In the 1890s, cartoonists lampooned the Christian commitment of John Wanamaker, Philadelphia's great merchant. Puck's front cover featured two Wanamakers. "Pious John" was dressed in a somber Sunday suit. But "Smart John," decked out in a loud plaid suit, with a book titled *Political and Business Schemes* stuffed in his pocket, was whispering in the ear of "Pious John." A cartoon in a magazine titled Judge depicted a plump Wanamaker standing on a pedestal named "Bargain Counter." Holding a Ten Commandment-like tablet, he announces a sale of collar buttons so cheap "they will almost be given away." "I Profit sighs," the tablet concluded, "any old thing for the sake of profit."

Historians have been a bit kinder to Wanamaker. But only a bit. They do not doubt his piety or his desire (born of his lifelong connection to the YMCA) to integrate Christianity into the culture of consumption. But in the end, they agree with William Leach, who claimed in his book *Land of Desire* that Wanamaker, a paternalist, produced a commercial environment "steeped in pecuniary values," extolled spending over saving, and "marginalized religion."
In *Wanamaker's Temple*, Nicole C. Kirk, an assistant professor at Meadville Lombard Theological School, takes seriously Wanamaker's efforts to "convert the retail business into a moral-ethical Christian endeavor." Kirk argues that the John Wanamaker Department Store's architecture, employee education programs, and art exhibits extended his religious mission while promoting new business practices. Citing Wanamaker's claim that customers were "free to look, see, learn, and enjoy without feeling any obligation to buy," Kirk maintains that the amount of floor space devoted to cultural offerings "suggests that he meant it."

She may be right. After all, the store's religious iconography did leave many customers deeply moved. That said, Kirk does not, in my judgment, effectively refute the consensus among historians that, consciously or unconsciously, Wanamaker "did not put the Lord's business first." She mentions, but only in passing, Wanamaker's role in creating refund policies and easy credit to generate impulse buying. She describes organ recitals at Wanamaker's in detail, but not the possibly relevant context — skyrocketing sales of keyboard instruments — for presenting them. Nor does she connect Wanamaker's sumptuous Christmas and Easter decorations to the holiday shopping season.

In 1924, in an essay in the Atlantic Monthly, Samuel Strauss declared, "the problem before us today is not how to produce the goods, but how to produce the customers." It seems clear that along with other retail and advertising titans, Wanamaker found myriad ways to use secular and religious symbols "to arouse in the observer the cupidity and longing to possess the goods." Almost 100 years after his death, it seems equally clear that, more than anyone before him, he invented ways to exert control over the twin "pliers of appetites and desire."

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