
CHANGE: EXPLORING ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP – A PEDAGOGICAL INQUIRY

LISA R. WITHROW

Abstract: Individuals, churches, and society experience discontinuous, unpredictable change in today's world, leading to disequilibrium in all areas of life. Change as a subject for instructors of religious leadership introduces pedagogical challenges requiring attention to context, experience, and theory in the midst of this disequilibrium. Attention to four arenas of changing context provides examples for teaching challenges: globalizing economics, politics, church, and the academy itself. Schools of change theory also contribute to student learning, resulting in theological reflection and practice. Hybridity of contextual analysis, interdisciplinary knowledge, understandings of power and authority, familiarity with postmodernism(s), public theological discourse, and inspiration all become necessary components of pedagogical content in light of discontinuous change as a meta-context. These emphases require teachers to share expertise in knowledge creation and interpretation of experience, ultimately teaching students how to think, imagine, and create paths through discontinuous change to transforming futures.

Introduction

Change is a very large one-syllable word. This word applies to all of life, history, and relationships. Change creates links to other words, both nouns and verbs, all depending on context. *Change* as noun can conjure visions of money, but also modification, transition, phase, transformation, reciprocity, abandonment, and a form of chaos. As a verb, *change* is synonymous with switch, alter, abandon, shift, or adapt. With these definitions come

Lisa Withrow is associate professor of Church Leadership in the Devire Chair and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio

implicit emotional responses. This large little word has great power, bringing fear, anger, or relief wherever it goes. It is rare to find a neutral response to change. “We have always done it this way” lives in juxtaposition to “we can’t do it this way anymore” in the realms of organizations, churches, educational institutions, and our working lives. Change itself becomes a meta-context for formation and development of religious leaders.

The study of change as it relates to religious leadership directs us to think about pedagogy in our learning environments that keep an eye on four contextual arenas: global economics, United States politics, United States mainline churches, and academies. In this article, I address the experience and conscientization¹ arising from these contexts and the resulting impact they have for the pedagogical methods we employ.

Four arenas of change comprise a complexity of contexts that affect how we understand leadership. Context shapes experience, which, in turn, has potential to raise critical consciousness, which changes, alters, shifts, adapts, modifies, and indeed transforms the leadership conversation in the learning environment. Complexity of context implies layers and mixtures of origin or composition, cultural hybridity,² or interwoven matrices of information and experience with appropriation of both. Each leader brings with him or her this complexity of context and meets others with their own, thereby creating a new, interrelated context. In light of this complexity, the question facing religious leaders and their teachers becomes increasingly layered:

¹ *Conscientization* is a word coined by Paulo Freire for raising critical consciousness. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, transl. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2000), 35.

² *Hybridity* is used in Kathryn Tanner’s study of Christian identity as a matrix of cultural anthropology, postmodern theory, and theology. For Tanner, cultural identity becomes a relational affair, living between as well as within cultures. See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 57-58.

how do we position ourselves in a globalizing, political world that we do not rely on politicians to solve our problems, but rather introduce alternative, healthy, and spiritually meaningful futures in the midst of discontinuous change? Living in ambiguity and disequilibrium as its own constant context affords religious leaders an opportunity to understand and experience flexibility as living in dissonant juxtaposition with events, relationships, and social locations. Leaders adopt the notion of hybridity in terms of contextual analysis and attempt to make meaning in the midst of discontinuity and complexity. They find that Searches for homeostasis and gradual, predictable change yield little satisfaction in this age.

So we become intentional about naming self and what creates and influences self in light of our teaching and learning.³ The four arenas chosen here provide examples of meta-contexts for our cultural hybridity as well as appropriation of knowledge and experience which inform pedagogical method and content.

Global Economics

Globalization can be defined as the compression of the world in terms of socio-cultural, economic, and technological interdependence accompanied by a rapidly expanding political and cultural consciousness. According to Roland Robertson, globalization is simultaneously cultural, economic, and political but not necessarily cohesive normatively; instead, it is networked multi-dimensionally in a complex and constantly changing

³ For example, my own hermeneutical lens, by way of attending to context in this article, stems from a hybrid background: British, American, feminist in conversation with womanist and mujerista theology and philosophy, postmodern practical theologian, former environmental biologist and political scientist, with an interest in process theology and environmental ethics. This personal matrix, combined with the culture that shapes me and the sacred texts of my faith-call, yields its own identity context which affects pedagogical method and content in my courses.

web.⁴ In Robertson's definition, we see the notion of hybridity playing out in globalism as an interconnecting, multi-layered, and complex system of interaction.

It can be argued that globalization has been occurring since explorers discovered worlds new to them while constructing their own cultural domination to bear in the midst of existing socio-cultural and religious constructs.⁵ Jürgen Moltmann puts it this way:

If we compare our civilization with pre-modern cultures, the difference between growth and equilibrium springs to mind. Those pre-modern civilizations were anything but "primitive" or "underdeveloped." On the contrary, they were highly complicated systems of equilibrium which ordered the relation of people and nature to the gods. It is only modern Western civilizations that for the first time are one-sided, programmed solely toward development, growth, expansion and conquest.⁶

However, what has emerged in the last two centuries is the notion that success is defined primarily as economic gain based on market speculation rather than territorial expansion. The rise of secularism and the de-divinization of nature have contributed to this shift.

Global economics is only one facet of globalization. Positive impacts found in a globalizing world include widespread communication and education, cross-cultural learning, shared knowledge about health care, and sustainable food production as well as opportunity for global conversation about the planetary challenges of our

⁴ Roland Robertson, "Globalization and the Future of 'Traditional Religion' in *God and Globalization: Religion and the Powers of Common Life*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse with Peter J. Parish, vol. 1 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 53.

⁵ See a broader discussion of globalization in Lisa Withrow, *Claiming New Life: Process-Church for the Future* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), chapter 3.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Destruction and Healing of the Earth," in *God and Globalization: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning, vol. 2 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 216.

time. What is important about economics as a focal topic for religious leadership as we think about change is that it affects every aspect of daily life: economics is an overarching context that is at the same time personal and communal, private and public. Rising fuel and food prices, privatization of water as a capitalist venture, arms trade, human trafficking, rights to land access as well as ownership are a few of the issues alive and well inside United States borders. The same issues are significantly more pronounced in Two-Thirds World countries. As such, economic concerns are vital issues in every country and every market. Governments or nation-states cannot regulate markets to the degree that they would like, despite hopes that capitalist markets are reasonably self-regulating with an occasional adjustment, thereby benefitting all who function in the market in the long-term.⁷ Recently, we have seen myriad financial commentators predicting the future of the U.S. economy in relation to the world economy while we watch banks and large corporations with global reaches requiring government financial assistance for solvency. Commentators admit that no one knows what will happen with monetary values, market speculations, and consumer liquidity with the exception of continued long-term increases in prices for fuel and food. In terms of change, global economics often seems like a bait-and-switch game, with large conglomerations forming through acquisitions of rival companies, followed by the very same industry's demise the next week. We simply need to watch the automotive and airline industries as well as banking corporations to recognize this

⁷ Neoclassical economic theory, which John Maynard Keynes attempted to correct in the twentieth century in response to unemployment and economic depression, posits that market forces adjust themselves according to supply and demand without interference. In other words, the market operates mechanistically. Current practice combines Keynesian theory (certain adjustments to savings incentives, interest rates and liquidity are necessary for effective market response) with the mechanistic view, resulting in governmental or state adjustments to interest rates and money flow to “correct” market swings.

discontinuous,⁸ or unpredictable, change caused by competing interests and speculation. We might describe ourselves as living in times of disequilibrium, ambiguity, and, for some, chaos.

At the same time, teachers and leaders promote change regularly, attempting to adapt to ongoing fluctuating circumstances. We instructors extol high flexibility, adaptive change, and creative partnerships in leadership studies. We attempt to train great leaders, acknowledging that “good” leaders are no longer good enough. Yet, even great leaders do not control the market. They may influence it, but they have no regulatory insight or real power to affect economic outcomes with complete certainty. Sometimes, ambiguity reigns supreme in the moment, leading to a sense of chaos and subsequent reactive activity, (such as quickly changing interest rates or financial organization “bail outs” to promote immediate stabilization of financial flows), employed as an attempt to move the economic system back into a so-called homeostatic, predictable state.⁹ Thus, we could claim that, rather than controlling our economic lives, we are controlled by an unpredictable economy at a significant level. The impact of this state of affairs for religious leaders and their constituents affects every aspect of life and therefore is relevant for discussion in the classroom. Once global issues are acknowledged to be relevant to student lives, conscientization begins, intentional theological reflection

⁸ Discontinuous change implies unpredictable, non-linear change whereas continuous change connotes ability to plan for predictable, mappable results.

⁹ James G. March, along with Herbert A. Simon and Richard M. Cyert, developed a theory of organizations that includes aspects of sociology, psychology, and economics to provide an alternative perspective to neoclassical theories claiming predictable behavior with control of variables. He indicates that there always is some ambiguity in leadership by indicating that human behavior cannot be predicted always when rationality is assumed in tightly controlled organizations with specified limits. Thus, neoclassical economics cannot ultimately be self-regulating. See “Idea as Art: A Conversation with James G. March” in James G. March, *Explorations in Organizations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 11.

is possible, living with disequilibrium grows necessary, and leadership ethics enters the conversation. At this point, students can benefit from cross-cultural immersion experiences where they live in the hybridity of contexts—including disparate economic ones—and, through reflection, begin to make meaning in situations where they themselves exist in disequilibrium.

When I think about students who are training to be leaders in churches and non-profit organizations or who are starting faith-based social justice movements, I acknowledge that this level of global study does not make sense to them initially, unless they have some experience of business or farming communities themselves. Or they may have lost a job to a worker overseas. Or they provide resources for someone who cannot afford food or fuel anymore. Or students themselves are receiving such aid. Or they find that the dollar does not cover tuition as it used to. Or they fear someone coming across the border to do the country violence. Or they want to learn a new language so that they can communicate across the world in an instant about a particular song or worship style. Or they want to understand where and by whom their clothes are made or where their food originates. When students realize that these situations stem from global as well as local economic concerns, they see the need for globalization studies which include cross-cultural immersions, which translate into not only theory but personal and communal experience.

United States Politics

The globalizing world watches the United States closely at the time of presidential elections because U.S. policy-setters make an impact throughout the world with Presidential influence creating the political and economic agenda. For two years before the election, slogans and appeals pervade television channels. In the 2008 race, the word *change* featured often and early in the Democratic challenge and subsequently in the Republican counterchallenge. In early 2008, two major Democratic contenders were pushing for change: one

had a checklist of counteractions to the *status quo*, and one had a dream for attitudinal change accompanying a checklist with a slightly different methodology. They each were aware of global context as well as personal context and attempted to use their social locations to their advantage. Likewise, the Republican side of the race knew that political content needed to relate directly to a hybridity of contexts. Consciousness-raising became tailored to citizens' local needs with a motive to be successfully elected. Some call this tailoring "manipulation," others call it "creating influence." What we experienced in this and other elections were candidates who attempted to create alternative futures for people's lives, convincing voters of the viability of their particular brands of economic, political, socio-cultural, and religious stances.

Ideally, voters think about the personal and perhaps the corporate impact of these alternatives and vote for the candidate whom they perceive will most likely deliver such a future. The message voters receive in election battles is that politicians have the power to control, or at least highly influence, domestic and foreign markets, foreign relations, and social services while willing to fight for the well-being of the proletariat. This construction of leadership arises from implicit understandings of power with different emphases and styles of influence supported by different leaders. Effective power notions which claim to be able to create alternative futures, combined with an unregulated global economy, begin to lead to a matrix of leadership issues that do not form a neat pattern, particularly in an election year.

Teachers who can teach students to analyze shifting contexts and adapt to complexity and discontinuous change while retaining integrity and authenticity are the most likely teachers to be fostering great leaders for the future. Formulaic or checklist leadership, attempting to predict results from strategic actions, will find itself floundering as we see in the world economy and in politics. Therefore, religious leadership instructors must continue to develop multiplicity of contexts and their

interactions within the classroom as pedagogical content. Economic policies and political environments require theological reflection about the nature of faithful leadership in a world that equates success with material gain and political dominance. Understanding hybridity and ambiguity as the meta-context of the world in which religious leadership lives and functions is crucial for pedagogical consideration in education. Adding a third layer of context increases the complexity of the pedagogical task further: the church.

The Church

“Change or die” has become a common phrase in U.S. mainline churches.¹⁰ This phrase can be heard on the lips of judicatory leaders, during sermons, in meetings, and at coffee hour. Change here usually is measured quantitatively when congregations are anxious or when they have adopted the Prosperity Gospel¹¹ as a means of God-blest success. Numbers count: numbers of the newly baptized, numbers of participants, numbers of prayers answered, numbers of souls saved, numbers of dollars in the collection plate, numbers of people turning out for special events. There is indeed a real concern for the well-being of others in churches, but anxiety about the future usually leads to an overemphasis on numbers. However, what remains unexamined in the midst of anxiety is not only the internal culture of the church but also the competing interests the church must face externally.¹² Incremental, continuous change appeals to most churches that wish to remain stable. Upholding tradition is a high value even when congregations

¹⁰ I refer to the mainline church in the United States because it is the church within which I serve. I trust colleagues from different religious backgrounds and countries will contribute their own voices to this conversation I trust.

¹¹ Prosperity Gospel refers to the notion that if one prays faithfully and acts in accordance with God’s will, one will be rewarded through the fulfillment of one’s needs and desires.

¹² Competing interests include social services, clubs, non-religious justice movements, restaurants, entertainment, sports, and other community events that draw attention away from church life.

acknowledge the need for some level of change. Often, these incremental changes occur through techniques or style shifts with little attention to the issues of authority churches face, understandings of ecclesiology that are rarely discussed, and context-based ministry that becomes relevant only when it faces globalization and political issues from an ethical base. Instead of enacting real change, churches entrench in “traditionalism”¹³ whereby they uphold habits and unexamined customs as faithful ministry, albeit with new packaging, rather than engaging in fruitful ministry.

I would argue that religious leadership itself often fears change, because the change that makes a difference might require significant pressure and chaos before transformation becomes obvious. Real change is less adaptive¹⁴ and increasingly and painfully transformative, requiring time in a crucible¹⁵ that undoubtedly seems like chaos. Context, social location, and experience determine whether churches are able to appropriate conscientization of others’ social location, walk toward the crucible to join others already there through no fault of their own, and find strength to risk living in this crucible until they emerge out the other side (if they do at all).¹⁶

¹³ See Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 39, quoting John B. Thompson, “Tradition and Self in a Mediated World, in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflection on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 93. Butler Bass also makes the distinction between traditionalism and tradition in “Vital Signs” *Sojourners Magazine* (December 2005), online version: www.soho.net.

¹⁴ Ronald Heifetz discusses the difference between technical and adaptive change. See Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1994), 75, 85.

¹⁵ A crucible is a vessel in which heat or pressure is applied to elements placed there, resulting in transformed material such as refined silver. A crucible also implies situations of extreme pressure psychologically.

¹⁶ I use “crucible” slightly differently from the popular phrase, “cruciform leadership.” Cruciform leadership implies stances leaders take that lead them or their constituents to the cross—the crucifixion as a cost of discipleship before there is resurrection. Crucible is a space in which pressures and discontinuity lead to temporary disequilibrium where leaders and organizations are transformed into the next phase of their lives without losing

Globalization and politics teach us this lesson: conflict, famine, economic disparity, torture, environmental degradation all are part of the crucible with an unpredictable outcome. The church has opportunity to lead through these times because it has a unique understanding of the transformative power of death moving to new life. At this point, theological reflection on the nature of the crucible, which may include crucifixion, and the outcome, which may include resurrection, in light of hybrid contexts allows students to reframe notions of chaotic living into “chaordic” space,¹⁷ the transition where chaos and order both are present. The crucible becomes a place where what seems like chaotic movement is instead a re-patterning of the elements (order) within it, resulting in a more complex, refined element.

The Academy

The contents and contexts of change continue to increase in complexity as they link together in the web discussed thus far. We have change that is unregulated and discontinuous (globalization), mixed with change that attempts to create a new future (political platforms and conversations), and painfully but potentially transformative change that creates new consciousness and experiences at the theological and spiritual level (churches). What are we creating with this hybridity of change that makes up the matrices of life while at the same time reshapes life altogether? How do we fashion pedagogy that addresses these complex issues? The realm of biblical and wider textual studies helps here for those of us teaching in the academy. Latin American theologian Fernando Segovia outlines changes in methodologies for

their initial elements or foundations. Crucifixion and resurrection can result from living in crucible contexts, but these events also may not occur.

¹⁷ Chaordic is a word coined by Dee Hock meaning a blend of chaos and order where neither state dominates. See Dee Hock, *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishing, Inc., 1999).

biblical study in the last century¹⁸ which speak to us about pedagogical focus in light of hybridity and discontinuous change.

Segovia indicates that the centuries-old emphasis on the immutable authority of the biblical text as it stands alone, its own unchangeable truth, yielded in the twentieth century to methods of historical-critical method, where the interpreter needed to find his or her way into the truth of the history of a particular context. These methods moved further during the last century by taking into account the current context of the reader as equally important for interpretation as context of text. According to Segovia, in the 1990s we moved into classroom exegesis exercises that had not *one* authoritative scholar on the gospel of John around which all other interpretations evolved, but a kaleidoscope of authors from which students draw equally: womanist, post-colonial, queer theory and ethnic interpretation, for example. All of these commentaries are on the syllabus in conversation with each other and are considered valuable in their own right. This approach to interpretation makes the text more ambiguous, or in other words, introduces hybridity, or layers of social location from a variety of viewpoints.

The impact of such an approach seems negative to many students because they no longer can demand *the* right answer to the question about the meaning of the text. At Methodist Theological School in Ohio, several biblical studies syllabi look like international gatherings of worldviews where both reader and writer are in conversation, thereby broadening and deepening learning. Contexts here bring power to the process of learning rather than a particular vantage point of truth. Perhaps “postmodern methodology” is a phrase that comes to mind, though we are encountering a pedagogy that evokes something deeper than postmodernism here. We are shifting power by raising consciousness about value

¹⁸ Summary of Fernando Segovia’s lecture taken from Schooler Lectures, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio. October 14, 2007.

and dignity in a variety of experiences and contexts. We are closing in on addressing imperialism in our academic pedagogies by acknowledging and employing hybrid contextual study and learning to live with ambiguity in meaning-making.

Religious leadership instruction itself must adopt complex notions of contextual leadership. As in biblical studies, stand-alone authority no longer makes sense in a wide variety of social locations. In other words, one leadership methodology does not translate into effective leadership. Adopting skill sets described and utilized by one leader or one authority figure does not allow for the kaleidoscope of contexts and cultures. Thus, students expecting leadership courses to provide them with a checklist of skills necessary to succeed in their chosen vocations will find that, in time, they are not equipped to be leaders by their mere skill-accumulation. Students also must have safe space to form and reform their emotional and spiritual centers in the midst of the ecology of theological education. Instructors do a disservice to students if they do not address, simulate, and invite, at first in experimental space and then increasingly through direct experience, complex, chaotic scenarios combined with theoretical and theological study of change. To do so, instructors can introduce change theories to provide constructs for initiation of, or response to, change found while students participate in cross-cultural immersions, engage in intercultural leadership, and live in multi-layered contexts.

Change Theory

I have introduced a mix of topics, all of which affect how we think about multi-faceted contexts and our experiences of them as we approach pedagogical questions in the field of religious leadership. As contexts change and power shifts in the arenas around us, as interpretative work struggles to keep pace with change, I acknowledge that the notion of context is more complicated than what is laid out in this article. We live in a variety of macro- and micro-cultures, with

stereotypes, power differentials, customs, spaces, families, friends, and communities. We tune into particular “texts” in our cultures, which denote and also create our experience and our consciousness. As Segovia indicated, reader and text each have context, and contexts determine interpretation, particularly interpretation of change or need for change. It is important then for leaders continually to locate themselves in their contexts, thereby acknowledging their own points of reference as well as learning others’ locations at the same time.

In true academic form, pedagogical method must mix theory and practice, creating praxis. The four arenas above introduce the bare bones of a hybridity of contexts that inform and affect change. The study of change puts daily experience under the theoretical microscope. Schools of thought regarding change and resistance to it can be found in a survey of vast resources available in change literature. A common thread that moves among interpretations of change theory is a near consensus that for change to occur, disequilibrium¹⁹ is required in a system or organization. Each of the four arenas introduced above shows discontinuous change leading to disequilibrium; each arena has been known to attempt to restore or establish a new equilibrium. Corrective measures push for homeostasis which can include incremental change. One example is the recent plethora of oil companies and transnational corporations advertising how “green” they have become since global environmental conscientization has occurred. A sense of public disequilibrium, brought about by decades-long movements working to educate the public about impending environmental trouble led to a breakthrough where popular media provided means to spread the message widely, thereby raising consciousness. Experience of rising costs of living and perceptions of a broken economy create further dissonance. Expectations are anxiety-based. This conscientization, with

¹⁹ Disequilibrium connotes an unstable, unbalanced, changing system. Discontinuous change contributes to this unstable system.

accompanying evidence of economic dysfunction and environmental crisis, has managed to break through natural resistance to change at the public level. Personal and communal behaviors are changing, and companies are responding to the new market expectations at least on the public relations level,²⁰ in an attempt to recover a lost sense of environmental stability (equilibrium).

One theorist in the field of psychology, Kurt Lewin, cited often in leadership literature, indicates that as early as the 1940s, psychologists had suggested two concepts which form the basis of behavior change: “1. Because an individual’s behavior is a function of both that person’s psychology and his [sic] environmental context, the most effective way to create lasting behavioral change is to change the environmental context, and, 2. Before behavioral change can occur, let alone become institutionalized, forces must be exerted to create disequilibrium in the status quo.”²¹

So internal and external context, combined with experiences shaped by those contexts, form belief systems and subsequent behaviors. Disequilibrium in one or both of these realms—context and experience—is the fuel for conscientization, and with that, comes potential for intentional change. Cataclysmic²² change also can occur. This type of change either occurs suddenly or unexpectedly or both. Some cataclysmic change is beyond human control such as the eruption of a volcano. Human beings also cause this type of change through violent attack or pushing systems to “tipping points” either intentionally or unintentionally.

Types of intentional change cited in change theory literature include transactional, incremental, radical, and transformational. The transactional tends to function on

²⁰ This article does not have the scope for analysis of corporate motives and data regarding “greening” of various industries and businesses.

²¹ Bert Spector, *Implementing Organizational Change: Theory and Practice*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007), 27.

²² Cataclysmic change in this case denotes catastrophic, violent upheaval that brings about fundamental change.

a management level, where give-and-take preserves the *status quo*. Transactional change functions mostly among individuals or individual organizations.

Incremental change, also called evolutionary or variance change, constitutes gradual, often linear transition. Incremental change is not necessarily minor; circumstances do not return to their original state. Because there is a sense of progression that incorporates continuity, it is easy to resist change based on the ability to perceive personal negative impact. However, if discontinuance is introduced, response may become reactive: shock or fear. Incremental change requires the attention of small groups within an organization, or a cluster of organizations within a wider field.²³

Radical change occurs when a pivotal or crisis point has been reached suddenly. Crisis or “tipping point” yields quick reaction, which can be planned in advance or simply erupts on the spot. This type of change can create conflicted polarities, opposite sides that do not wish to compromise with each other, or it can unify participants who share a common goal, such as saving the organization.

Transformational change occurs when individuals or groups refocus their central purpose, again arising from a sense of disequilibrium, rethinking or shifting their whole sense of functioning. This is high-risk change. Transformation requires immediate attention of all parties involved.²⁴

Naming these theories which find their way into change literature under different labels and guises gives us a categorical understanding of change. They presume for the most part that change occurs, and then equilibrium is re-established until the next interruption takes place. There is another school of thought that

²³Adaptive change often fits into the incremental category. See Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1994), 126-129.

²⁴Linda Holbeche, *Understanding Change: Theory, Implementation and Success* (Burlington, MA: Elsevier, 2006), 5-6.

focuses on process change, though these thinkers show evidence of some overlapping premises with the theories listed above. Based on Van de Ven and Poole's 1995 study regarding schools of thought and change theory components, we find these descriptions of change: life cycle (organic growth, linear, and irreversible sequence of prescribed changes, similar to incremental change);²⁵ teleological (purposeful cooperation in the midst of recurrent, discontinuous sequence of goal-setting, implementation, and adaptation as means to reach an end-state); dialectic (opposition, conflict, a discontinuous sequence of confrontation, conflict, and synthesis); and evolutionary (competitive survival, recurrent, cumulative, and probabilistic sequence of variation, selection, and retention).²⁶ Change theorists struggle to categorize change by creating their own definitions based on varieties of schools of thought. Descriptors are helpful to tailor implementation or response, but ironically, even multiple categorizations imply a desire for containment.

In the midst of the aforementioned descriptions of change, I would argue that process theory combined with chaos theory most adequately delineates the nature of change, particularly at the organizational level. The biological sciences and physics describe both process and chaos as non-linear movements as methods of change. Warner Burke summarizes change:

Biology yields three areas that constitute movement: pattern, which is the configuration of relationships so that networks continually remake themselves; structure, which is embodiment of a system's physical components; and process, the activity involved in the continual organization and reorganization of the system's pattern.²⁷

²⁵ This description matches much of the environmental and ecological evolutionary models found in science. See Andrew Van de Ven and M. Poole, "Explaining Development and Change in Organizations," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995).

²⁶ Warner W. Burke, *Organizational Change: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 146-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

So when discontinuous change, along with its resulting disequilibrium, is introduced either gradually or suddenly, a temporary appearance of chaos occurs as the organism or system reconfigures itself, usually in a more complex way. Margaret Wheatley echoes this notion of non-linear change and chaos by applying work in physics to characteristics of change encountered by leaders. She too claims that change is unpredictable, non-linear, and often chaotic.²⁸ Lew Smith, who studies school systems and change, adds that unpredictability or uncertainty means we expect the unexpected (ambiguity) and do not know the ultimate impact of the changes to be implemented or experienced. Assumptions and routines are disrupted, usually creating stress, and by implication, leading parties to operate in the emotional area.²⁹ The emotional area, as Smith describes it, precludes people from seeing chaos as benign. However, even amidst chaos, patterns still exist though they may not be readily visible.³⁰

Change literature tells us about the benefits of chaos as well as about the discomfort. Innovation and creativity occur at the edge of chaos as many scientists, environmentalists, and organizational theorists note. For example, if one observes a forest from the middle, one sees a generally uniform growth stand. If, however, one stands on the edge, or margin, of a forest, all kinds of things are happening. A much wider variety of plants can be found at all different stages of growth, invasive species can be attempting to take control, more animal activity takes place, and the future of the forest may be altered depending on what takes place at the edges. Therefore, change theory acknowledges the benefits of chaos as one of the elements in a chaordic system, despite the discomfort living in disequilibrium brings. Students of

²⁸ See Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1999), chapters 1 and 2.

²⁹ Lew Smith, *Schools That Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008), 250-1.

³⁰ Burke, *Organizational Change*, 288.

context and change theory will need to address their own ability to live in chaordic economic, political, ecclesiological and academic processes should they desire to facilitate real change as transformative leaders.

Pedagogical Implications

This discussion of change and its elements—context, experience, and thought—leads finally to the question “so what?” in terms of the pedagogical implications for teaching religious leadership. We face the challenge of knowing that external contexts are moving at a faster pace than most internal contexts. We also face the challenge that many internal contexts are dependent upon or interdependent with the external for survival, and certainly for thriving. If we continue to think in systems, then even a small change in the hybridity of contexts can have a significant change on the system. As teachers of leadership, we must negotiate change as subject in the classroom and the accompanying change in our organizations themselves as students contend with the adventure of their own changes. In addition, theoretical work with change events and processes provides a framework for understanding the variety of patterns, elements, and variables cultivating change and subsequent responses.

Peggy Holman describes creative approaches to change in *The Change Handbook*. Leaders can move from “chaos to coherence” when they find wisdom within themselves as well as healthy connections with others, they respect and perhaps even welcome difference, exhibit the capacity to bring dreams to life, and know the power of story-telling. Holman claims that welcoming disturbances through use of powerful, life-affirming questions in light of a hybridity of contexts and inviting a diverse mix of people who care to explore the unknown are catalytic actions that start an innovative change process.³¹ The implication for the classroom is the

³¹ Peggy Holman, “From Chaos to Coherence: The Emergence of Inspired Organizations and Enlightened Communities” in *The Change Handbook: The*

methodology suggested here, much like the methodology used in the earlier example of biblical criticism. Learning to negotiate change in the world occurs when diversity becomes the norm in the classroom. Students need safe space amidst the chaos of new ideas and theological challenges so that questions and stories have power to raise consciousness, and they find permission to create meaning together through critique of context. In the classroom students simulate change that creates disequilibrium while creating safe space to keep enough equilibrium that risk-taking can occur intentionally. Change occurs when it is practiced until it becomes reality. Living well with change occurs when analysis meets emotional and behavioral acceptance of ambiguity. Pedagogical effectiveness in the classroom devoted to study of and experience with change results from introducing necessary components for simulation, immersion, and reflective analysis of scenarios present to leaders today.

The good news for teachers of religious leadership is that we ourselves are encountering changing emphases in pedagogy. Emphasis on the context of the teacher matters as well as the context of the content. Context of student adds another layer. Meta-contexts as described in the four examples above create even further complexity. Deconstruction of each of these layers initiates analysis and reflection, and reconstruction with deeper knowledge and experience becomes vitally important in pedagogical approaches. To accomplish the shift from simply teaching skills and principles to teaching imagination, flexibility, and risk-taking requires utilizing these components:

1. **Interdisciplinary savvy** – requiring a generalist’s knowledge and experience in several fields for competent analysis of complex matrices involved in change. Theology, sociology, political studies, and

Definitive Resource on Today’s Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, 2nd ed., ed. Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, Steven Cady and Associates (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), 610-611.

practical theology are basic subjects for teaching religious leadership.

2. **Methods bringing about hybridity of contextual analysis** – overlapping theory and change methods and using them as appropriate to time and place in “situational” leadership.³² Tools for managing change need to be employed with attention to context on macro and micro levels.
3. **Discussions regarding authority and power** – Understanding what these words mean contextually and who has authority and power in formal and informal terms. Authority and power each carry implications for religious leadership at theological, behavioral, and organizational levels.
4. **Understanding postmodernism** – discussing the dangers of complete relativity and opportunities for understanding diversity and truth networks. Postmodernism studies themselves necessitate study of context and social location and how we appropriate knowledge and experiences.
5. **Initiation of public discourse** – interpreting to secular society the influence and significance of religion upon public spheres. Students need to be encouraged to be engaged with different publics in the area of religious discourse.
6. **Inspired hope and imagination** –developing visions and creating scenarios for the future with students. Brokenness in the world fosters cynicism and defeatism; realism with a hopeful, imaginative lens operates to create viable futures with meaningful purpose and energy.

³² Appreciate Inquiry (adaptive), Collaborative Loops (create own change process in small groups), Planning (discovering common ground and scenario-thinking), Structuring (systems and collaborative work teams), Improving (action-reflection and 360 degree feedback), and Supporting (direct or taped feedback), all are change methods available to manage primarily continuous change.

These components indicate that the teacher no longer is the information expert so much as the facilitator of rigorous and informed praxis which is contextually based. Teachers *are* the experts when they introduce the right question at the right time and know how to access various avenues of response, while at the same time having the ability to critique each response. Teachers aid students in creating their own knowledge bases as well as acquiring skills. In other words, teachers teach students how to learn, how to determine what is important to learn, and how to appropriate lessons imaginatively and in particular contexts. Ultimately though, in a classroom that addresses change and all its attributes through reflection, context, and experience as well as various skill sets, pedagogy moves from pouring information into people's heads to creating meaning together. Knowledge creation and innovation occur with capability development as the process of learning and teaching becomes its own change agent for the future of education and the organizations we serve.

When students learn to live within disequilibrium while retaining a "center of self," they can in turn invite others to do the same in the midst of transforming organizations, churches, or religious movements. As teachers and students pay attention to others' contexts, or arenas of change affecting their own contexts, they create a working knowledge of how to be flexible, to invite discernment about the future in religious organizations, to live with ambiguity as adventure, and to call forth a vision for a new day.