

Is the Blessed Virgin Mary a bridge or a barrier to fruitful ecumenical relations between the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and the Anglican Church of Ireland?

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationship of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the ongoing ecumenical task within the Irish context. Mary may at first appear to be a barrier rather than a bridge to fruitful ecumenical relations on the island of Ireland if the older methodology of ecumenism is applied between the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland. This is a methodology which obsesses over convergence and visible unity, a methodology which does not allow for difference. The 'Agreed Statement' regarding Mary published by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission represents such an approach and is subject to critique in the work which follows. I apply the methodology of Receptive Ecumenism and a form of Scriptural Reasoning adapted from the interfaith model developed by (*inter alia*) David Ford as an alternative to how both Communion can journey together with Mary and how both traditions read, think, and speak about Mary. I begin by arguing that, while the ecumenical landscape exists in its current form, Mary will remain a barrier. The discussion moves forward from this position, proposing the practical implications of Receptive Ecumenism and Scriptural Reasoning in the lived enterprise of reading, thinking and speaking about Mary. The voices of feminist theologians are crucial to this process. Each chapter contains a conclusion and a recommendation for moving the ecumenical encounter, centre on Mary, forward at the local level. Understanding the loss of common context for reading and interpretation from the textual source, recognising difference, continuing ecclesial dialogue and the reception of ecumenical gifts all have the potential to deepen our relationship one with another. There is a curiosity which exists regarding Mary from a Church of Ireland perspective at the local level, and there is a misunderstanding about what Anglicans believe about Mary from a Roman Catholic perspective at the local level. It is to these two areas that this work is primarily addressed. The aim of which is to deepen mutual understanding, develop trust and enrich the devotional life of both traditions.