [and vice versa], the first time for us as Muslims and Jews to focus on the similarities of our scriptures rather than on divisive world events, the first time for many of us as Muslims and Jews to see and hear why the story of Moses is so important in each other's faith traditions. Afterward, the conversations continued during a delicious dinner of Middle Eastern foods.

Mary/Maryam in Christian and Islamic Traditions used a similar format with similar goals for interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. The Christian Mary as the Mother of Jesus has a rich history of theology, legend, and artistic interpretation. In Islam, Maryam as the mother of Isa the prophet is also deeply venerated. My approach to *Mary/Maryam* was both intra-faith and inter-faith. The play was first performed in a Protestant church. In recent years Protestants have begun to look again at the importance of the figure of Mary and her erasure from their own tradition. Thus the play *Mary/Maryam* as an educational tool offers Mary in Christianity to Protestants, as well as Maryam in Islam to Catholics and Protestants, but also offers Mary in Christianity to Muslims.

The play critiques the fact that there is little about Mary in the Christian gospels (Matthew and Luke) and turns instead to the apocrypha, particularly the Infancy Gospel of James, written in the 2nd century. From it we learn of Mary's mother Anna and her husband Joachim and the angelic announcement to Anna that she is pregnant, Mary's living and schooling in the all male Jerusalem temple, the angelic announcement of Mary's pregnancy, her betrothal to Joseph and Mary's birth experience with a mid-wife and birth of Jesus in a cave in Bethlehem.

In turning to Maryam in Islam, her story is given in suras 3 and 19 of the Qur'an and the various Hadith offer commentary. Maryam is the only woman named in the Qur'an. Her name is invoked 34 times. She has an entire sura named after her, sura Maryam. In the Islamic tradition we meet Maryam's mother Hannah, told by the angel Jibril she will give birth. After her husband Imran dies, as a widow, Hannah gives birth to Maryam. As in the Christian tradition, Maryam is raised in the all-male temple, and also receives the angelic announcement of Isa. But in a striking difference, Maryam is not betrothed, but a single mother. She goes out into the desert to give birth alone, beneath a date palm tree that nurtures her with dates and water. Alone, she courageously returns to her village and is impugned by neighbors for being a single mother. But the baby in her arms, Isa the prophet, speaks for Maryam and tells the village how Allah honors her.

Looking through the lens of gender, and hoping to counter the critiques of a misogynist Islam, the play 1) presents Mary/Maryam as breaking the gender binary by living in the all-male temple confines, 2) notes the power and threat to the all-male temple establishment's view of her menses, 3) presents Mary/Maryam's deliberate "yes" to the angel as pivotal to her faith, 4) questions the emphasis in Christianity on her virginity by offering several views of her pregnancy and marriage to Joseph, 5) reveals the Qur'an's perspective that Maryam is honored as a single mother, who gives birth alone, and as an act of faith returns to her community reviled but then praised when her baby, Isa, speaks and praises her and Allah.

Originally produced by Peace United Church and the Islamic Center of Santa Cruz, California, *Mary/Maryam in Christian and Islamic Traditions* used the same format of the *Halaqa/Seder*. Again, Christians, Muslims and others came together to experience a play that is interrupted four times for table conversations about Mary/Maryam and then share a meal together. Video clips of the play can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/p-e40UzKeR4>. Since then, the play has also been seen at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, Whittier College in Los Angeles, a national conference of Roman Catholic women priests in Madison, Wisconsin and will be produced in autumn 2017 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The original cast of *Mary/Maryam* was made up of Christians, Muslims, a Jew, a Hindu/Divine Mother, and a Sufi. General responses to the play and conversations that I heard afterward again spoke of "first times": first time hearing both the Christian and Muslim story of Mary/Maryam; first time learning about the Qur'an or Christian scriptures; first time being in a Christian church. But I also heard something new: a Wiccan woman remarked that she experienced the play as a vision of the Divine Feminine; a Buddhist woman witnessed the play as a story of Quan Yin; a woman just back from Standing Rock offered that she saw the play and audience conversations as activism, where we all could respond, like Mary/Maryam, in saying "yes"; an indigenous man from Mexico said "you all may have seen the Virgin Mary in the play, sometimes called Guadalupe. But I saw the Nahuatl indigenous Mother, Tonantzin."

It is my hope that in this time of Islamophobia, both of these plays, *Halaqa/Seder* and *Mary/Maryam*, will continue to be opportunities to build bridges of understanding, and through understanding open our hearts to the beauty and power of the Spirit in all women and men to create a more just and peace-filled world.

Discussion

Robert: Catharine, I see many parallels between *Voices of Justice (VoJ)* and *Full of Grace*, especially in the process and their goals. Is instigating activism a goal of *VoJ*? How has it encouraged greater social action and advocacy among the students, interviewees, and the audience who attends the completed works?

Catharine: I've been involved in this kind of theatre work since 2006, and fortunately have had the chance to witness a variety of students, issues, and audiences. Many students have spoken of the power of this process, and how it has helped them to see the whole situation differently, whether it's to do with life in and out of prison, homelessness, or life in and out of a gang. What I find interesting is that, almost across the board, it seems to have changed not only their view of the issue itself, but their views regarding a number of other marginalized groups, in general. I chalk this up to

great teaching (Judith and Dorie are awesome), and also to the fact that they've had to walk a short but powerful mile in someone else's shoes. And I think both teachers are fantastic at gently being able to unpack a different viewpoint for the students. Once this has been effected for the student, that openness applies to a spectrum of issues. One of my favorite stories is about a student with whom I was quite close. She came to college passionate about being a musical theatre performer. She left deciding to do work advocating for the rights of pregnant women in prison! She's still doing that today, years later!

Regarding the impact the class has had on the interviewees who've seen some of their life story told by someone else, they've always said how powerful it was to be a witness to their own story, and have noted that it brings a sense of being able to accept their story in a way they sometimes hadn't been able to before.

On a personal note, my own work teaching meditation to ex-lifers [people sentenced to life in prison but out on parole] began after attending a *VoJ* event that focused on the stories of ex-lifers like Francisco Homes. It's also made me a passionate advocate for the Anti-Death Penalty Campaign.

Robert: Many of the social issues of our time are multi-faceted and include varying and often divisive opinions. As such, the stories of the interviewees are subjective narratives that occur within a wider framework. How do students incorporate these diverse voices and the wider horizon of the issues they are encountering and presenting?

Catharine: Gosh—they don't always. The allocated time is short, to increase the impact of the story; some students choose to bring in a different and challenging voice – some don't. It's pretty subjective what elements they choose to highlight in the context of sharing another person's story. If a dissenting voice is brought into the equation, it's often personified by another actor/character, and played out as dramatic dialogue. Sometimes it's reflected in the choice of photographs that are shown on the large screen behind the performer, as part of the event. These photographs are always provided by the interviewee themselves. The "wider horizon issue" is hopefully addressed through the individual and specific stories; statistics and figures don't tend to play out well. Hearing the story of someone who has lived with such a challenge seems to be the most impactful thing.

Robert: In such a subjective exercise, how are objective research, counterpoints and polarized viewpoints addressed in relation to the subjective narratives? I ask because they are questions that come up in my own work.

Catharine: The *VoJ* class comes with a pretty specific directive: to present the issues from those who are underserved in the community, therefore the focus is on the life stories of the individual and how they have faced and/or dealt with the problem. Implicit in that directive is the fact that polarized viewpoints are frequently those that are held by the community at large. *VoJ*'s directive and mission is to hold a voice for the counter-arguments, given through the narrative of the individual interviewee.

Robert: Victoria, I am very taken by the intentional dialogic pauses in *Mary/Maryam*. It seems like a great way to engage audiences as real participants in the work. And the

meal at the end really fosters the kind of solidarity that this interfaith piece seeks to create. What has been the response of *Mary/Maryam* by both Christians and Muslims as they interact with one another during these dialogue moments?

Catharine: Yes, I am also curious about how the performances were received.

Victoria: Each group or table of audience members is going to be different, of course, but overall there was genuine amazement at the first time hearing both the Christian and Muslim story of Mary/Maryam and the first time learning about the Qur'an or Christian scriptures. Some groups used the questions provided initially and then went off on their own. Other groups stuck to the provided questions. But it was clear at all tables that for most of the middle-aged Christian people who were present (not so true of younger people), this was the first conversation they had had with a Muslim.

The late feminist Christian theologian Nelle Morton wrote in a now well-known essay about "hearing each other to speech" as an act of empowerment for the marginalized and disinherited. For both Muslims and Christians, such "hearing each other to speech" was an active ingredient at each table. With this deep listening, perhaps for the first time, people engaged with the other faith and actually heard what was believed/felt about Mary or Maryam. Some said it was such a relief to not talk politics but talk faith.

Catharine: How did you ensure that people of different faiths sat at the same table?

Victoria: When people arrived, they made a good will offering of \$10 (which helped to cover the Middle Eastern cuisine that was provided; at other times the meal has been a potluck brought by the audience; or at other times, with no meal attached to it at all). They received a program and were told to seat themselves at a table with people they didn't know, and particularly to try and create a table with Christians and Muslims and others. At the Exodus play I adapted and directed with ING and the Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley, people made reservations and could self-identify their faith if they wished. The organizers then put Jews and Muslims and others at each table.

Catharine: There's so much I loved about watching the YouTube clip (too short!) and reading the text. I loved the fugue-like dancing / sometimes repetition / echoing of the text between Mary and Maryam, the humor of Matthew, and things like the simple, powerful statement made by Anna's handing the child Mary to the Angel. Just so sensible. I also loved the light touch of historical context added in — so important especially in this current American climate of fundamentalism and rampant literalism.

With the table conversations, I love that you will have ensured that audience engagement happened, and looking at the clips, they're really engaged! One of the responses in the YouTube clip called this piece an "antidote and medicine for the challenges of our time". I wonder what specific challenges you encountered (if any) that prompted you to write this?

Victoria: I intended both theatre pieces to respond to the currents of Islamophobia in our country. But in addition to that, because I teach the Abrahamic traditions, each year I've seen how students really yearn to know more about these religions and what draws people to them. I imagined their parents would be similar. On a more personal

note, my mother had a deep devotion to Mary which I never understood. When I discovered Maryam's story in Islam, it helped me recover my own relationship with Mary/Maryam. So in many ways, there is something of my mother in the play too.

Another inspiration has been understanding the humanity of Mary, especially because I grew up Catholic, and because I'm a feminist lesbian, and early on I quickly tired of the perception of Mary as compliant, perfect, silent. I was thrilled with Colm Toibin's play, *The Testament of Mary*. She is a real person in that play, and even an older woman with guts! When I spent time in Israel/Palestine in the summer of 2016, as I walked around Nazareth and Bethlehem, as I met young Jewish and Arab women, the particular story of Maryam in the Qur'an came to mind. She is so much more human than in the Christian Gospels.

Ultimately, this play fits into being part of a much larger project that women of all religions have been engaged in for several decades. We are "recovering" women in our traditions, dusting off what has gotten lost or put aside as unimportant. We are reimagining patriarchal traditions, lifting up the voices of women historically, theologically. As I have often said, "you can't just add women and stir." Recovering our histories and voices must also change patriarchal theologies. Women today are also making the connections, seeing the intersections between and among all religious traditions.

Robert: Have these pieces of interfaith theatre inspired ongoing interfaith dialogue and activism?

Victoria: Once a church or mosque community decides they want to do this play of *Mary/Maryam*, they begin a process of getting to know the local mosque or a local church. The play is a collaboration between two communities. Through rehearsal and then performance, new members of each community are drawn into the experience. The circle widens. And new seeds are planted for further projects. For example, after the play was done in Santa Cruz, a new group was started by several different Christian individuals to specifically engage, get to know, and support the Muslim community in the area. As of this date, they have shared a dinner on Eid al Fitr, and have created a music concert of Arabic music. I have also heard that several churches in the area have also had Muslim speakers come to their services to share knowledge of their faith. For me, that is how the play plants seeds for more dialog and the kind of activism that positively supports similarities and differences.

It's really quite amazing how little the people of the Abrahamic traditions know about one another. And demagogues build on that lack of knowledge and empathy.

Speaking of empathy — Robert, I love how our two plays connect with Mary/Maryam through the angel's greeting "Hail Mary, full of grace!" And so, *Full of Grace* is an important testament to the many voices/faces/lives of LGBTQ people. As a lesbian, I certainly found myself represented several times! I have several interrelated questions for you. First, what Catholic theologians inform the play?

Robert: The play itself, as a concept, is a response to the need to include subjective existential inquiry as a criterion in developing ecclesial, moral and pastoral teaching and practice. The lived experience of LGBT Catholics has not been considered in the development of universal teachings from the Church regarding their own theological anthropology and teleology. Therefore, *Full of Grace* is an attempt to insert narrative

experience into the theological conversation as a sacred source along with scripture and tradition. Therefore, theologians who support the inclusion of human experience as a valid and necessary criterion for authentic theological discernment are among the giant shoulders that this play rests upon. Those theologians and philosophers include Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Ricoeur, and David Tracy as well as pastoral theologians and religious education gurus including James and Evelyn Whitehead, Thomas Groome, Joe Holland, Paulo Freire and others who believe that God is communicating God's self in and through the human experience and that putting experience into conversation with traditional sources, new and authentic understandings of faith will emerge.

Victoria: What questions did you ask to generate the answers you received?

Robert: Each interviewee was invited to share their own stories of faith, their experience of growing up Catholic, the history and current state of their relationship to the Church, both local and universal, their process of coming out and the history of their own relationships as well as the history of their own vocational calling, especially in the case of clergy and religious sisters. Questions of both rejection and acceptance by members of the Church and their own family were asked. Finally, questions of hope, both for themselves and the Church were asked.

Victoria: Where do you think the play succeeds and where does it need improvement?

Robert: I believe that the play succeeds in bringing a diversity of voices to the stage. It offers varying points of view, even divisive viewpoints, in an intimate setting. It succeeds as a work of advocacy in that it brings marginalized voices to center stage and provides them with a forum to be heard and for the audience to reflect. The play demands discernment and reflection on the part of the audience. It does not spoon-feed or drive a particular position, but provides diverse points within a demonstrably polarized environment. The audience is left to sort out their own feelings about each character and their relationship to one another and to the wider Church. Therefore, I think it succeeds at being a catalyst to deeper discernment.

There are two points of improvement that I will mention. The first is the need to include more and more voices. The play current has two transgender voices, but they are small pieces and I believe more attention to trans stories is needed. The experience of coming out and living as an LGBT person of faith in rural America is a very different experience than growing up in a large city in a blue state. I believe that including more voices from rural America would also be helpful. I could say the same for LGBT Catholics in other countries.

One other area that we struggled with while writing the play was the narrative arc of the entire play. Other documentary plays, such as *The Laramie Project*, focus on a particular event and the responses and reactions of individuals around that event, such as the killing of Matthew Shepherd in Laramie. *Full of Grace* has powerful narrative stories and captivating interviews, but there is not one single uniting event that galvanizes the cast and drives the action. Individual characters have natural arcs to their stories and these are arranged in a particular order in relation to one another and events like the Synod on the Family, the passing of Marriage Equality or the Pulse

nightclub shooting act as touchstone moments for the characters but the absence of a singular galvanizing event makes playwriting more of a challenge.

Victoria: What's the most compelling voice in the play...and how might you strengthen it?

Robert: There are many compelling voices in the play and I hope that each is compelling in their own way. I believe that Tom Nelson, the father who begins the play as a staunch by-the-book Catholic and becomes a more loving, accepting and compassionate man as a result of his own son's coming out is a compelling story with whom most Catholics in the pew can identify. Though I believe his voice is quite strong and prominent already. Hilary, the transgender male-to-female character, is a deeply spiritual person who shares her story of transformation and conversion through the lens of faith. Her journey of authenticity and truth-telling and truth-living is a most compelling story that provides the audience access to experiences that they may not understand or initially identify. I believe that providing more space in the play to unpack Hilary's story and other trans stories may strengthen the play by immersing the audience a bit more into the faith journeys of transgendered folks.

Catharine: Robert, as I was reading your play I found myself stopping to read out some of the loveliest lines to my husband, who was also blown away by the beauty and humor of what I read out loud to him. One of the specific lines was from "the Irish woman" who said, "If that is what you are then that is what you are, now stop trying to be what you are not and eat your lunch." We both laughed out loud. I had an Irish mother and this just rang totally true to me. The other line that I read to him was from the priest in the confessional, "David, it doesn't matter to God who you love, it matters to Him *that* you love." It brought tears to my eyes, and to his.

In your position statement, you speak of Bishop Joseph Sullivan's request for the LGBTQ play to be written. Instantly I was struck by the rally of many Catholics to help the "hurting people of society." It parallels the Sisters of St Joseph of Orange (CSJ) mission statement: "To serve a wounded world in need of healing, striving to be mindful of the diverse and unmet needs of the dear neighbor." I won't wax lyrical about the true service, but that's really clearly what's going on! Of interest here: Judith Royer who instigated the VoJ class is a CSJ.

Also, this piece reminds me so much of the work of Norma Bowles with the LGBTQ community. (I've also been writing about her work and mission.) She calls her pieces a dramaturgical quilting bee, and there are many similarities in what she has crafted and this play.

I've been musing on the range of responses that I've witnessed within the Catholic Church itself in regard to the LGBTQ community: from St. Monica Catholic Community in Santa Monica, California (which has an active LGBTQ ministry) to another Catholic church nearby where, during the homily, the priest asked people to vote against gay marriage (years ago) when it came up on the California ballot.

From the spiritual side I love the idea of support from the communion of saints, and the "saints of integrity," the notion of those that has passed on helping humanity deal with perceptions of narrow mindedness and rigidity. I was also struck by a phrase in the final statement of the piece: "of witness to grace." I feel like that's what this play offered—being a witness to grace.

I want to know what happened to the audiences? How did it change their viewpoint? Did it change their viewpoint?

Robert: Audiences have deeply engaged *Full of Grace*. The hope is always to create a safe environment and foster a sense of temporary community as audience members grapple with stories outside their own experience and find connection with narratives that resemble parts of their own stories. Audience members unfamiliar with the stories of LGBT people articulated a newfound sense of solidarity as they resonated with themes of integrity and the effects of exclusion. LGBT Catholics in the audience have felt empowered as they hear their own stories articulated on a public stage in a Catholic environment, no longer hushed or dismissed. Conservative Catholics have taken umbrage with progressive viewpoints while more progressive Catholics have bristled at the stories of Catholics who view their sexual orientation as a disability. Those who are neither Catholic nor LGBT have remarked that they felt privileged to enter this conversation in such an intimate manner. Parish ministers and clergy have remarked how their ministry to LGBT Catholics would change after hearing these stories. While we have found that many of the stories are new to people, the struggles, hopes, courage and convictions of our interviewees are universal and build a sense of solidarity and compassion.

Catharine: You just mentioned that there is not one single uniting event that galvanizes the cast and drives the action. I would ask, does there need to be one? Why? What would it change?

Robert: The uniting event is meant to be a touchstone in which all characters are involved. The thought is that such an event holds together all of the narratives and drives the action in some common direction. Events typically have beginnings, middles and ending points. This movement is helpful when trying to construct a dynamic plot. The danger is that the stories and even the various moments/themes become disjointed. As I reflect on your question more and the play itself, you make a good point. The binding issue is being LGBT and Catholic and the various dimensions of that experience. Perhaps the themes (coming out, falling in love, getting married, having children, living with integrity) are sufficient to hold the work together without a common driving action. That said, I do think that including a scene about Pulse nightclub and the Catholic response was an important and necessary addition since it has had such an impact on the LGBT community.

Catharine: I know the Catholic response to the LGBTQ community is important and obviously the focus of this, but what I think might be interesting if you were to go farther with the LGBTQ issue in context of a variety of faiths, to see how all the major religions in America today help or hinder the issue. I realize that's quite a handful, but I think that would be an interesting tapestry that would reflect back onto the role of religion in general.

Robert: I think you just gave away the sequel! Yes, I have talked with many people from other faiths about the state of the LGBTQ issue in the context of their tradition. There are courageous activists in each denomination and faith tradition seeking to bridge the gaps and foster a similar conversation. Many of the themes that emerge in

Full of Grace are mirrored in other faith traditions as well, in their own way. I believe that such a play that integrates various faiths would be a great benefit to each faith tradition, to the LGBTQ community as they seek to integrate faith and to the continuing efforts at ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue. Stay tuned!

Victoria: Catharine, what have been your own roles in the VoJ process? And how has your part in the process affected your own work?

Catharine: My roles have been as an interviewer (which I love), a writer, and a performer. The uniqueness of each process always seems to take me by surprise; I love the freshness with which one has to approach the material, since every storyteller and their story is completely different.

Victoria: I'm interested in the process. I gather that the initial connection starts with, in this case, a non-profit organization. Do they set students up with people to contact for interviews? How are the students prepped for those interviews? Who develops the questions? Are there several interviews of a person? Do the students transcribe the interviews? How is the play shaped from the interviews? And by whom?

Catharine: Actually, the connection originates from the class itself, specifically Judith and Dorie, who have made the initial contact and preparations in the previous term. Judith and Dorie make the choices about which group to work with (rotating issues and groups each term). However, once the group has been introduced to the students, the question of who interviews whom works itself out organically in that initial meeting. Interview questions develop naturally as part of the conversation – and in cases where students feel they may well be 'stuck' there are some suggested questions they can fall back on, should they need. The students transcribe the interviews themselves, and the amount of interviews needed varies from one to about three times, although one or two meetings seems to be the norm. Initially, the idea for how the story will be told comes from the student. Dorie then steps in and helps to shape the idea, masterfully editing and crafting the piece both as an individual unit, and in its relation to the arc of the whole piece.

Victoria: I can only imagine the impact on the "storytellers" sitting in the audience watching actors present their lives/struggles. What is your own experience with talking with these storytellers afterward?

Catharine: Yes! As you can imagine, the impact on the storyteller afterwards can be extraordinary and profound. I knew one woman who told a story that she had not even told her own (now grown) children. When her story was read back to her for her approval, she began to cry. The student suggested editing out that part of the story, but the storyteller realized how proud she was of her own strength in facing down that particular demon in life. Knowing that her children would be in the audience, she chose to keep that part of the story in, revealing to her children a key and formative moment in her childhood through the medium of a third-party storyteller. What she had previously experienced as a weakness, she was able to appreciate as an event from which she had actually derived a greater sense of her own strength of character.

Storytellers always seem to have a keen sense of pride in seeing their story on stage. They have the chance to feel honored, and it can be rewarding for everyone involved to see them glow with pride after their stories have been honored.

Victoria: I'm curious about activism beyond the stage. When the play is read/enacted/performed, are the organizations present and able to direct an audience's interest (and in some cases perhaps outrage) into avenues for action?

Catharine: Yes! What's wonderful is seeing how this work inspires both the students who are getting involved in the process of gathering and re-telling the stories, as well as those students who are in the audience supporting their friends who are in the class. There's always a mix of general public support for the organization itself, and the organization's leaders also have a chance to network after the event itself.

Victoria: I have a few further thoughts on the notions of "deep hearing" and "hearing the other to speech", reflecting on both your pieces. "Deep hearing" intertwines with Robert's response in describing *Full of Grace* "as an attempt to insert narrative experience into the theological conversation as a sacred source along with Scripture and Tradition." I would add that feminist theologians, for at least four decades, have posited that experience, particularly women's experience, and particularly the experience of women of color, has been left out of the hermeneutical circle with patriarchy focused only on scripture and tradition (see Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Ruether, Katie Cannon, Beverly Harrison, Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, Carter Heyward, and Elizabeth Bounds, to name a few).

Catharine, I was just re-reading the section from your position statement where you describe the "deceptively simple yet powerfully transformative role of being present to the client". As Dorie Baizley notes, just listening is a "real spiritual practice", and for the students, the transcription is an additional act of listening. It seems to me that these students are engaging listening as spiritual practice along with the feminist ethic of mutuality, with the additional rigor of transcribing the interview word for word as a deepening of the listening process. I'm reminded of Anna Deavere Smith, who said, "If you say a word often enough, it becomes you."

Robert: What a fruitful conversation this has been. Thanks to you, Victoria and Catharine, for your work and for sharing in this dialogue, and much thanks to Claire for spearheading this forum and editing our conversation.

Claire: It's been inspiring and enlightening! I have such admiration for your work and your commitments to teaching, scholarship, and community.

Catharine: Thank you all for this conversation across multiple weeks and multiple time zones!

Victoria: Thank you Catharine and Robert for diving deep, swimming out beyond the breakers. It's given me inspiration and affirmation. And thank you *PRS* for providing this Forum, this time for reflection and conversation, so needed in our siloed lives. We have encountered so many intersections. And I hope Catharine, Robert and I will continue to share our work with each other.

Script Excerpts

Full of Grace: Faith Journeys of LGBT Catholics
by Scott Barrow and Robert Choiniere

Interviewer: As a Catholic, what is it like to come out?

Actor 1: I remember the day I went home to tell them.

Actor 5: I said, "Well, I'm a lesbian", and I waited for everything to crash. . . and nothing.

Actor 3: I had this crippling fear that if I told them that they would throw me out.

Actor 2: One of the hardest things I ever had to do.

Actor 5: There were two times in my life my father cried. Once was when his mother died, and once when I told him I was gay.

Actor 4: I remember it vividly. My father grew up on a farm in Ireland A.) wasn't that surprised and B.) was overwhelmingly supportive from the beginning.

Actor 6: . . . that they would disown me.

Actor 5: My parents said, "He couldn't possibly be gay because he is a seminarian. He is going to be a priest". So I let them live in that for a while.

Actor 3 (German lady): Why would you tell? Why would you disturb your father by telling him?

Actor 1: I think my mother was prepared for me to tell her that I had cancer, and I think she might have been a little disappointed ... because it's a little more socially acceptable to have cancer.

Actor 2: I just saw a video of myself when I was like 8, and I'm running around singing, "I'm a pretty pretty Princess!" That might be my official coming out.

Actor 6: My mom would just say, "Just don't tell anybody." She couldn't understand. I couldn't just say I was dating a woman. I made up this big dramatic story about this huge fight and someone was stalking me and in the end I said I went to see ... her, oh, and she is my girlfriend. I thought that if it was more dramatic she would be more accepting. I have no idea why I did that but I remember her saying:

Actor 3: Well, you can't help it.

Actor 4: I remember that night. Three other priests and I had tickets to go see the Pointer Sisters. I came out to my parents that night.

Actor 1: I pick up phones; it is crisis intervention. A 17-year-old boy from the south came out to his family. He talked to his dad and his dad said, "The world would be better without you." He left the house, but before he left, he left the key to his gun cabinet, and the kid was opening the cabinet when he called me.

Actor 7: And I went to see my mother and she had a dishrag in her left hand and she said, "Michael, what the hell is the matter?"

Actor 4: He came out to us at 24, late one night sitting on the edge of my bed he said, "Mom, you have asked about my love life, I think I found someone." And I said, "What's his name?" He said, "You knew?!?!?" And I said, "You didn't?"

Final Actor: I never came out. (*Pause. All look at actor.*) I didn't want to do all these sits downs, like "I-need-to-tell-you-something", so I just said screw it and I just started college gay; Catholic College.

Nicholas: You only know you are a gay man when you fall in love with another man and I fell in love.

Aaron: Things started to change when I fell in love for the first time with this guy who had come from New York to Atlanta. I was so in love with him and I felt ashamed for being gay. One day I was in church, praying, and then the thought of this guy, Giovanni, came up and I was so happy, that I really loved him, and I said, I really love him, and I really love you God. God, at the end of the day, you know what, even if this is wrong, I want you to be here. I am now kneeling in front of you to let you know that I like him, I really like him and you can direct my life otherwise if you will, but no matter what is going on in my life, I am going to bring it to you. You can decide what to do with it, but I am going to come and I am going to tell you that I am a guy and I love this guy and I love you.

David: It was in a confessional, I came in and confessed that I was in a relationship, a gay relationship. I didn't know what the priest would say and I was afraid he was going to tell me I was going to rot in hell. Instead he said, David, it doesn't matter to God who you love, it matters to Him *that* you love. That moment changed my entire understanding of myself, my love and my God.

Aaron: That was the first time I said it was not going to be a dividing issue between me and God. That was my turning point.

Nicholas: We were both in the right place at the right time and our hearts, souls and minds were in the same place, we were both done with it, I had given up at that point on love, I gave up because all my relationships ended because of sex, because of outside distractions. I became resentful of the entire community. I used to say, does anyone have any respect for other people's relationships? And I was guilty too. I tried to convince myself to accept it, this is what it is. That's when I met David, I thought, wow, this is achievable, a loving, monogamous, happy family can be part of my life.

Aaron: I always dreamed that I would be dating somebody and my mom would know it and now I am living that. I always dreamed to come to a day like this where I would just feel comfortable with myself, and feel happy, and feel happy with God and my homosexuality and now I do.

John: I think when the Church changes what's gonna be important is not gonna be whether sex is about procreation, but whether it's pro love. And so I think it's gonna come down to, soon, hopefully, [*laughter*] sex is gonna be about love, like it should be.

Nicholas: The morning of the wedding, I called a priest friend of mine and I asked him, I said, am I ok with God when I do this. There was this doubt. My cold feet had nothing to do with David. My cold feet were about God. He said, do you love him? I said, very much. Does he love you, very much, that is all that matters. That is all that matters.

John: Jesus is love. I mean that's what He talked about. And so when you're expressing yourself through sex with love, I mean, that's being as close to Jesus as you can be.

I don't see how that's been so overlooked. I don't see how such a fundamental part of who Jesus was has just been ignored by many people. When I was with like Andrew, I felt the closest to God that I ever have before, and that wouldn't be like a sinful thing.

I wouldn't feel close to God if I were sinning because, by definition, sinning is pulling away from God. I am proof to myself, like evidence, because of the beauty and the comfort I feel right now, I am never gonna think that being gay is sinful because that's when I feel close to God is when I'm, you know, expressing my sexuality with love.

Aaron: Meeting that guy, being in love, just didn't feel bad.

"Nothing": script excerpt from the *Voices of Justice* Class at Loyola Marymount University
Transcribed by Catharine Christof Dada

TZIGHE speaks in present tense, narrating. The WOMAN speaks in unison with TZIGHE. The BOY speaks alone.

TZIGHE: I step out of the airport. She comes, and she says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: (*in a friendly and welcoming voice*) "Are you Tzighe?"

TZIGHE: I say, "Yes." She takes me home. After two days, I ask for a phone to call my daughter. I want to tell her how I came to America; I want her to know. She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: "No. No phone."

TZIGHE: First time. I ask, "What happened?" She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: "No. No phone."

TZIGHE: “How can I talk to my daughter?” I ask. She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: (*irritated.*) “I don’t know.”

TZIGHE: I tell her, “Okay, I want to go back. I want to go back to Eritrea.” She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: (*WOMAN more dominant*) “No, you come for three years, you have to finish three years.”

TZIGHE: I stay... One week later, I ask for the phone. She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “No.”

TZIGHE: Her house is far. There’s no center, nobody walking ... there’s nothing. I go outside, but everything is dark. I’m looking for anything — some flowers or something, but no. Nothing. She calls for me,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “Come and see the TV.”

TZIGHE: I go look. She shows me something bad — somebody killing someone else. She threatens,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “This is what happens in America if you go outside. If you go outside, the same will happen to you.”

TZIGHE: Now I’m scared. I have no phone, no money--nothing. I’m sick, I’m crying. I tell her, but she says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “I don’t have anything. No medicine. Nothing.”

TZIGHE: I stay for three years, sick, sleepless, and crying badly. Still, I wake up at 5 o’clock in the morning, make breakfast and lunch for the family. I garden all day. I clean the home, I cook ... all night, all day. Now three years have finished. I say, “I want to go. I want to go to my country.” She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “I won’t bring a plane ticket.”

TZIGHE: I ask, “What do I have to do?” She says,

TZIGHE/WOMAN: “I don’t know. I don’t care. No phone, no ticket--nothing.”

TZIGHE: Around 11 o’clock that night, I want to drink bleach. What else can I do? I prepare a cup, and I go to bathroom. Her son, a twelve-year-old boy, is in the bathroom at this time. He asks,

BOY: (*sweetly, but confused*) “What’s this?”

TZIGHE: I say, "I want to clean the bathroom." He asks,

BOY: "At night? Throw it away. Come sleep!"

TZIGHE: I say "Okay." I throw it, and I go sleep ... but I don't sleep. I wake up at the same time, 5 o'clock in the morning, but I don't feel good. I don't want to work, and I'm scared of what she showed me on the TV ... but I have no choice. If I'm here, I'll hurt myself. If I'm outside, someone might hurt me. (*Shifts from feeling defeated to feeling empowered and full of agency.*)

It's better to go outside. I open the door. I'm running. From her house, an hour, I'm running. 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock I'm running.

Mary/Maryam

By Victoria Rue

Questions for Table Talk:

1. In the Qur'an, Isa/Jesus is almost always referred to as Jesus son of Maryam. What significance could this have for single mothers?
2. In the Qur'an the unique experience of birth is given focus and elevated significance. We are not left to take it for granted. What does this say about how God/Allah/the Compassionate is perceived?
3. What is the meaning in the differences between the Christian birth story and that of the birth in the Qur'an?

MUSIC draws us back to the play.

SCENE 5: Mary and Maryam

Mary, the older: Sister

Maryam, the older: Sister
[they embrace]

Mary: I am from a small town.

Maryam: I am from the desert.

Mary: I am married.

Maryam: I am single.

Mary: I am a mother.

Maryam: I am a single mother.
[pause]

Mary: Maryam, your story is inspiring to me. You are a single mother. I love the palm tree that helps you give birth. You are so human in Islam. I sometimes seem to be a woman swathed in blue, remote, and so perfect.

Maryam: Oh, but you have a vision, a vision of Allah's justice, a world turned upside down. The Magnificat.

Mary: Yes, I too love that. But we do have different sons. My son is the Son of God, who is the center of our faith, who died and was resurrected.

Maryam: And my son is a Prophet, who never died, and lives in Paradise. This divides us, and our people.

Mary: People sometimes get offended in different ways.

Maryam: Perhaps there is something about us, about Mary/Maryam, that can help bring people together.

[pause: Music]

"Perhaps each time a woman gives birth....

Mary: Or each time a woman sings in joy or wails in mourning

Maryam: Each time a woman seeks out knowledge or teaches it to others

Mary: Each time a woman works for justice and acts for peace

Maryam: Or risks her life for freedom"¹

Mary: Mary is there.

Maryam: Maryam is there

Together: Mary/Maryam is there.

Music: Song of Mary/Maryam

Music and lyrics by Lori Rivera²

[Mary+Maryam sing, All in cast sing, Audience sings]

Ave Maria, Mother full of grace

Ave Maria, Mother full of grace

Maryam, Subhanallah. La ilaha illallah

Maryam, Subhanallah. La ilaha illallah

¹ From Lesley Halleton, *Mary: A Flesh and Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 209.

² Lori Rivera is an actress, vocalist, songwriter and Sufi. She performed the role of Mary in the original cast of *Mary/Maryam* in 2016