



Paths of Exile: Narratives of St. Columba and the Praxis of Iona

James Lewis

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Paths of Exile is an in-depth study of the principal stories about the great Irish St. Columba (Colum cille) focussing on his actions, whether historical or legendary. It is the books conclusion that these stories provided a way-of-being-in-the-world, (what theologians call a praxis, a guide, even a requirement) for all those who wished to associate themselves with the great saint living or dead. After analyzing in detail the Irish annals, the Amra Choluimb Chille (the sixth century elegy for Columba), the poems of Becca mac Luigdech, St. Adomnáns masterpiece, the Life of St. Columba, the eleventh-century Irish Life of Columcille and the sixteenth-century Life by Maghnus ODomnaill, a catalogue of characteristic narrated actions by the saint is identified. The question whether or not this catalogue is reflected in the real-life actions and long term commitments by his followers in the next hundred years during which the Picts, the English and the inhabitants of the Low Countries were converted to Christianity, and the archaic Christianity of the West renewed is tested by comparing the catalogue with the actions of Columban and other monks as described by Bede in the Ecclesiastical History of the English. Not only are those actions as described by Bede now linked specifically to the practice of St. Columba but the epochal role of Irish, and specifically Columban, monks in the great act of Christianization is shown to be a reflection of three interlinked praxis elements. An appendix offers a sketch on how Christians today can follow the path laid out by the great Irish monks of Iona and their founding father.

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