Saudi National Museum in Riyadh lays out its exhibits in two floors. On the lower level, visitors walk through displays on geology, paleontology, archeology before ascending a long ramp, to the second floor where the treatment of Islam begins. Walking down a long hallway surrounded by battle scenes, visitors enact the *hijra*. Subsequent exhibits tell the story of the emergence of the Saudi state, sometimes showing its military triumphs—without mentioning that those defeated were also ancestors of current Saudi citizens.

The museum's didactic displays blend history, religion, nation, and state in ways that are all the more powerful because they are unspoken. *What is Political Islam* does not examine museums, but scholars who follow Cesari's example will likely wander far away from electoral campaigns and ideological tracts by autodidact religious leaders in this and other directions to pursue their inquiry.

***The Urban Church Imagined: Religion, Race, and Authenticity in the City*. By Jessica M. Barron & Rhys H. Williams. New York: New York University Press, 2017. vii + 193 pp. $89.00 cloth, $30.00 paper**

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In *The Urban Church Imagined*, sociologists Jessica Barron and Rhys Williams conduct a close, ethnographic study of an evangelical church plant in Chicago. (First author Barron conducted the fieldwork and transmits a clear unitary voice in the text, so I often refer to her here.) "Downtown Church" was founded by "Pastor Phil," the white, twenty-something son of a megachurch pastor who runs the wealthy, suburban Indiana campus that funds the new congregation. The megachurch is geographically not far but culturally worlds away from downtown Chicago, where the pastors fantasize they will reach the unchurched by curating a hip space tailored to busy urban professionals. The congregation gathers on Sunday evenings in a refurbished theater, holds "nights out" (complete with cocktails), and prides itself on its selective volunteer missions in the

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city. However, church leaders display a stunning ignorance (my word choice, not Barron's), both of the communities whose space they have entered, and of race, class, and gender dynamics more broadly. The study draws from 18 months of fieldwork, 55 interviews, and content analysis of sermons, marketing materials, and web content—although the analysis is carried mostly through a handful of illustrative anecdotes and comments from a small cast of key characters.

This book illuminates the ways in which the conception, leadership practices, and institutional culture of Downtown Church (DC) reveal troubling dynamics at the intersection of race, religion, gender, and consumption. Anyone concerned with the future of evangelicalism, American religion in urban spaces, or approaches to diversity and multiracial contexts would do well to attend to these dynamics. I would expect *The Urban Church Imagined* to be a welcome contribution to several kinds of literature: the scholarship on race and religion in the United States (and in American evangelicalism), on neoliberal approaches to diversity and multiculturalism, and on racialization and urban geographies. It also potentially contributes to debates over the so-called "end of White Christian America" (*The End of White Christian America*, New York, 2016).

Barron and Williams argue that Downtown Church leaders, in their cultivation of a diverse urban church experience, foster a particular "racialized urban imaginary," a set of racially coded expectations about the urban environment that many of the parishioners from Chicago do not share. Examination of this racialized urban imaginary deftly exposes how church leaders utilize people of color, especially African Americans, to legitimate the church brand, while managing diversity in such a way as to limit the possibilities for more meaningful cross-racial interactions in the church community and restrict the ability of members of color to influence leadership structures. An illustration employed frequently is the fact that young, attractive, well-dressed Black folks are enlisted as greeters in the church lobby, but when these individuals express interest in paid or influential leadership opportunities, or when they question or offer criticism about church practices, pastoral staff are unresponsive. Too, although leaders advertise the church as a place where young people can mingle in a diverse atmosphere that "looks like the city," where a young man can even "find a hot wife" (59), they steer congregants away from certain kinds of interracial dating (white/black) through social signals and not-so-subtle redirections. These examples of *racial utility* (using bodies of color for specific purposes) and *managed diversity* (restricting the ability of the multiracial space to change church culture or leadership practices) produce

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a striated and deeply racialized power structure within the church, and a superficial mode of commodified, race-blind multiculturalism. Though congregants of color may be critical, of this, they may choose to stay at DC to leverage the church's resources, or the space it is creating, for their own reasons.

Having conducted research on race in American evangelicalism and the multiethnic church (MEC) movement, in particular, I was stunned by many of Barron's revelations about DC church leaders' attitudes and behavior. The racial obliviousness of Pastor Phil, who came from a (presumably) monoracial megachurch and never attended college, is unsurprising; his repeatedly demonstrated arrogance is a product of multiple levels of unchecked privilege. But that he and his associates managed to approach their church plant not only without basic cross-racial literacy but also without knowledge of even the multiethnic church movement *within* American evangelicalism, is alarming. In the past 15 years, the MEC movement has produced "how to" forums and distinct tracks at regional and national evangelical church-building conferences, so it is by now a visible constituency in a world with which Phil and his father are undoubtedly familiar. I wish this study had highlighted that the DC leadership makes almost every error that the research within and outside the MEC movement warns against. They plant a church in Chicago while living in the suburbs; their multiracial approach is theologically unanchored; the music ministry is culturally monotone (and white); leadership is unrepresentative of the community they seek to reach, despite a multiracial congregation; and Pastor Phil does things like schmooze the local public high school principal to leverage real estate opportunities, while never participating in the church's outreach to the school's students. Books by practitioners, as well as scholarship on the movement, suggest that this church is likely to fail dramatically, at least in terms of its multiracial vision.

The study's analytical framework is persuasively applied; I finished the book convinced of its value. The ways in which the racialized urban imaginary of DC's leadership produces toxic dynamics about which leaders are clueless, though many parishioners are not, are striking. The leadership's lack of research, resistance to critical feedback, and cultural humility deficits amount to a huge lost opportunity to build meaningful relationship-based, cross-racial community. This is sad because DC managed to attract people who are, like many Americans, hungry for such forums and, indeed, who are willing to try to create them even outside their pastors' sightline.

My main critique is that such important conclusions seem to rest mainly on the handful of anecdotes about and reflections from Barron's small set

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of critical informants, individuals to whom she turns repeatedly throughout the analysis. Barron seems not to have made a serious effort to test her inductive reasoning against the perspectives of church leadership. She surfaces many issues—the pastor's racial pantomiming, his stereotypes about the Black Church, his suggestion that a white woman not date a Black man, his hiring of a white ministry leader despite critical feedback from parishioners of color—on which she does not follow up. I can see why, as a mixed-race woman and outsider, she might not want to risk the appearance of challenging a pastor with deep sexist and racially problematic beliefs. (Her dismay at the audacity of some of his assumptions is often palpable, and as a fellow ethnographer I felt for her.) But probing Phil and his associates' sense of mission, their understanding (if it existed) of the biblical account of race, gender, and difference, and even their defenses of certain interactions would surely have been informative. We gain much insight from seeing some church members use ambiguity, ambivalence, and outright compromise to navigate a cultural system that limits their full integration, but we could likewise better understand the limits of DC leaders' approach to multiracial community if we knew more about what their own concerns, defenses, fears, and hopes were. We end up with a picture of the white church leadership that is rightly critical, but without more investigation of their perspectives, the narrative comes close to rendering them straw men.

Despite some analytical shortcomings, *The Urban Church Imagined* is an important contribution to the growing scholarship on race and religion in the United States.

Religion on the Battlefield. By Ron E. Hassner. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016. 232 pp. $24.95 cloth

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In his 2009 book *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY), Ron Hassner examined how sacred space generates Fearon-esque issue indivisibilities, inhibiting the bargaining for peaceful dispute resolution. He focused

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