

Anglican Experiences of Mary: An English Perspective

Reverend Ruth Dowson

This paper will explore the different traditions within the Church of England and their relationship with and attitudes towards the Blessed Virgin Mary. An autoethnographic element will narrate the author's personal journey from charismatic evangelical sceptic, through ordination formation at an Anglo-Catholic monastery in West Yorkshire, to recent lived experiences at a small Italian village church festival.

The range of influences that shape the Church of England's different traditions are perhaps unique compared to other denominations across the wider Christian faith, where happy-clappy, arm-waving charismatics and conservative bible-carrying evangelicals live alongside incense-brandishing Anglo-Catholics and questioning liberals. Not always an easy union, each grouping has its own tribal activities, such as summer events and festivals, and particular associated organisations, that together almost form brands, visible banners behind which their followers can unite. Whilst it is challenging to view these four aspects of Anglican churchmanship as being wholly separate, because in reality there are many crossover points, not only as individuals develop in their Christian faith, it is important to recognise the impact of inhabiting the 21st century, with the background of the postmodern environment that enables contrasting and sometimes opposing views to be held in conjunction with each other.

It is within this context that this paper will explore the attitudes and motivations of churchgoers and clergy towards Mary, and their experiences, within the Church of England.