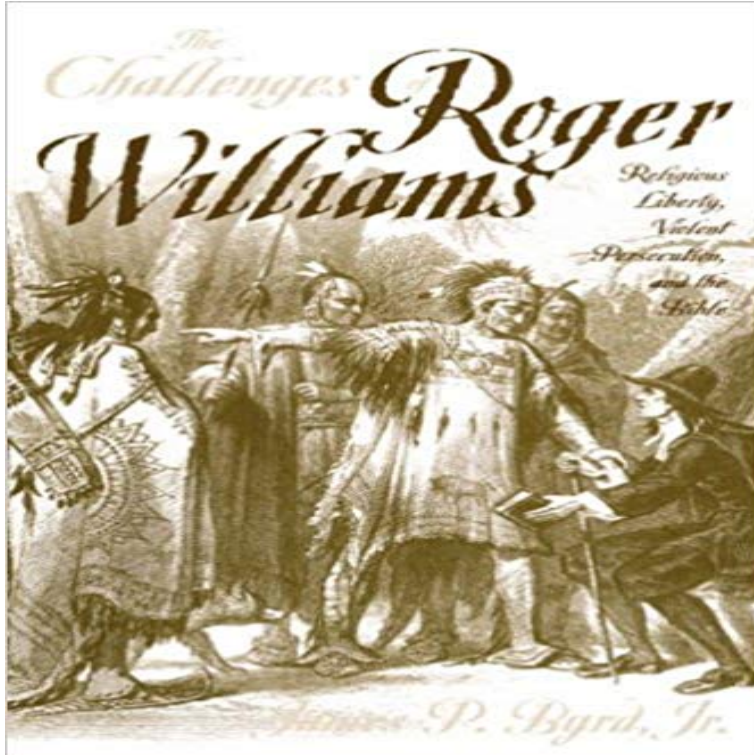


THE CHALLENGES OF ROGER WILLIAMS (Baptists)



This book examines how biblical interpretation promoted both violent persecution and religious liberty in colonial America. Frequently, the Bible was a violent force in Puritan New England, where ministers and magistrates used biblical passages to justify the punishment of many religious radicals. Encouraged by the Bible, Puritans whipped and imprisoned Baptists, banished a variety of radicals from the Puritan colonies, and even sent Quakers to the gallows. Among those banished was Roger Williams, the advocate of religious liberty who also founded the colony of Rhode Island and established the first Baptist church in America. Williams opposed the Puritans use of the Bible to persecute radicals who rejected the states established religion. In retaliation against the use of scripture for violent purposes, Williams argued that religious liberty was a biblical concept that offered the only means of eliminating the religious wars and persecutions that plagued the seventeenth century. Empowered by his interpretation of scripture, Williams posed a serious challenge to a colonial society in which the Bible was the paramount guide in every aspect of life, both public and private. As Byrd reveals, Williams's biblical case for religious liberty was multifaceted. He drew from a wide range of scriptural texts and wrestled with a variety of interpreters. By focusing on Williams's biblical opposition to religious persecution, this book demonstrates the importance of the Bible to violence, religious liberty, and the relationship between church and state in early American history. Included is a reference guide to Williams's biblical interpretation which features the only biblical indices to his published works, accompanied by rankings of his biblical citations in various categories, including his most cited biblical passages throughout his career.

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