

Again, the volume is opened by a study that puts the presented texts in the general framework of millenarianism and prophecies that, as the authors remark, were a persisting feature of religion in eighteenth-century Britain (Newton being just one example) (3:1).

The texts presented and interpreted in the three-volume edition shed colorful light on the topic of eschatological, apocalyptic, and millenarist prophecies, their political applications, and their ramifications. Although one chapter deals with the fifteenth century and several texts stem from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it may come as a surprise that more than half of the chapters focus on the eighteenth century. This fact may lead to a revision of our narratives about the period of secularization and Enlightenment that is said to have replaced the centuries of reformatory and religious zeal. As the authors remark, in this period even the enlightened philosophers developed ideas deeply rooted in Christian traditions. This time, it was not the Bible that was the ultimate source of norms, but nature, which, however, for most of the authors was still of divine origin (1:21–22). Thus, the trilogy may serve not only as a handy source of rare primary texts, commented and contextualized in a stimulating way. It may also bring fresh air to the broader way we look at the presence, meaning, and use of eschatological thoughts in European history.

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Giles Firmin and the Transatlantic Puritan Tradition: Polity, Piety, and Polemic.
Jonathan Warren Pagán.

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Giles Firmin was, as Jonathan Pagán acknowledges, “by no means a canonical figure” (261) in the religious debates within the transatlantic Puritan community of the seventeenth century, but his career and writings offer valuable insights into that world. An English Puritan clergyman whose career began as a minister in north Essex, he emigrated to Massachusetts in the 1630s. The congregation-centered church structure of the colony had a lasting impact on him, though he identified more with those, such as Nathaniel Ward and James Noyse, who favored strong ministerial leadership within particular churches at a time when there were no clear lines between Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. Firmin returned to England in 1647 and in the following year was appointed vicar of the Essex parish of Shalford. He was ejected at the Restoration, supporting himself as a medical practitioner and occasionally holding conventicles. In 1672 he was licensed to preach in Ridgewell, Essex, where he lived till his death in 1697.

There is very little biographical detail about Firmin. What we know of him comes largely through the tracts he wrote and what others said about him in their tracts.

Pagán offers a detailed, well-informed analysis of Firmin's contributions to the theological and polity debates of the second half of the seventeenth century. His driving concern was the "continuing reformation of England and New England through the purification of the churches, the unification of the godly, and the cultivation of a piety fit for the 'poor lambs of Christ'" (3). Firmin never assumed the importance of a John Owen, Richard Baxter, or even Daniel Williams, but by examining his views on the issues that concerned Puritans, Pagán provides a valuable survey of the views of a host of divines. In the process he offers an overview of the numerous conflicting views held by the participants in a variety of debates, making it clear that any effort to identify the essential views of Puritans in general or Presbyterians and Congregationalists in particular must be doomed to failure.

Chapter 1 examines Firmin's writings in the 1640s and 1650s and argues that while he strove to reconcile the diverging Presbyterian and Independent (Congregational) factions, by the 1650s his ecclesiology was moving toward the former. The second chapter looks at his positions during the Restoration and his opposition to what he called "prelatical episcopacy," while taking a position accepting the pastoral value of primitive bishops. Chapter 3 focuses on Firmin's most famous work, *The Real Christian* (1670). Pagán disagrees with previous analyses of that work, arguing that he drew more on the views of divines such as Richard Rogers, William Perkins, and Thomas Hooker than has generally been appreciated. Chapter 4 looks at Firmin's interactions with various Anglican theologians of the 1670s and 1680s and his defense of dissent. The next chapter examines his writings against Anabaptists in the 1680s. While Firmin's New England experience and knowledge of the writings of the early colonial divines is demonstrated in the earlier chapters, Pagán does not indicate that Firmin was influenced by any of the New England debates over baptism and the writings of ministers such as John Davenport, Charles Chauncy, and Increase Mather. In fact, the post-1660 transatlantic dimension of the Puritan tradition is largely absent. The final chapter deals with the disputes over justification in the 1690s that doomed attempts at uniting Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

While focusing on Firmin, Pagán offers new insights into the theological and ecclesiological debates of the period, his analysis rooted in a deep familiarity with the works he addresses, but also extensive knowledge of recent secondary studies, including dissertations. In negotiating through the thickets of theological distinctions he assumes a greater familiarity with definitions and distinctions than many readers will bring to the work. Readers familiar with the political and cultural context of the times will get more out of his informative survey of those debates. This is an important study for everyone interested in the Puritan tradition in the seventeenth century, dispelling simplified explanations for an account that highlights the nuances in the thoughts not only of Firmin but of those he engaged with.

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