



Prophecy and Kingship in Adomnan's 'Life of Saint Columba'

Michael J. Enright

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This book offers a new interpretation of Adomnan's Life of Saint Columba, a crucial source for the study of early Irish and northern British history. Whereas previous scholars have assumed that this vita was of a fairly typical Irish saint, author Michael Enright shows that Adomnan intended to portray Columba as an authentic Old Testament-style prophet, one who was superior to any other leader because he had been divinely chosen and commissioned to impose God's will on the British Isles. Columba's purposes were not refutable by any other power since, like Moses, Samuel, and Elijah, he had been made into God's own singular herald. Columba's commission was to reform kingship by selecting, anointing, and guiding rulers according to Old Testament precedent. Like a scriptural prophet, moreover, he taught his followers to be prophets so as to ensure the continuity of his mission. In order to advance this regime of the prophet-guided ruler, God also endowed Columba with the special privilege of giving victory in battle to those who supported him. Adomnan ended to show that no other leader or institution could ever legitimately defy Columba, whose spirit actively lived on in his community.

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