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Review Of "The Soul Of Celtic Spirituality In The Lives Of Its Saints" By M. Milton

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***The Soul of Celtic Spirituality in the Lives of its Saints.* By Michael Mitton.**
Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996. 148 pp. \$9.95.

This book by Michael Mitton reflects on Celtic spiritual traditions with an eye toward how these traditions can inspire Christian ministry and mission today. Its strength lies in its appreciation for history and its recognition that church renewal comes as much from looking back as it does from looking forward. The book is very readable, written in a clear and engaging narrative style.

As Mitton acknowledges, he draws largely on the works of Bede. Although this is primarily a work of inspiration and church renewal and not a scholarly monograph, Mitton's largely uncritical recounting of tales from Bede ignores altogether the political and religious struggles that are at the heart of Bede's works. This, along with the portrayal of the Celtic church as "refreshingly free from prejudice" (p. 3) and "culturally sensitive" (p. 77) (but not succumbing to the "danger of syncretism" [p. 80]) in its evangelizing practices, is danger-

ous as an inspiration for church renewal, which takes place always in the arena of political and cultural struggle.

This book is important in its presentation of the power and mystery of Celtic Christianity. It will whet its readers' appetites for more. But one wonders, what is the nature of the Christian renewal these traditions inspire? The asceticism of praying in freezing-cold water, the wanderings far from home, the world of uncorrupted bodies and miracles at saints' tombs—these characteristics of Celtic religion are muted in Mitton's rendering and less than obviously applicable to his vision of Christian spirituality today.

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