Project Title: The Perfection of Religious Innovation: Robert Schuller and the Crystal Cathedral Ministries

Project Abstract: Robert H. Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral stood for decades as a prevailing model of Christian ministry by establishing a standard of professionalism and attractiveness. The iconic all-glass structure attracted both regular attenders and curious visitors. The Hour of Power television show delivered a recognizable worship that outdid viewers’ local congregations with its polished and manicured delivery. More than that, the show infused the ministry with cash. Further, much like McDonalds’ proliferated with franchises, the church produced replicas of itself by training thousands of pastors at the Robert H. Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership. In effect, the Crystal Cathedral became a multi-modal ministry where each branch fed into the same reinforcing system that allowed it to establish a predominant paradigm of Christian church ministry. With all that in mind, we use a social scientific analysis to comprehensively examine the legacy of the distinct and pervasively influential church-industrial complex that would simply be known as Crystal Cathedral Ministries.

Project Outcome: Book manuscript (under contract with Rutgers University Press)
Possible presentation at SSSR/ASR/on campus involving MacGregor Fellow

The manuscript will deepen the academy’s understanding of the potential and limits of religious innovation. Moreover, the volume will likely hold interest for churches and seminaries.