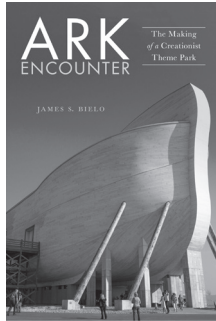
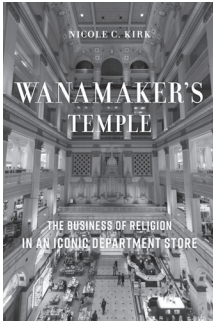


*Review Essay*

## **Playing with Noah in Wanamaker's Temple: (Re)Thinking U.S. Christianity in American Studies**

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**WANAMAKER'S TEMPLE: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store.** By Nicole C. Kirk. New York City: New York University Press. 2018.

**ARK ENCOUNTER: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park.** By James S. Bielo. New York City: New York University Press. 2018.

Religion has been, and remains, a driving force in American history. Yet, all too often scholars of American society and culture view religion and religiosity as secondary to prime movers like race, class, and gender. American Studies rarely engages with an in-depth analysis of religious practitioners or religious cultural creation, falling into the trap of relegating religious motivation to the realm of superstition. This is especially true in the current political moment where conservative Christian support of Republican politicians is seen as either the height of hypocrisy or a testament to political manipulation. Nevertheless, religious

practitioners, far from opiate-takers with dulled senses, are active and creative in the public sector. With the recent scholarly work coming out of Anthropology, History, Religious Studies, and American Studies, however, religion is coming to the fore as a prime mover and motivator in American history.

Two such scholars, Nicole Kirk, an historian, and James Bielo, an ethnographer, have different methodologies, sources, time periods, and people, but both discuss how conservative Christians (variously defined) have influenced U.S. culture particularly in the business sector. Both at least tacitly understand their forms of conservative Christianity to be oppressive cultural creators, upholding gendered, classist, and racialized cultural norms. But, both scholars demonstrate how religious practitioners help(ed) to (re)create those cultural norms.

### **Fashioning Decorum with Wanamaker**

In Nicole C. Kirk's first book *Wanamaker's Temple: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store*, Kirk uncovers the life of John Wanamaker and the growth of his iconic department stores between 1880 and 1920. Wanamaker's example allows Kirk to interrogate the development of good taste, decorum, and respectability in U.S. culture by Protestant businessmen, a development that privileged white, middle-class values and norms.

Kirk represents the most recent scholar to take up the question of the role of religion, particularly Protestantism, and how it intersected with business interests and consumerism. Other scholars, including Kim Philips-Fein, Kevin Kruse, Darren Grem, Bethany Moreton, and Darren Dochuck (to name a few), have looked to the 1920s-1960s to set up the interwoven nature of business interests/free market economics and Protestantism. These authors often connect the amalgamation of business interests and Christian interests to the rise of the Religious Right and the conservative turn in U.S. politics. Kirk's analysis, however, represents one of the first to focus on the 1850-1920s rather than the mid-century.

During the late 1800s, most religious revivalists viewed businessmen as corrupt, greedy, and irreligious. Unfortunately, Kirk notes, modern scholars also assume corrupt business/religion connections by presupposing an inverse correlation between the rise of consumerism and a presumed decrease of Protestantism (and religious perspectives in general). In this perspective, businessmen used religious language or "gimmicks" in order to sell their products. However, this historical perspective devalues the work performed by religious practitioners in bringing their perspectives to bear on the public sector. Kirk is particularly interested in turn-of-the-century Christian moral reform projects during the urban crisis and increased immigration from Europe.

In response to a rapidly changing U.S. landscape, Protestants felt fear. An influx of immigrants caused explosive growth in unprepared urban centers. While many at the time interpreted urban growth as a sign of progress and technological wonder, Protestants worried about sprawl, unemployment, crime, poverty, and unsanitary conditions. City work accepted women in the workplace while follow-

ing on the heels of diminished church authority and the decline of family-owned stores in favor of large businesses. All this led to a belief that city life inherently caused moral degradation. But these changes paled in comparison to the fear of increased immigration. Immigrants between the 1820s-1920s challenged the Protestant majority and brought unassimilated workers into sprawling, poverty-stricken urban landscapes. In response, fearful Protestant preachers called for a "moral awakening" (Kirk, 7-10).

Kirk's argument centers around her notion of "aesthetic evangelism" as a response to rampant Protestant fear. She describes aesthetic evangelism as the way "Protestants intentionally mobilized architecture, fashion, art, and music to promote morality and conversion" (Kirk, 12). Social reform programs in response to urban growth and increased immigration sought to train/discipline people to be morally upright. Kirk uses Benedict Anderson's theory of real and imagined communities to describe this process. The "real" community of Evangelical churches "moved away from a sudden conversion model to one of religious formation over time." Protestants could now quantify their religiosity and level of sanctification via outside determinants, especially "good taste." Thus, taste became indicative of piety. This practice created an imagined "pan-Protestant community rooted in a nostalgic, idealized vision of rural small-town life remembered as moral, virtuous, orderly, and supported by neighbor's supervision" (Kirk, 10-11). As Protestants standardized "good taste" as an indicator of moral uprightness they produced an "American Protestant Christian ethos" (Kirk, 7). People who were able to display good taste and decorum as defined by Protestant reformers received social capital and thus greater social mobility. As a result, while Protestants touted their reform movements as immigrant uplift, instead they only served to increase the divide between classes and cement institutionalized white Protestant supremacy.

John Wanamaker also participated in these social reform movements. He did so in traditional ways, working to develop the YMCA for instance. However, Wanamaker saw his department store franchise as a method of social reform as well. He used aesthetic evangelism by merging his business and Protestant faith, physically demonstrating this comingling in the form of his department store. Wanamaker used his store to educate, discipline, and orient his clientele towards his perception of good taste and thus piety. Additionally, items of good taste could be purchased in Wanamaker department stores. Thus, developing proper exteriors as indicators of reformed and orderly interiors worked to bolster the rise of consumer department store culture. Through his hiring, development of space and who could access it, and educational programs Wanamaker also helped to define this increased religiosity along white and middle-class lines. In short, Wanamaker used his business as an instrument of religion to affect cultural change.

In her first chapter, Kirk introduces Wanamaker, placing him in his cultural and historical milieu. She narrates Wanamaker's traditional religious reform movements and business endeavors while also detailing his business philosophy, the chapter culminating with his idea to build the Wanamaker Building in

Philadelphia. Chapters two through five examine the new Wanamaker Building and orient around Kirk's concept of aesthetic evangelism. Kirk also fills each chapter with important historical asides covering a plethora of topics such as the rise of European and U.S. department stores, Evangelical reform movements, the City Beautiful movement, and the onset of modernist architecture. These asides demonstrate the breadth of her project and its potential for interdisciplinarity.

Chapter two begins with the architecture of his huge new department store. Wanamaker controlled the building process, from its layout to its building materials, all of which were carefully chosen to convert and uplift onlookers. Through the "built environment of the city..." Wanamaker hoped his building would "[inspire] responsible, disciplined, and moral behavior by [the store's] mere presence" (Kirk, 87). Like the bodies of his workers or clients whose respectable outsides spoke to pious insides, Wanamaker made the exterior architecture of his building mirror the righteous and pious business strategies within. Christian business strategies, pioneered in his Oak Hall department store, treated customers well, did not cheat their clients as often happened in less reputable stores, guaranteed their products, and in general used "the golden rule" in their transactions. Afterward, these principles would characterize department stores in the U.S.

Chapter three introduces Wanamaker's employee education program. Kirk looks specifically at the white male children, women, and African-American workers that Wanamaker hired. At over 10,000 workers, Wanamaker was forced to hire working-class people who did not display the type of "middle-class" taste he required. Thus, Wanamaker used several tools to train, educate, and discipline his workforce, including a school, uniforms, report cards, the Wanamaker Cadets, and a camp for young, white, boys. Through these educational initiatives, Wanamaker not only hoped to raise good employees who were uninterested in unions and were efficient, diligent, and honest, but in a reversal of "Christian nurture" (a philosophy which states that Christian families can nurture moral children) he believed his employed children could convert their families to proper virtue at home (Kirk, 93). The Wanamaker school permitted advancement for white boys while denying advancement for black employees who were stuck at low-skill, low-wage labor. Thus, Wanamaker made a store whose racial demographics protected societal hierarchies and forcibly made a "safe space" (read "white-space") for white, middle-class clientele. Wanamaker employees became "walking advertisements" and "liturgists" for his Christian form of business (Kirk, 123).

Chapter four introduces Wanamaker's art collection, mostly curated from Europe, especially Paris. The store was not only a place to consume goods but also to consume art and culture in, what Wanamaker considered to be, its highest forms. In rotating exhibits throughout the store, educational booklets guided the onlooker, teaching them how to interpret the art in ways that might increase their morality. This art tended towards religious imagery and romantic nature scenes, only furthering the Protestant perspective that the city degraded morality even as nature/agriculturalism elevated it.

Finally, chapter five continues with the interiors of the stores, particularly the layout of its great atriums, its organ, and the way Wanamaker transformed these arenas for religious and civic holidays. The atriums, rotundas, and halls were meant to evoke cathedrals, instilling a sense of awe, wonder, religious and civic virtue. Ironically, this period of Protestantism borrowed from Catholic neo-gothic architecture and grandness to provoke a “nostalgic version of Christianity that linked a romantic “ancient” Christianity with patriotism and consumption...[a] pan-Christian imagery” (Kirk, 201) only adding to the imagined Pan-Christian community Kirk references in her introduction.

In the end, Wanamaker did not acknowledge a sacred/secular dichotomy. He managed both fluidly. Wanamaker saw his business ventures as a type of religious evangelism that could convert, what he believed to be, a chaotic and dangerous society into an orderly, righteous, and respectable one. This image of taste and decorum helped to define whiteness and support racial and masculine hierarchy at the turn of the century. For Wanamaker, consumption could be society-altering and holy.

### **Creatively Creating the Theme Park “Ark Encounter”**

Changing tack from an historical perspective to an anthropological one, James Bielo's book *Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park* also examines the connection between religion and consumerism. His fourth book, *Ark Encounter* represents a further development of Bielo's work of exploring the social life of scriptures, that is—how scriptures are made to perform actively in the world. Bielo has been on the forefront of this exciting development within the larger field of the anthropology of Christianity. In this latest addition to the field, *Ark Encounter* expands the social life of scripture to include materialization. Materializing the Bible refers to “transforming written scripture into an experiential, choreographed environment” (Bielo, 4, 19). His work exemplifies how scholars interested in the interpretation of scriptures can move beyond analyzing only the sacred text used by their subjects. Instead, scholars must recognize that their subjects, that is interlocutors of sacred scriptures, use those scriptures not only in textual form but often render it manifest in the material realm as well. Specifically in *Ark Encounter*, Bielo demonstrates how a Fundamentalist interpretation of the Genesis text is made material in a theme park. Bielo's examination of creationism in this book is also unique because he studies creationism and materialism through a “religion-entertainment” lens rather than the more common “religion-science” dichotomy (Bielo, 11).

Bielo's first chapter orients his book around three key themes that enable materialization in the theme park: devotional consumption, entertainment as play mediated through immersion and affect, and religious publicity. Devotional consumption refers to the way religious practitioners, and Christians more expressly, “have sought to sacralize their consumption of cultural goods, transforming purely economic or functional activity into something integrated into the moral and

spiritual fabric of life” (Bielo, 20). Importantly, melding consumption to spiritual objects does not demean the spiritual. Instead, it uplifts the banal. “Devotional consumption,” says Bielo, “reveals more about the creativity of religious actors...than it does categorical contamination” (Bielo, 21). By filling the market with “faith-based alternatives” Christians reclaim commodities from “secular” institutions, transform and convert the marketplace, and challenge the stereotype that a Christian material item (such as music, a book, or a theme park) need be of poor quality. Instead, a Christian good can compete with, if not exceed, the quality of a secular good (Bielo, 21-22).

Second, Bielo looks to entertainment and play theory, more specifically the role of immersion in creating an “entertaining” experience. “[I]mmersion excels at generating affective attachments to the past” (Bielo, 25). *Ark Encounter* uses immersion in order to produce affective responses leading toward devotion and conversion through fun and play.

Finally, Bielo discusses the importance of religious publicity, a term coined by fellow anthropologist Matthew Engelke. Religious actors seek out and disseminate information in public spheres. In the case of the *Ark Encounter*, the goal for this religious publicity is two-fold: first, it is to have fun. Second, it allows creationists, who represent a “counterpublic,” that is a heterodox perspective, to “[vie] for authority.” *Ark Encounter* can “sow suspicion about the cultural legitimacy of evolutionary science and bolster the status of fundamentalist Christianity” (Bielo, 29). In short, the Fundamentalist perspective of the Bible can be materialized in this public theme park designed around devotional consumption that is fun, immersive, and affective and thus entertaining. If the park is of high quality in the way it delivers this entertaining experience, creationists can claim authority and legitimacy for their worldview in a public setting. This is not done through scientific, intellectual, or even devotional dialogue. It is performed through fun, immersive entertainment.

Each of Bielo’s next chapters hinge on these theoretical ideas. However, each chapter also adds a new theoretical lens by which to examine the chapter’s particular issue. Chapter two puts *Ark Encounter* as a theme park in conversation with the global phenomenon of Bible-style parks. He postulates that these entertaining public spaces exist to solve the “virtual problem” of Christianity (Bielo 36). Namely, Christians recognize that their religion is inaccessible—that is to say, it took place long ago in a geographically different location in a language and culture unlike the modern U.S. Materializing the Bible reduces that inaccessibility through a construction of historical continuity. Materializing the Bible/securing continuity performs two functions for practitioners: it builds an intimacy with sacred scripture and provides access to an inaccessible biblical past. Bielo calls this a “performance of authenticity” (Bielo, 52). The words of the Bible (its materialization) become transmedial, that is, not simply words on a page, but embodied by different mediums such as a flowering garden or an enormous ark.

Chapters three through five deal expressly with Ark Encounter and how the artistic creators actualize the Bible transmedially by creating intimacy and access to the creationist biblical past. Chapter three begins by examining the team and studio space. By examining the space, place, and people of production Bielo focuses his analysis on the creation of religious cultural materials rather than their circulation or consumption (a far more common analysis, see Bielo, 59). Bielo sees cultural production as a dialogical relationship between producer (in this case, the artistic team) and the consumer, which he calls dialogic creativity (Bielo, 61). The chapter demonstrates that the team constantly thought about who was consuming their product, how a consumer might interpret it, and how their production could be changed in order to evoke the type of affect and immersion they desired. Bielo has multiple sections of Geertzian deep description in this chapter. In analyzing six different creative strategies, the scholarly reader may be surprised at the lack of devotional language, the interest in secular producers like Hollywood and Disney, the general lack of religious paraphernalia, and the amount of tedium and bureaucratic pushback for the designers.

Chapter four is concerned with the assumed consumer of the park and how the artistic team created an immersive environment for play and (through the tactics of entertainment) possible conversion. Playing in the ark demonstrates plausibility of the creationist past and affective experience of the creationist past for a doubting public. Taken together, Bielo calls this conversion strategy plausibility-immersion. Through an immersive environment, this strategy shows how the ark could have happened, reducing the doubt of the onlooker.

Interestingly, plausibility-immersion does not rely on faith, intellectual, scientific, or historical arguments. Instead, it relies on the dialogical relationship of creator and consumer, performed through roleplay. By allowing the public to experience and interact with/in Noah's world, the viewer leaves room for plausibility. The team achieves this plausibility-immersion strategy using several tools including: immediate immersion (from the moment people can see the theme park to the last drive away), authenticity (including waste extraction for the ark), and complex world-building (using, for example, Tolkien, George R.R. Martin, A.A. Milne, and Mel Gibson).

In chapter five, Bielo explores history-making as an act of power, and one readily adopted by the artists of Ark Encounter. Creationists do not "inhabit the same temporal landscape as non-creationists" (Bielo, 132). Seeing history-making in Bourdieuan terms, creationism exists as a heterodox belief against the orthodox evolutionary perspective. Ark Encounter serves as safe space for heterodox beliefs, but it does more than this. The sophisticated quality of the entertainment factor of the park challenges the idea that creationism needs to be herterodox at all. Bielo calls this "playing in the heterodox past." Cultural Power is suddenly "up for grabs" through "edutainment" (Bielo, 136-138).

Finally, chapter six details what happens when people walk through the ark. All consumers, even non-believers, are encouraged to use a Fundamentalist



gaze, that is, “a way of seeing that reifies creationist truth claims and re-creates the movement’s moral critique of evolutionary science” (Bielo, 142). The physical choreography of walking through the ark also creates a “poetics of faith.” Participants are lead through the exhibit, encouraged to “fill in intertextual gaps between scripture and the creative teams’ artistic imagination” (Bielo, 143).

Bielo’s excellent, in-depth analysis about the production of the Ark Encounter theme park provides the reader with rich ethnographic descriptions and an even richer theoretical trove. Each chapter introduces new theoretical lenses while continually returning to the main point of materialization of the Bible through entertainment, affect, and immersion in a public sphere. Bielo’s book provides fodder for further analysis of Christian entertainment.

### **Playing with Noah in Wanamaker’s Temple**

These books have five major points of intersection which demonstrate their importance in the field of American Studies and how the analysis of religion can be used to produce a more complex image of the public sphere. First, they both challenge typical scholarly angles in order to develop more complex lenses. For Kirk, scholars typically argue that business/consumption waters down or damages religion or that the two are inherently opposed. Therefore, those who wed business/consumption and religion are using the latter to increase the former. Similarly, Bielo notes that most scholars approach the study of creationism via the science-religion standpoint, and further, that they see the commodification of religion as a secularizing process. Kirk and Bielo both demonstrate that religion as expressed through and within business and entertainment ventures are actually processes of immersion or total life commitment to religious faith. Wanamaker made his business ventures an aspect of his Christian social reform while those at Ark Encounter use consumerism to convert a secular marketplace. The point is that many cultural scholars cling to a sacred/secular dichotomy without noticing that Christian practitioners do not acknowledge this dichotomy for themselves. These new lenses provided by Kirk and Bielo, whether of aesthetic evangelism, religious publicity, or dialogical creativity, cause us to reconsider some of the most foundational assumptions regarding religion in the public sphere. Both scholars find something new (or add to the continuing scholarship) within the history of Christianity in the United States: Bielo finds creative creationists, and Kirk finds pious businessmen.

Both books also are about materializing faith within religious publics. This addition of “faith” is my own and neither scholar describes their work in exactly this way. Bielo makes clear that he sees materializing the Bible as part of his larger project of the anthropology of Christianity and social scriptures. It is also an aspect of Vincent Wimbush’s scriptualizing. Both terms refer to how religious adherents make their scriptures act and produce in the world. By adding material elements to this analysis, the question becomes not just how people make their scriptures mean and do, but also how practitioners make those scriptural words



into real, tangible things. That is, how words and the meaning of those words are rendered into material form especially to produce a particular interpretation.

Kirk, on the other hand, does not deal with Christian scriptures at all. However, Wanamaker does make his faith intersect with taste and middle-class virtue. Through his store, art, décor and interiors, Wanamaker made that faith material. I generalize Bielo's concept of materializing the Bible to incorporate Kirk's perspective of aesthetic evangelism by talking about materializing faith, that is pronouncing one's faith through the material and the real to be "read," understood, and importantly, taught to and by others. Through this materialization process, religious faith creates cultural change and (in these cases) enforce power structures.

Third, both authors rely on immersion and authenticity as a key element of this materializing process. While Kirk does not use play theory or immersion as theoretical lenses, Ark Encounter and the Wanamaker building both perform similar tasks. Wanamaker also invited his consumers to roleplay in highly choreographed areas, especially through window-shopping (imagining themselves donning goods that would render them "respectable"), through art galleries from salons in Paris, and through opulent atriums, listening to organ music. Viewers in the neo-gothic-style atriums imagining a pan-Christian community and history in the 1900s were similar to viewers in the modern gigantic ark, imagining the creationist past as actual and orthodox. As clientele walked through and viewed art galleries, they were also performing a guided poetics of faith just as clients at Ark Encounter walk through stations within the ark. While Kirk does not use the theories of immersion that Bielo does, reading the two together, a reader can be struck by the similarity of Wanamaker's use of immersion for the education of his guests in his galleries, holiday décor, atriums, and auditoriums that Bielo's artistic staff used.

Fourth, both books deal with the important task of educating the public. Kirk's use of aesthetic evangelism works both for her description of Wanamaker but also for Bielo's analysis of immersion and entertainment. Wanamaker's purpose to educate the public on propriety and decorum resulted in social capital for its practitioners. Ark Encounter's goal is conversion, meant to educate and even convince (or at least throw doubt upon belief) for non-Christians and non-creationist Christians alike. This education also provides social capital, but instead of providing it to the population generally (as was Wanamaker's hope), Ark Encounter instead hopes to provide social capital for heterodox creationists. Because of the high quality of their "edutainment" theme park, the creators are able to show that Christian entertainment can not only be good, but as good as non-Christian forms.

Fifth, Kirk and Bielo both talk about the creation of safe space through aesthetic evangelism or Bielo's concept of immersion. Ark Encounter creates safe space for the creationist and a challenge to the skeptic. Wanamaker also created safe space for white and middle-class buyers. This safety is given a divine component as both books understand that Wanamaker and Ark Encounter's

creative team were “co-creators” with God. As co-creators with God, a safe space becomes divine. Interestingly, while Ark Encounter creates a space for conversation around heterodox beliefs, it does not succeed in changing the cultural norm. Creationist perspectives remain heterodox. However, Wanamaker’s movement to teach and inculcate middle-class norms and virtues did become orthodox. It cemented a classist and racist way of being in the city, separating uneducated people, poor people, and immigrants.

Both books are excellently researched and written. There are a few areas that could be improved. For Kirk, a deeper analysis of the connection between middle-class values and Christianity, or at least the unique ways Wanamaker connected them, would have been useful. It makes sense that values relate to Christianity, but she is not clear exactly how that connection occurred. An examination of rhetoric, especially scriptural rhetoric, would have increased this point. In the same vein, the biographies of Wanamaker that Kirk uses in her first chapter are rich sources that offer insights into how Wanamaker saw himself. However, Kirk does not always interrogate the truthfulness of these sources. Examining the rhetoric of these early biographies could have added further depth to Kirk’s argument since, like a modern hagiography, they portray exactly the form of good taste, middle-class values, and religious business and consumerism that they believed Wanamaker emulated. Finally, I was curious how much Kirk’s discussion of architecture or art was simply a product of modernism. Could her analysis give way to a larger argument about the innate effect of Christianity on modernist art and architecture?

In Bielo’s case, I found myself questioning the role of Orientalism in imagining Noah’s past. Morocco was an inspiration for the artistic portrayal of Noah’s home (Bielo, 14, 65), and “Middle East”-inspired music play for onlookers at the exhibit (Bielo, 159). When artists sought to portray a pre-historical Biblical past, they reached for a highly Orientalized and stylized portrayal of the modern Middle East, whose current artistic look has more to do with Muslim architecture and history. This speaks to these creative creationists’ inability to imagine a biblical past without pre-modern and modern Islamic history, and yet, that Islamic history is also actively denied and devalued.

During Bielo’s sixth chapter as he discussed walking through the ark exhibit, I was moved to consider the complex interconnection between the creationist past and the creationist present—that is, what happens when the two meet? Throughout the exhibit, Noah and his family are portrayed as just like their Christian viewers. The artistic creation of immersion and the viewer’s roleplay rely on the present to define the past. But it means that the creationist’s present is bolstered by their vision of the past. For instance, gender roles in labor or praying at the table (Bielo, 146-149) are part of the modern Christian present, but the ark exhibit shows Noah’s family doing these things in the past. By placing modern Christian practices and beliefs in the biblical past as if they were native to that temporal arena leaves a Christian creationist on looker seeing validity in their current Christian manifestations. But this goes for sin as well:

Bielo tells an anecdote of a mother and her daughters looking at a portrayal of the sinfulness of Noah's time. One man is drunk and passed out. The mother remarks to her giggling daughter, "there's nothing new under the sun" (Bielo, 166). This is critically important for thinking about how the artistic team sees the present as a recreation of the past. While Noah's past is different, it cannot be so different from our present. This creates a dialogical relationship between the actualized past and present mediated through the onlooker, and it is integral to materializing the Bible.

Finally, Bielo does not consider race or gender in creating safe spaces for creationists. As Bielo walked through *Ark Encounter*, how many faces that walked through with him were white? How did race figure into conversations with the creative team, or did it at all? These questions are largely left unanswered in Bielo's analysis. However, these questions may have been outside the scope of his work. *Ark Encounter* serves as a jumping-off point for future scholars of American Studies and American Religion to ask these next questions about Orientalism, gender, and race.

## Conclusion

By finding new lenses that incorporate religious analysis rather than denying religious knowledges, perspectives, and realities, we can understand American culture and identity more deeply. Bielo's creative team are direct recipients of Wanamaker's philosophy (Bielo, 21). By reading both books together, we see a perspective from the late 1800s to 1920, and then see where religious/business/consumption has gone in 2018.

American Studies must put aside its blinders and engage with the fact that faith is a real component in people's lives. Even further, American Studies must be willing to accept that faith, while perhaps an oppressive force, has also been a creative one. It is a language spoken fluently and freely by people throughout the Americas. Scholars can examine how business, entertainment, race, class, and gender can be bound up together with religious practitioners' (re)creation of and in our history. These two books invite their scholarly readers to play, imagine, and immerse themselves in the creativity of religious cultural manufacturers.

