

## St Columba

Year	Event	Commentary
521	Columba is born, possibly in Gartan, Donegal; Columba was a member of the royal family of the Northern Uí Néill, and would have been eligible for the high kingship.	As was the tradition in his day, Columba was raised by a foster parent, a priest called Cruithenechán; later he studied with Gemmán at Leinster (Leinster was a leading church school of the time), and the studied scripture with Uinniau (a Briton, who was a leader in the Irish monastic movement of Columba's time).
561	Battle of Cúl Drebene, between Northern and Southern Uí Néill.	Columba is thought to have played a role in this battle, which ultimately led to his exile from Scotland; most likely his role was to pray for his family's army — according to legend, Columba drove away mists that concealed the army of their pagan opponent. .
563	With 12 disciples, Columba leaves Ireland for Dalriada (Scotland).	Legend has it that Columba's (self-imposed?) "exile" required him to leave Ireland for a place where Ireland could no longer be seen.
574	Columba ordains Aédán mac Gabhráin, King of Scots' Dalriada; this is the first coronation in European history where Christian rites were used in a king's coronation.	This coronation establishes Columba (and subsequent abbots of Iona) as both the clients and protectors of the Dalriadic kings; ultimately, Iona would become the "burial place of kings".
575	Columba attends the Convention of Druim Cett, establishing an alliance of kings across the water, and fostering a future high king of the Uí Néill.	Columba's role in early Scottish history was as much political as it was evangelical, for the two roles would have been intertwined in Columba's day.
587	Columba founds a monastery at Durrow.	Columba, in his own time, was the head of a <i>paruchia</i> , or family of monasteries; these monasteries and the networks which bound them were important both politically and culturally.
590	Columba arranges and mediates a meeting between Aédán mac Gabhráin, king of Scots' Dalriada, and Áed mac Ainmirech, overlord of the Northern Uí Néill, at Druim Cett near Durrow.	This event attests to Columba's importance in the politics of western Scotland and northern Ireland during his time.
597	Columba dies a "white martyr's" death on Iona.	After his death, Columba is succeeded by a series of Abbots of Iona, all members of the same dynastic family — Northern Uí Néill — it is the sixth Abbot of Iona, Adomnán, who writes the <i>Life of St Columba</i> .

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## Six Constants of Leadership

Although there are several good books on leadership, here I adopt the cognitive-developmental framework of Howard Gardner, most completely described in his *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (1995, Basic Books). The core of this approach is a set of six constants that collectively define effective leadership. These constants are listed below, and can provide an effective intellectual framework for investigating the great leaders of Scottish history.

- **The Story:** In order to be effective, the leader must articulate and communicate a message, or story, to his or her audience.
- **The Audience:** In order for the leader to be effective, the audience must be able to understand, and be responsive, to the leader's story.
- **The Organization:** In order for the leader to be effective, he or she must create or shape an organization; very often the leader will rely on an inner circle of close associates who are instrumental to the communication and implementation of the leader's policies .
- **The Embodiment:** In order for the leader to be effective, he or she must be credible, that is, they must embody the central themes of their story.
- **Direct and Indirect Leadership:** There are two broad categories of leadership:
  - o *Direct Leadership:* What we normally think of when we think of leaders, including generals, presidents, kings, and queens.
  - o *Indirect Leadership:* Another form of leadership where the leader exerts his or her influence indirectly, such as is the case with scientists, writers, and artists.
- **The Issue of Expertise:** Expertise is most obviously relevant in the case of indirect leadership, where the leader must be an expert in his or her field in order to exert influence; but expertise of other kinds is relevant for direct leadership (e.g. military skill or oratorical excellence).

## Leadership Analysis: St Columba

<b>Constant</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Story</b>	Columba's story was not unique for his age, for his age was the "Age of Saints", and the story was a common, apostolic one. Although Columba was in all likelihood an effective communicator of that story, he did not create the story. The story was a creation of the early Christian church, and basically spoke of building a "Kingdom of God" on earth. Central to the early Christian leadership story was the notion of a divinely ordained partnership between secular kings and emperors, on the one hand, and holy abbots and bishops, on the other.
<b>Audience</b>	As a royal personage, and as an abbot, Columba's audience would not have been the common man. Columba's audience would have been other leaders of the early church, the monks of his own monasteries, and the nobility of Ireland, Scotland (Dalriadic Scots mainly, but also the Picts), and northern England (Strathclyde, Northumbria). Columba was many things, pilgrim, penitent, abbot, king- and treaty-maker, but he was not himself primarily an evangelist.
<b>Organization</b>	Columba was an effective leader primarily because he was able to establish an effective organization. This organization consisted not only of the monastery on Iona, which was arguably Scotland's most important religious center for several centuries, but a network of other monasteries, both great and small. This was Columba's <i>paruchia</i> , or family of monasteries, and testimony to his effectiveness as a leader was that his <i>paruchia</i> continued to grow after Columba's death, peaking about the time of Columba's hagiographer, Adomnàn, during the late 7th century. The <i>paruchia</i> eventually included the great monasteries of Dunkeld, in eastern Scotland, and Kells, in Ireland.
<b>Embodiment</b>	During the "Age of Saints", the leaders of the church appear to have been genuinely pious and devoted men. They embodied the central messages of

Christ's life and teaching, as well as those of his twelve apostles. During a period in its history when the church was struggling to exist in an oftentimes hostile world, its leaders appeared able to avoid the comfort, cynicism, and corruption that would afflict the church a few centuries later. In fact, their ability to embody Christ's teachings was almost certainly a central ingredient to their success as leaders of the emerging church. Nevertheless, we should be cautious about our interpretations of works such as Adomnàn's *Life of St Columba*, for these are works of hagiography, not biography.

**Direct or Indirect?**

Although Columba did write, he was almost exclusively a direct leader. In contrast, Adomnàn—Columba's hagiographer— would be considered to have exerted his leadership both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, through his writings, which not only included his *Life of St Columba*, but also his *The Holy Places*, a tale of pilgrimage by a Frankish bishop. Adomnàn's writings served primarily political purposes, in the wrangling for power between rival centers of monastic power, and thus are excellent examples of indirect leadership. However, as abbot of Iona, Adomnàn also exerted his leadership directly, in the administration of the Ionan *paruchia*.

**Expertise**

Columba received his training in two different, but related traditions. First, as a member of the Northern Uí Néill, Columba was raised as a member of the nobility. However, the ancient Celtic traditions of leadership were not the same as later Norman traditions, where son inevitably followed father as king. In the Celtic (including the Picts) traditions, would-be kings were chosen from the royal family, but *which* members were considered eligible depended upon their abilities. And the abilities that counted the most were those of the warrior. Second, Columba was trained in the abbey, studying with some of the best Christian teachers in sixth century Ireland. He would require all of his expertise, both secular and ecclesiastical, to carry out his program once leaving Ireland for the west coast of Scotland.

Iona Abbey – Path of the Dead

