

DANIEL S. SCHIPANI: A CHALLENGING CHRISTIAN  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Daniel S. Schipani and his theory of Christian religious education can be introduced with the word “challenge”. To read and reflect upon his publications is a challenge in many ways.

When he writes, he offers an academic challenge to his readers. Some examples of what reviewers of his book *Religious education encounters liberation theology* have written will suffice to illustrate this: “the book is intended as an academic and theoretical work. It can become extremely dense in places, . . . and is certainly not an easy introduction to liberation theology” (Tombs 1990, 113); “This is a scholarly book, with excellent research and extensive notes. Only serious readers will take the effort to read it, but those few will profit greatly” (Lines 1990, 369). He certainly “digs deep” to lay the foundations!

But, if readers view his publications only as an academic challenge, then they have missed the point. The point of Schipani’s publications is rather to challenge traditional ways of doing Christian religious education, which have been manipulative and quietistic, which have not fostered countercultural ways of living according to the Reign of God, which have been comfortable without aiming at social transformation, and which have been grounded on other grounds than the Trinitarian God, who called into existence the church to be “the light of the world” in the midst of the present social reality. This is but an introduction of what will follow in the description of Schipani’s theory. But, before analyzing it, we will get to know him a little better.

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start an upward movement, that is, they dreamt of improving their social and economic condition... In fact, my dad always maintained that sense of needing to work hard and to strive for a better life.

Not only the grandparents made Pehuajó their new home. Also some North American missionaries came and started the first Mennonite church across the street of the Italian immigrants' house. For these missionaries, this meant making a "downward" move from Pennsylvania and Ontario, both in terms of moving to the South, as well as, in terms of leaving their peaceful and prosperous communities and coming to a place where they would experience many difficulties, including ridicule. Their friendly and persuasive witness which made Jesus' life and ministry become relevant for everyday life, their relationship with a personal God, and the warm family atmosphere in the church where the Bible was made accessible to the common believer were so appealing, that Daniel's grandparents made this "Evangelical" faith community their new spiritual home. It is here where Daniel's parents met and eventually were married by the missionary-pastor. In 1943, as mentioned in the beginning, Daniel was born and hence came to be a third generation Mennonite.

Daniel was a special child in his family. He was born eight years after his oldest sister. The strong spiritual life of his parents, their visible and consistent spirituality, their deep commitment to the Kingdom of God, to the church and to people definitely left an impact on his life. He indeed experienced genuine spiritual nurture in his family and church, and hence, he says, "for as long as I can remember I have always felt that I belong in the church." Now, this sense of "belonging" at the same time also meant "not belonging," since being evangelical meant to be different from the dominant [pre-Vatican II] Roman Catholic

Church. Consequently, Daniel was brought up in a countercultural way, so to say. This was not always easy. It was a challenge! He reflects upon this phase of his life as follows:

We went through some difficult times, especially during the years when Roman Catholic religious instruction was part of the curriculum for public schools and I was the only kid in my class who needed a special permission to do something else instead (the other kids didn't think it was a good idea).

But, as already mentioned, the example and teaching of his parents, the ongoing participation in church life, and the very good teachers and role models in the community of faith, contributed to the fact that Daniel did not resent being different from the majority. So, when he was sixteen he decided to be baptized. Now, at the same time that his church and parents prepared him to be different, they also prepared him to be open and receptive to new experiences, questions, doubts and corrections where necessary. Indeed, through his adolescence, the secondary school years, as well as the university years in Argentina, when he experienced numerous intellectual struggles and conflicts together with tremendous learnings and challenges, home and church continued being there for him. Reflecting on those years he says: "the church was always there with me and for me. And so were my parents and my sister." These observations give much insight into his later convictions about Christian religious education.

In 1967, Daniel was married to Margaret Anne Snyder, a daughter of missionaries. They had met during early childhood years and again briefly later. Their love story is unique, since it unfolded and developed through correspondence; Daniel's letters were mailed from Buenos Aires, and Margaret's from Madison, Wisconsin. Again, different! A challenge? The wedding was in the United States where they stayed for a short while. In January of 1968 they returned to Argentina, where their two children were born: David, in

1969 and Marisa, in 1972. Reflecting upon his marriage, Daniel makes following observation: “Our marriage is the blending of two very different stories, the ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ trajectories ....” This blend has been significant. Dialogues with Margaret have been very important and valuable for Daniel’s work and theorization in the areas of psychology and practical theology. Currently they reside in Elkhart, Indiana.

### B. His Educational Journey

After finishing secondary education in 1960, Daniel moved away from home to start his university studies. He attended the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) from 1961-1965, where he graduated as *Licenciado en psicología* and *Profesor de enseñanza secundaria, normal y especial en psicología*. Immediately after, he went to the Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA), where he earned his Doctor in Psychology in 1968. These were years of much political turmoil in Argentina, known as the “the era of the military coups,” (Beeson and Pearce 1984, 104) which of course, also affected the university campuses with ideological turbulence created by the radicalized Marxist and Peronist groups present there. During these years most of the students at the university were atheists, and quite hostile to religion in general and to Roman Catholic Christianity in particular; and since Daniel was a Christian, he was not left unnoticed by them. All of the above factors, plus the nature of higher studies in psychology, sociology and philosophy challenged Schipani to clarify his own convictions and Christian values, and his interpersonal and institutional commitments ‘from’ his Christian faith stance. These university years also helped him define his twofold vocational inclinations, namely, psychology and counseling, on the one hand, and teaching, on the other hand.

After Daniel's wedding (1967) and before getting his Doctor title in Argentina (1968), there is a small parenthesis. He studies for a short time at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart (AMBS), Indiana, and spends 3 months as "post-doctoral fellow" at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). In January of 1968, Daniel, together now with his wife, returns to Argentina.

With the encouragement of John Howard Yoder, who spent a year in Argentina in 1971, Daniel and his family decide to move to the United States in 1973. There he attends AMBS until 1974 and graduates with a degree of Master of Arts (in Religion) Peace Studies (MAPS). It is here that Schipani's Anabaptist convictions about faith, Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the church, peace and justice are shaped and deepened, especially through the teachings of John H. Yoder (although, it needs to added, he has always evaluated him critically).

In 1974, a providential change of plans takes place. Schipani is accepted in the Ph.D. program in Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS). There he studies until 1976. It is during this time at PTS, that he studies in a systematic way the work and thought of Paulo Freire, who will shape his convictions in a deep way. It is also important to highlight, that it was through Freire that Schipani started having an interest in liberation theology as a focus of study and reflective dialogue. The personal contacts with Freire though, don't take place until the years 1982, 1983 and 1984 in Puerto Rico at the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico. Schipani graduates from PTS in 1981. His dissertation "Conscientization and creativity: A reinterpretation of Paulo Freire, focused on his epistemological and theological foundations with implications for Christian

education theory,” was done under the guidance of the dissertation committee formed by Professors James E. Loder (chairman), Richard Shaul, and D. Campbell Wyckoff (Schipani 1981, ii)<sup>1</sup>. As a final remark to the time of studies at PTS, it can be said that, without a doubt, the major impact that this institution has had on Schipani’s thought, work and writings is in the area of epistemology and methodology in interdisciplinary studies.

### C. His Vocational Activities

#### 1. Activities in Argentina until 1972

In 1965 (the year Schipani graduated from UBA), he starts pursuing his twofold vocational inclinations. He teaches at the secondary level and is Director of the Psychopedagogic Orientation Department at Escuela Cristiana Evangélica Argentina from 1965-1972. Starting that year, he also is an Associated Instructor in Profound Psychology and Psychoanalytic Psychology at UBA.

It seems as if Schipani had just been “dying” to graduate and start working, because those weren’t the only activities he was engaged in during those first seven years of his working carrier. From 1965-1970 he also works part-time, heading the Department of Orientation and Personnel Guide at Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes in Buenos Aires, is the Principal of a small secondary school started by Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes during its first 3 years (1968-1970), and is Professor of Development Psychology and Social Psychology at Instituto de Profesorado Juan Amós Comenio in Buenos Aires. Challenges that shape him!

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<sup>1</sup>From here on, Schipani’s name as author will not appear in the parenthetical reference, unless it is a co-authored publication.

As an outcome of the intense activities with youth in churches, with the Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes and as a teacher at the secondary and university levels, Schipani writes the book *Orientación existencial del adolescente* in 1971. This book was very well accepted, and in fact, it was given the first prize in its category by the Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la República Argentina (1994, 24). Shortly, before this book, he had already published *La angustia: y la dimensión trascendente* (1969).

In connection with a faculty seminar in 1970, when there was found to be so little literature on the topic of inter-faculty and faculty-school dynamics, arises another book, *Educación y comunidad*, written together with Dr. Daniel E. Tinao in 1973.

## 2. Activities Beyond Argentina and After 1972

Once residing in United States, Schipani's circle of influence is widened considerably. He welcomes challenges! While still studying at PTS, he is a Visiting Professor in Pastoral Counseling at Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico (SEPR) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. After the two years of study at PTS, he and his family move to Puerto Rico, and there he starts a teaching career for nine years (1976-1985); first as Assistant Professor and then as Associate Professor in the areas of Pastoral Counseling and Christian Education at SEPR. During this period, specifically in 1983, he also is a Visiting Professor at Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, in the Doctoral Program of Education.

In 1985, Schipani moves back to United States, and starts his teaching career at AMBS (where he continues until now) as professor of Christian Education and Personality. AMBS has made it possible though, that he also have a broad teaching ministry, which takes

him as Visiting Professor to numerous Seminaries in the United States, in Latin America, the Caribbean Islands and in Europe.

During this second period of his vocational life, Schipani also turns out to be a prolific writer. Most of his books are written in Spanish, and hence in the beginning, he was not so well known in the North American scene, as Donovan E. Smucker from Conrad Grebel College (University of Waterloo, Ontario) points out (1989, 309). A partial listing of the books he has written and/or edited follows:

1. *Liberation theology: a challenge for dialogue* (1976).
2. *El arte de ser familia*, which deals with marriage and child raising issues (1982).
3. *El reino de Dios y el ministerio educativo de la iglesia* , a book written for Christian educators and other people interested in the foundations and framework of a ministry of education in the church, which is characterized by two main tenets: the Kingdom of God, and its relevance and applicability in the Latin American context (1983, 7).
4. *Conscientization and creativity: Paulo Freire and Christian education*, which is a revision of his dissertation (1984).
5. *Los niños y el reino de Dios*: this book deals with Christian Education of children in a church context, with the backdrop of Anabaptist and Kingdom of God theology in a Latin American social context (1987).
6. *Religious education encounters liberation theology* (1988).

7. *Freedom and discipleship: liberation theology in an Anabaptist perspective*, which was written under the auspices of the Institute of Mennonite Studies (1989).

8. *Cuando se piensa en el aborto*, a book addressing abortion (1990).

9. *Discipulado y liberación: La teología de la liberación en perspectiva Anabautista*, the Spanish version of *Freedom and discipleship* (1993a).

10. *Teología del ministerio educativo: Perspectivas latinoamericanas* - a slightly reworked version of *Religious education encounters liberation theology* (1993b).

11. *Comunicación con la juventud: Diseño para una nueva pastoral*, a book which deals with youth ministries within a trinitarian ecclesiological framework (1994).

12. *Psicología y consejo pastoral: Perspectivas hispanas*, a book which stresses the church as the main healing community (1997, 24).

13. *Theological education on five continents: Anabaptist perspectives* (1997).

14. *Educación, libertad y creatividad: encuentro y diálogo con Paulo Freire*, which is written after Paulo Freire's visits to the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico in 1982, 1983 and 1984, and which portrays Freire's and Schipani's shared main emphasis on education, freedom and creativity (Schipani and Freire 1998).

Schipani has also written chapters in other books like:

1. Liberation theology and religious education (Miller 1995).

2. Education for social transformation (Seymour 1997).

And of course, he has written a number of articles in different periodicals, both in Spanish, as well as, in English.

From this quick overview of Schipani's challenging activities and writings, one can already see why he will describe himself as "a 'practical theologian' especially interested in church education" (1989, 1) with Anabaptist and liberationist convictions and values (1997a, 164). But, this will yet become more evident when focusing on his theory of Christian religious education.

### 3. Movements in His Spiritual Life

Daniel S. Schipani indeed is a person deeply committed to genuine scholarship and to a life of service. But, there is more to his person than schools, books and engagement with people. His person is not only outward-oriented; it is also inward-oriented. By getting to know part of his inner life, one will find that God is immanent as well as transcendent (using philosophical categories); that epistemology is a matter of being engaged in praxis in the world, and also of being in "God's secret." Therefore, it is very important to get to know Schipani also from behind the scenes. It's not that he has a double life. Not at all! He always remains a dialectical person, a person in tension and movement, a person in dialogue, who is being challenged and who challenges others. What follows is a direct transcription of part of his autobiographical reflection mentioned earlier, since when it comes to the "heart," it is best to let people speak for themselves.

#### Reflections for the three movements of the spiritual life

I have not experienced any of these three movements as a completed process already resolved in terms of solitude, hospitality and prayer. Rather, I find the recognition of the polarities helpful to identify specific, ongoing dynamics which involve a blend of conflict and struggle together with a focused challenge and encouragement for further spiritual growth.

#### From Loneliness to solitude

I am a strongly introverted person who has always experienced a rich, complex, and often wild inner life of the imagination, including the desire to be by myself for significant periods of time. Such character trait has always determined the steps of this movement in a unique way both positively and negatively. In spite of the living care of my parents and many other people, and not significantly, my wife Margaret, I have a tendency to fall back into a depressive sense of loneliness from time to time. This is an area in which the spiritual resources are indispensable for me, especially prayer and the reassuring message of divine grace I find in the Bible. I cherish the blessing of witnessing within myself even small transitions to safe and peaceful solitude as a gift from God. That in turn energizes and empowers me for the 'outer journey.'

#### From hostility to hospitality

For me there is a direct link between this movement and the one described above. On the one hand I am a caring and sensitive person who can actually welcome people in diverse circumstances, both spontaneously and in ministry settings such as care and counseling. On the other hand I often struggle to allow people to get emotionally and spiritually close to me. A growing sense of the world as God's world in spite of whatever is wrong and ugly, has helped me to become more hospitable. I have been and continue to be enriched by interpersonal experiences with many other people in different social settings in which I am welcomed. Allowing others to bless me is sometimes hard for me (a major lesson I had to learn very painfully a couple of years ago when I was hospitalized for 15 days!); when that happens, then not only do I experience care but I am more open to be hospitable myself...

#### From illusion to prayer

Learning to pray and being encouraged to pray in church and at home are pleasant memories from my childhood and early adolescence. As I developed the practice of praying, however, I also developed some personal habits and forms of praying. Again, I can see a correlation between this polarity and the others in the larger framework of my faith journey.

Concerning illusion, for me there have been mainly two kinds: on the one hand, illusion is connected with a sense of inadequacy; on the other hand, it is associated with pride and self-aggrandizement. Therefore, among other things, prayer becomes essential for me to gain a better sense of reality. During the last few years I have learned to appreciate and to practice several forms of prayer which provide conditions for further spiritual formation.

I realize that the movements and changes in my faith journey correlate closely with the unfolding chapters of my life story. I know that I must always make the psalmist prayer my own. "So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart" (90:12). And I also know that, when all is said and done, my (our) personal testimony may echo the words of the apostle Paul in my (our) particular contexts: "By the grace

of God I am what we are, and God's grace towards me has not been in vain" (1Cor 15:10). Praise be to God.

## II. Development of Schipani's Theory of Education

Attempting to take on the challenge to synthesize and systematize someone's theory of education that is dialectical in method and content, that is a theory made "on the road," and that is "under construction,"<sup>2</sup> is not a simple task, and also doesn't quite do justice to its content and methodology. Besides, Schipani also sometimes uses a style of writing, which Patrick M. Devitt describes as follows in his review of *Religious education encounters liberation theology*:

I came to see in this book a very interesting movement, which is not linear but rather spiral. As one ascends or descends a spiral staircase, one sees the floor, roof and walls from differing points of view. Arguably this is better than just going forward and looking straight ahead. (1991, 91)

This style of writing certainly has its advantages, but it makes it a little more difficult to systematize and summarize the concepts in a paper as this one. We will not be able to fully do justice to all the "differing points of view" that could be seen when ascending or descending a "spiral staircase," but will need to take the short-cut of a "straighter road" for the sake of space and time.

We will first take a look into the context of Schipani's theory (which already is part of the theorizing), then we will consider the main foundations for it, the guiding principle, and lastly the theory in its narrower sense, by looking into the key questions that it will give answers to.

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<sup>2</sup>Schipani is releasing a new book during 1999-2000, which promises to be very illuminative and helpful.

### A. The Context for the Theory

Every theory of education has (1) its *Sitz-im-Leben*, to which it intends to give an answer, critique and corrective. In order to do this, (2) it defines how reality is known and interpreted, and (3) who or what is the starting point for knowing and interpreting. We will now look at these 3 issues: (1) the geographical context with its historic/social, cultural and educational components, (2) the epistemological context, and (3) the ecclesial context.

#### 1. The Geographical Context

Since Daniel S. Schipani is “engaged in theological education in the Chicago area, Latin America and the Caribbean,” (1997a, 164) he will address both the North American scene, as well as the Latin American scene. Now, of course, because of his interests, he gives priority to the latter.

##### a) The Latin American Context

Some of the characteristics that Schipani highlights, when describing the Latin American context, in order to put his theory into its *Sitz-im-Leben*, are following:

(1) The historic/social-political context. Generally speaking, Latin America is in a situation of much political and economical uncertainty, with constant power struggles, intervention of military forces in the political life, and a small ruling elite over against big majority of people who are getting poorer every day with little chances of “ascending the ladder.” Added yet to these factors, are (a) the consumerist society and culture, which creates the necessity to “have” in order to “be someone”, both in terms of material as well as

academic achievements, and (b) the increasing globalization with its neo-liberal ideology, which makes the breach between the “have” and “have-not” even bigger. This of course, generates on the one hand, a situation of resignation and frustration, and on the other, a situation of confused hopes and resentment (1994, 17-25; 1999c; García 1987, 19-23).

(2) The cultural/religious context. There are two main cultural/religious contexts in Latin America: the Roman Catholic, and the non-Roman Catholic or “Evangelical.” In order to better understand Schipani’s emphasis in his theory of Christian religious education, we need to have a look at the underlying Christology present in these contexts. In the Catholic context there is

the predominant portrait of the suffering, defeated, and basically passive Christ as often depicted in art: hanging on the cross, as a corpse and as a helpless child on the bosom of Mary. The other classic image of Christ in Latin America is that of the idealized and glorified heavenly king, presented in imperial garments as the almighty Ruler. Both are historically associated with Spain’s imperialist and colonialist project in the Americas.

.....  
 The Jesus of the cross is transfigured into a symbol of the defeat and resignation of the people; the risen Christ of glory is effectively demoted to the rank of a propaganda minister in the service of oppressive regimes and systems. (1988, 73, 75)

In the “Evangelical” context, generally speaking, the focus has been on the death and resurrection of Christ, with a slightly different accent: (a) Jesus as Savior, who dies vicariously, atones the guilt and eases the anguish of the sinner--fundamentalists; and (b) Jesus, as healer who liberates of physical and spiritual bondage--Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals (García 1987, 25).

So, in both contexts, the stress has been predominantly on Christology “from above,” (transcendence) rather than “from below” (immanence). Now, of course, it needs to be said,

that in both contexts there have been new tendencies, due to factors such as the rise of Liberation Theology and the return to Radical Anabaptist convictions (García 1987, 25; 1989, 1-5; Driver 1989, 101-111). Schipani, as we will see later, turns his attention to both.

(3) The educational context. Education, both in the public school systems, as well as in the churches has been done predominantly according to the “banking” model, as Paulo Freire described it. The main features of the pedagogical method used by the Catholic church can be summarized by two words: “catechetical” and “sensuous.” It’s indoctrinating and domesticating character aims at maintaining and sacralizing the status quo (1984, 111-112). In Schipani’s publications, education in the Protestant churches, is also generally described, in a rather negative way: it is conservative in its approach to the Bible and doctrine, it is disassociated from the social reality, it has a ghetto mentality, has narrow objectives for Christian education and its programs are fragmented. Evangelicals have been preoccupied mainly with “winning souls,” “teaching the Bible,” and “improving the quality of the members”; in other words, preoccupied mainly with experiences and activities within the church, and little concern for the social/political context of the world. To a great extent education is reduced to expository instruction (1983, 17-21; 1984, 112-116).

Again, of course, as Schipani and others will point out, changes are occurring. But, the brief description above, is the educational context Schipani will be responding to (García 1987, 25).

## b) The North American Context

We will not describe this context with too much detail; but since Schipani also addresses educational issues in the North American church, we need to mention at least some main points of contention. When writing for the North American context, Schipani addresses issues such as:

. . . the dominant values of contemporary U.S. life such as achievement, affluence, individualism, competition, consumption, and militarism . . . also . . . church practices of patriarchy, moralism, legalism, and lack of compassion . . . domestication [i.e.] . . . compliance, indifference, or complicity with structures of injustice, oppression, and neglect. (1997b, 28)

He is not so much concerned with

. . . the erosion of respectability on the part of religion in certain circles—that is, its trivialization in the legal and political cultures and its marginalization in the public square . . . . Instead, my primary concern is with the “cultures of disbelief” within the ecclesial community—that is, the church’s own cultural captivities, its own trivialization of educational and ministry goals, its own pursuit of conventional wisdoms (and thus, also, conventional politics and ethics) while accommodating and conforming to the dominant culture. (1997a, 165)

Having defined the context within which Schipani works and which he addresses, we now need to analyze, what is needed to offer alternatives to such a context and how these can be known and interpreted in order to be able to look for foundations for the theory, which in turn will give practical answers to the problems and then pose new questions (1983, 7-8, 138-146, 152; 1984, 116-122).

## 2. The Epistemological Context

When defining the epistemological context according to Schipani’s theory, we need to be referring to at least three aspects: revelation, orthopraxis and the church.

a. Revelation

Schipani, insists that, “in practico-theological reflection upon faith and educational ministry, revelation has *noetic*, or cognitive, priority. That is, revelation must remain the normative point of departure epistemologically.” (1997a, 167)

Now, what does he mean by that?

(1) The nature of revelation. Revelation has following characteristics:

(a) Revelation is a gift of divine disclosure. This “is the basic epistemological presupposition and point of departure in Christian theology and ministry.” (1997a, 167-168) Christian faith is always the unveiling of something (Someone) which (who) could not be known just through human reasoning. And this gift “cannot be possessed, manipulated or controlled, for God eludes our grasp in the moment of encountering us.” (1997a, 168)

(b) Revelation is a process and relationship between subjects. In other words, it is “a meeting of persons in which humans are attending agents-subjects within events of divine disclosure.” (1997a, 168) It therefore, can never be reduced to a set of manageable and manipulable dimensions, nor equated with “principles, ideas, or dogmas that are assumed to be ‘revealed truths’ and that lead to authoritarian views or and approaches to religious education.” (1997a, 168) It is not so much “something” that is revealed, but “Someone” who is revealed. This understanding of revelation, will have implications for the how of education as well as its substantive content (1997a, 167, 169).

(c) Revelation connotes potential transformation through the transforming of imagination. Divine revelation will always have the intent “to address and transform the whole

of our being . . . ‘mind,’ heart,’ and ‘will’.” (1997a, 171) Hence, as people are recipients of revelation, they need to respond to it in a wholistic way, and not reduce reception of revelation to ecstatic spiritual experiences (spiritualization), nor to an act of knowing (intellectualization), nor to active engagement in the practice of doing justice (‘praxis’). While addressing and grasping all of our being, revelation will transform our imagination, compelling us into seeing afresh, hoping, and acting (1997a 170-171).

(2) The loci of revelation. Revelation is found:

(a) In the historical events and centered on Jesus as the Christ. Following, both Anabaptist and Liberation Theology emphasis, Schipani will affirm that “Christian faith is a christocentric revelational religion.” (1997a, 169)<sup>3</sup> Now, less this be misunderstood, it needs to be added that, Schipani will stress very much that, God is about to bring liberation, salvation and shalom (his Kingdom) through Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, and thus he reveals himself in the historical context. Hence, the historical context (in which the Word—Christ was revealed), is a *locus* of revelation. When referring to the Word in history, Schipani will also be aware of and try to not fall into the danger of interpreting the historical Christ as primarily a prophet who confronts and subverts the social order, nor to interpret the cross event only in political terms (1997a, 169-170; 1988, 80).

(b) The church. Schipani will stress that,

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<sup>3</sup>See also, Schipani 1989, 1.

The point is not that churches possess a revelation and that they must somehow strive to conform to it; rather the claim is that they are called to become revelation, that is sacramental communities in the sense of truthful, living symbols and signs of divine

love in the world and for the sake of the world. It is as truthful revelation that faith communities are especially equipped and empowered to participate in formation and transformation as fruitful contexts for religious education. By becoming revelation, faith communities provide grace-filled glimpses of what one might call the “good form” of life in the light of God. (1997a, 165-166)<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the church is to be a sacrament, a place of revelation in a threefold sense (1) of symbol, icon or image--representing God’s life and will, (2) of sign--pointing to God’s presence and activity, and (3) of agent--being an instrument of God’s grace and salvation (1997d, 9).

(c) The poor. In line with Liberation Theology, Schipani will talk about the need for an “epistemological conversion.” This is to mean that, in order to know, we will not first and most go to books, knowing will not be primarily an act of cognitive appraisal by “intelligent” people; but rather it will be a matter of giving priority to hearkening to the marginalized, the poor (and the children) and their way of perceiving reality. They are a very important *locus* of revelation. This is due to the fact, that “God’s revelation contains in itself a partiality in favor of the weak, the victim, the oppressed.” (1988, 224) Now again, Schipani will offer a critique to Liberation Theology, and remind us that when having said the above statements, we can’t conclude that the poor are automatically part of “God’s people” just because they are poor. They also need to be confronted with their sin, and they do not have a moral privilege over against the rich (1985, 33-42; 1988, 215-226, 230-235; 1997b, 29).

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<sup>4</sup>See also, Schipani 1997b, 39.

(d) The Bible. Within the Anabaptist framework, Schipani holds following convictions concerning the Bible: “it is God’s Word written and its authority has its ultimate source in God; it must be interpreted, understood and applied to our life and ministry in the light of Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church.” (1997d, 6)

Now, he also adds two qualifying notes: “we recognize that the study of the Bible is not an end in itself—it must happen for the sake of growth in the love of God and neighbor; further, the ultimate foundation for our life is not the Bible but Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:11).” (1997d, 6)

So, “the Bible witnesses to God’s Word [Jesus] in such a way that it becomes the indispensable text for the faith community, the book for the people.” (1995a, 298-299) Being the book of the people, the Bible is “liberated”. It no longer remains mainly in the hands of the teachers, scholars and pastors (these are now servant-leaders and co-disciples), but it is reappropriated by the common people. And secondly, it “is ‘liberated’ through communal discernment of ideological captivities which prevent us from being challenged and empowered by God’s Word.” (1995a, 299)

#### b. Orthopraxis

How are we able to know in order to offer alternatives to the context that the educational theory is responding to? It is here that Schipani draws from Radical Anabaptism and Liberation Theology in order to offer a different way of knowing that will help bring correctives to the problems that the educational theory addresses.

Both, Radical Anabaptism, as well as biblical Liberation Theology, stress that the prerequisite to know is to follow Jesus in obedience: obedience as epistemological principle

(1988, 125; 1989, 1; 1995a, 298; 1997d, 30). The dualistic distinction between a theoretical knowledge of truth and practical applications of it simply cannot claim a biblical base because the scriptural records point to correct our right knowing as being contingent on faithful doing. In other words, the knowledge that counts and matters—the knowledge of God—is disclosed in righteous action. Wrongdoing is ignorance and disbelief; further, there is no such thing as neutral knowledge (or lack of it) (1988, 121).

Now, Schipani rightfully calls attention to the danger of falling into pragmatism, if there is no other norm of evaluating Christian praxis outside of historical praxis itself. He points out that,

praxis must be evaluated in light of criteria derived from revelation, and from biblical revelation especially lest doing the truth becomes equivalent to *making* the truth through historical praxis, rather than *practicing* the truth which ultimately is being revealed to us. . . . Rather than emphasizing the unity of theory and practice, it is then preferable to highlight consistently the integration of *knowing* (theoretical or otherwise) and *obeying* with a twofold and simultaneous concern with both faithfulness to God's word and relevance to the historical situation. Praxis may then be seen as both reflective and contemplative as well as biblically anchored. (1988, 136-137)

At the same time, he also points out that, orthodoxy and orthopraxis must remain in dialectical unity, without subsuming the first under the second (1988, 137).

### c. Hermeneutical Circulation

In order to not fall into the above mentioned pragmatism, Schipani's emphasizes the need of practicing a "hermeneutical circulation." Hermeneutical circulation is a multiway conversation which

. . . consists in the interplay between the scriptural text in its historical context and the ecclesial community reading the text in light of the current historical situation. The circular character of this interpretation stems from the fact that each new reality

compels us to discern and interpret God's Word afresh, to transform reality accordingly, and then go back and reinterpret the Word of God again. (1988, 174-175)

This multiway conversation is illustrated in Figure 1 (See Figure 1 (1997d, 31).

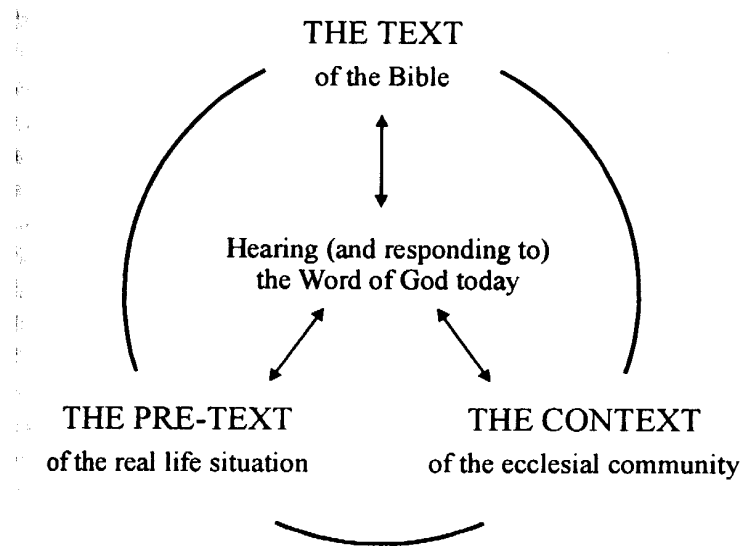


Figure 1: The Hermeneutical Circulation

Now, Schipani warns against reducing the hermeneutical circulation to a cognitive exercise, to a process of mere observation, analysis and application, to a process done just to better interpret the Bible. One ought not to overlook the mystical and spiritual roots of Christian faith and praxis, nor its past with the traditions. The hermeneutical circulation must also conduce to worship, growth in the life of communion within the body of Christ, empower for witness and service; it must help to see reality more clearly and transform it more faithfully. All of this needs to happen in the framework of a prayerful and worshipful

spirit, which of course, shouldn't necessarily be equated with a cultic or liturgical context (1988, 189-190; 1992, 126-128; 1995a, 299; 1997d, 32).

### 3. The Ecclesial Context

The above observation just made, leads naturally to the last aspect of context which needs to be taken into account: the ecclesial community. Schipani, in consonance with Radical Anabaptism and biblical Liberation Theology (plus, of course, his own childhood and youth experiences), without a doubt will emphasize that, the starting point for knowing and interpreting the reality in order to bring alternatives to the problems encountered in the context described in the beginning, "is the church itself in the midst of the socio-historical situation." (1988, 118) Hence, it is made clear that the educational process is the responsibility of the community, not of individual "theologians." These are not negated, but they need to work in the context and in dialogue with the church; they need to be part of the ecclesial community (context) in the hermeneutical circulation. Thus, conceiving the church as epistemological context, it is possible to reconcile, integrate and foster mutual enrichment between "theological education"--usually reserved for the leadership or "clergy" and restricted to specialized institutions, and "Christian religious education"--generally referred to the "laity" (1985, 48-49; 1988, 226; 1992, 127).

All this to underscore once more that, which for Schipani, is key for the process of Christian religious education theory, namely, that it be "communal, dialogical, collaborative and discipleship/ ministry-oriented." (1997d, 30)

## B. The Foundations for the Theory

As disciplines, education in general, and Christian education in particular, have a derivative character. Therefore, they need to take into consideration the contributions of the human sciences, as well as the reflections of theology, examined of course, in the light of the socio-cultural reality and the educational practice in particular (1983, 8, 152; 1984, 116-117). In this regard, Schipani stresses D. Campbell Wykoff's observation, namely, that "Christian education can and must be theologically thorough and accurate, and at the same time maintain educational integrity and soundness." (1984, 117) These foundations will mark both the possibilities and the boundaries of the theory, when it provides the answers (and also new questions) for the problems and challenges that the educational practice encounters (1983, 8, 152; 1984, 116-117).

Now, before looking at the foundations, Schipani emphasizes that the relationship between the disciplines of theology and human sciences (psychology, education, etc.) must be governed by the so-called "Chalcedonian pattern" with its threefold features: differentiation, unity and order. This implies that, although they, on the one hand, need to maintain each their unique integrity, and on the other hand, complement the readings of the human situation, they nevertheless are asymmetrically related, and theology has conceptual priority over the human sciences. Having clarified this, we will now briefly consider the foundations for the theory (1995 b, 4-5).

### 1. The Human Sciences Foundations

Schipani concentrates on two major fields: education and human development theories, and education and conscientization/creativity.

### a) Education and Human Development Theories

Schipani here will acknowledge the contributions of development theories, such as cognitive development (Jean Piaget), psycho-social development (Erik Erikson), moral development (Lawrence Kohlberg), and faith development (James W. Fowler). Now, he also mentions several considerations that need to be taken into account. (1) Each person's growth/development is unique, and can't be designed and programmed in advance. (2)

“Moral/spiritual growth per se is not developmental in the sense of following a certain invariable sequence and a hierarchy of stages; however, as our life unfolds throughout the life cycle, the practices and disciplines of the Christian faith become more complex.” (1995b, 4) (3) “Development also brings with it increasing intentionality in and responsibility for the practices we engage in.” (1995b, 4) And (4) although these theories will help us understand the development of people as individuals, we always ought to consider their development in terms of the community experiences and the broader socio-cultural context (1983, 32-51; 1994, 25-34; 1995b, 4).

### b) Education and Conscientization/Creativity

Here, Schipani will draw upon Paulo Freire, whose “pedagogy and educational philosophy centers on the human potential for freedom and creativity in the midst of the historical reality of cultural and political-economic oppression.” (1988, 13) This philosophy emphasizes that, oppression is there because “modern society does not encourage authentic freedom and does not promote the development of critical consciousness.” (1988, 15) It instead uses a *necrophilic* (death-bringing) ‘banking’ model of education, based upon “the dichotomizing consciousness-world, the teacher-learner contradiction, and the lack of

dialogue and mutuality in the educational process and context.” (1988, 15) Now, if only humankind’s *ontological vocation* (namely, its potential as creative history makers) would be encouraged through *biophilic* (life-bringing) education, there would be freedom, justice and peace (*utopia*), which are the basic conditions for human emergence (1988, 15). So, what are key characteristics of *biophilic* education, which Schipani will appropriate in his theory of Christian religious education?

First, *biophilic* education rests on a close relationship between practice and theory, where these relate to each other not “in terms of opposition or superiority of one over the other, but . . . [in terms of] dialectical association that underscores the tension and critical correlation between the two as well as their unity.” (1988, 12) It is an education based upon an epistemology of *orthopraxis*.

Second, it is an conscientizing, an awakening education “that eschews instructional manipulation and ideological propaganda. . . . rooted in the Socratic tradition of the dialectical process of indirect communication between teachers and learners.” (1988, 19) It fosters a critical viewing of the socio-political context, both by denouncing what is oppressive and announcing how it should/could be; always aiming at transformation. It is an education which will help us to “see culture always as a problem and not to let it become static, becoming a myth and mystifying us.” (1988, 13) For this to happen, we need to move from “semi-intransitive” (uncritical immersion in culture) and “naive-transitive” (simplistic interpretation of problematic situations) to “critical transitive” consciousness, i.e., a consciousness which examines and questions reality in a structural and dialogical manner within the community of learners. In other words, *biophilic* education fosters people’s

“formal-operational” level of cognitive development (using Piaget’s categories), challenges people’s “radically conventional (i.e., pro-establishment) morality,” (using Kohlberg’s categories) and helps demythologize the “synthetic-conventional faith” (using Fowler’s categories). It indeed promotes a *vision or paradigm transformation*. Now, before, going to a third characteristic, we need to say that Schipani criticizes Freire on the overemphasis of the cognitive and verbal rationality. He argues that, “acquiring and developing critical consciousness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation and humanization.” (1988, 23) The noncognitive registers of behavior, such as affect and imagination need to be given more weight. Schipani also points out to the danger of falling into *messianic paternalism*’ and *elitism*, when referring to the would-be “conscientizers” in Freire’s model (1988, 12-24).

A third, but not last, characteristic of *biophilic* education: it is an education which will help people become *makers* of their culture, encourage them to see themselves as *pro-active agents* and not just as *re-active subjects*, and so fulfill their *ontological vocation*. It helps them see the potential that is *in them* for the transformation of their oppressive context. In other words, *biophilic* education, not only encourages freedom *from*, but also freedom *for*. For this to happen, there needs to be, among other things, immersion with compassion in the situation of the oppressed, and there needs to be a context of mutual trust and respect so that true dialogue can happen (1988, 25-29; Schipani and Freire 1998, 77-87).

Of course, there is much, much more to be said about *biophilic* education; but, these are the main points of Freire’s pedagogy that Schipani will blend asymmetrically into

his theory of Christian religious education. So now, we want to consider the theological foundations, which have conceptual priority over the human sciences.

## 2. The Theological Foundations

We first will briefly consider some basic theological presuppositions, and then take a look at two major theological themes which permeate all of Schipani's theory of Christian religious education.

### a) Basic theological presuppositions

(1) God. Schipani doesn't use the categories of "immanence" and "transcendence", because they are philosophical rather than biblical categories. He emphasizes that, the Bible will always portray God as being very present in this world, at work both in the midst of his people, as well as in the "world". Now, Schipani very quickly will emphasize, quoting Douglas John Hall that, although he is the "Emmanuel who will be 'with us' [he] will not be possessed by us," (1997a, 169) will not allow us to manipulate nor control him. He also is a compassionate and just God, who does not approve of the "manipulation" of the poor. In fact, God is not distant, inaccessible and domineering, and hence doesn't approve of "manipulation." (1988, 36) That is why "God is predisposed on behalf of the weak, the victim, the marginal, the oppressed." (1995a, 291) Another aspect, that is foundational for Schipani, is God's trinitarian nature. Now, in consonance with his Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, he will affirm the trinity of God not so much out of a concern "for doctrinal orthodoxy in its own right as for the ecclesiological and therefore ethical function of the

Christian doctrine of the Triune God.” (1997, 7) To this emphasis we will turn later in more depth.

(2) Humankind. Schipani also holds to a “trinitarian” anthropology, based on and developed in light of the God who is: Creator (humankind is created in God’s image), Redeemer (humankind is sinful and in need of Christ’s salvation), and the Life-Giver (humankind being promised new life in and by the Spirit). Not only is humankind’s “being” defined in trinitarian terms, but also its “becoming”, its growing towards the “good form”. The challenge for the growth process hence is, to have the vision of the living God (i.e., increasingly seeing reality with the eyes of God), the virtue of Christ (i.e., becoming conformed to the heart of Christ), and the vocation of the Spirit (i.e., the self increasingly participating in the life of the Spirit in the world) (1995b, 9, 15, 18). The form and threefold expression of the self is illustrated in Figure 2 (1995b, 21):



Figure 2. The Form and Threefold Expression of the Self.

Schipani stresses that, “[i]t is the grounding of the self in the trinitarian life of God which allows us to refer to it as *spirit* in the light of Christian faith and theology.

An additional note yet. Since God is Creator, Liberator and Life-giver, to be created in God's image means to be able to exercise creativity, freedom and true life (shalom). Hence, human emergence (emergence of the *imago Dei*) is related to the degree of creativity (being a co-creator with God in history), freedom and *shalom* life which humankind is or is not experiencing. All this, of course, seen within the framework of the mentioned trinitarian grounded vision, virtue and vocation (1984, 67; Schipani and Freire 1998, 61-63).

(3) Sin. Schipani will refer very often to the social sins (oppression, alienation, etc.). But, although some liberation theologians minimize personal sin, Schipani will acknowledge personal sin as one of the factors that contributes to the lack of vision, virtue and vocation in humankind (1995b, 14, 18, 21).

(4) Faith. Christian faith always begins with revelation, with the gift of divine disclosure (Schipani 1997a, 168). Now, this gift of divine disclosure, needs a human response (faith) characterized by faithfulness, a life of obedience (orthopraxis), and a new cosmivision and value system (Schipani 1983, 15). It can be said that Schipani, understands faith essentially in “terms of discipleship—i.e., committed following of Jesus Christ in light of the ‘curriculum’ of the reign of God (e.g., the ‘Sermon on the Mount’).”(1995a, 287) And conversely, to live in “disbelief”, means to fail “to embody a normative project of life according to the ethics and politics of God.” (Schipani 1997a, 165)

Having briefly seen some theological presuppositions, we will now turn our attention to two major theological themes for Schipani: the Reign of God and ecclesiology.

## b) The Reign of God

In the biblical documents, the theme of the “Reign of God”, establishes a close relationship between ontology, epistemology and ethics. The fact that God is, implies that he reigns (ontology); and in order to know him (epistemology), humankind needs to live in tune with his reign (ethics). Schipani discusses the theme of the Reign of God according to three types of implications that it has.

(1)Formal implications. First of all, the Reign of God is a call to *take seriously the One who reigns*. This is what Jesus does when performing miracles and casting out demons. Through him the Reign of God has come, and one’s eschatological salvation depends on the stance to his person. Secondly, the Reign of God *involves actual history*. It “is not something outside of this world or purely transcendent or ‘spiritual’. It is rather the whole of this social and physical world being incorporated within the rule of God.” (1988, 86) Hence, all (neo-platonic) dualism and all unilateral emphasis on the inner life need to be discarded. Of course, this Reign is also eschatological; it will be complete, through a future divine intervention, when there will be a new heaven and earth. But, meanwhile there is but one history and one liberation process. Thirdly, the Reign of God *demand political obedience*, “due to its concern with the issues of structures, interests, power, and socioeconomic and political projects.” (1988, 87) It’s curriculum is found in the Sermon of the Mount, and is closely related to the notion of *shalom* with its emphasis on peace, wholeness, well-being and salvation (1983, 80-85; 1984, 88-94; 1988, 84-88; 1993b, 102-106).

(2) Critical-material implications. First, the Reign of God implies that there is but *one Kingdom*. All loyalties to other “kingdoms” need to become secondary or even canceled in case of contradiction. Second, it is an “*Upside-Down Kingdom*”, i.e., it challenges conventional wisdom and requires an alternative way of knowing and being. This brings up the third aspect, which is related to *power and service*. Jesus exerts his power through service, love, sacrifice and truth. He never exercises it through imposition; and the same he expects from his followers. Here, Schipani’s stance of peace and love for the enemies, will not allow for the use of violence, and hence, it will differ with Freire’s stance, by which there is room for killing as an act of love (1983, 92-96; 1984, 94-96; 1988, 87-90; 1993b, 106-109; Schipani and Freire 1998, 191-192).

(3) Constructive-material implications. First, to announce the Reign of God, implies *creative power for transformation*. This new nonconformist community, as described above, is empowered to be an agent of change that creates new social and interpersonal models of human existence.” (1988, 91) Secondly, in order to do so, God’s people need to exercise *critical discernment*, appraising and critiquing the present order in the light of the ethics of the God’s Reign. Thirdly, the ecclesial community needs to be a *messianic community*, a contrast-society, with “a nonconformist lifestyle and a liberating model of social service.” (1988, 93) It is a community that loves indiscriminately, is open to God and others, and is a healing community of reconciliation (1983, 97-102; 1984, 96-99; 1988, 90-93; 1993b, 109-112).

## c) Ecclesiology

For Schipani, the church is not only *locus* of revelation, epistemological context and starting point for Christian religious education, but also key for setting goals of Christian ministries (which includes education) and defining content (structural and substantive). In fact, Christian religious education needs to be based on the nature and identity of the church, reasons of being of the church and the goals of the church, because it is its servant and facilitator (1987, 9-12).

(1) The nature and identity of the church. Since the church is God's creation, it "is meant to partake somehow of God's trinitarian nature and is called to be a sacrament of the Trinity." (1997d, 8-9) Schipani will concentrate here on three biblical images of the church based on the Trinity: the (covenant) people of God, the body of Christ, and the (dwelling) of the Spirit. Each of these images will determine theological qualities by which one can evaluate the church's growth. As *people of God* (1 Pet 2:4-10) the church is called "to walk humbly with God." (Mic 6:8) Hence the theological quality by which its growth can be evaluated is *faithfulness*. As *body of Christ* (1 Cor 12:27) it needs to foster communion among its members and with Christ as the head. In other words, it is "to love kindly." (Mic 6:8) Hence, the expression of growth is to be seen in its fruit (John 15), its *spirituality*. As *temple of the Spirit* (Eph 2:22; 1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19) it incarnates God's grace and power and seeks "to do

justice.” (Mic 6:8) The corresponding expression of growth is *incarnation* (1987, 9-11; 1992, 116-117; 1994, 46-47; 1997d, 10).<sup>5</sup>

This is illustrated in Figure 3 (1994, 49).



Figure 3. Trinitarian Model of the Church.

(2) The reasons of being and goals of the church. Taking into account again the trinitarian concept of God and its correlative to the church, Schipani also develops a threefold reason of being of the church: worship, community and mission.<sup>6</sup> And this, of course, is closely correlated with the “great commandment” (Mark 12:28-34) and its threefold love to God, neighbor and self (1994, 49-50). This is illustrated in Figure 4 (1997d, 21).

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<sup>5</sup>The first time Schipani develops this concept, he correlates growth in incarnation with body of Christ, and growth in spirituality with community of the Spirit (1987, 12-13). Afterwards, he prefers to change it, because “we prefer to stress the dialectical tension suggested by the notions of Christ’s body growing in spirituality, and the dwelling of the Spirit growing in incarnation.” (1997d, 11)

<sup>6</sup>The first time Schipani develops this concept, he uses “discipleship” instead of “community” (1987, 12-13).

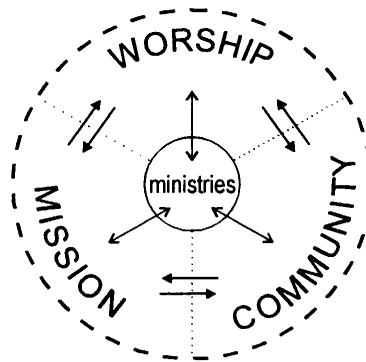


Figure 4. The Church and Its Threefold Reason for Being.

*Worship*: is the first reason for which the church exists. It is to acknowledge and celebrate the reign of God, in of course, more than just cultic experiences, since it has deeply political roots. In order to worship meaningfully, the goal of the church needs to be to *grow in vision*, needs to see God, itself and the world around it with God’s eyes, as illustrated so well in Isaiah 6:1-8 (1987, 12; 1992, 119; 1994, 49-50; 1997d, 16-17).

*Community*: secondly, Schipani points out that, the “church also exists to become community, that is, to embody the reign of God historically and socially in its own midst.” (1997d, 18) The goal of the church, hence will be to experience *growth in virtue*, growth in Christlikeness (1987, 12; 1992, 119-120; 1994, 50-51; 1997d, 18-19).

*Mission*: thirdly, Schipani says, that the “church also exists to be in mission, that is, to participate in the manifestations of the reign of God in the midst of history, and to witness by means of presence, word and deed.” (1997d, 19) In order to do this, its goal needs to be to experience *growth in vocation* (1987, 14-15; 1992, 122; 1994, 50-51; 1997d, 19-20).

Of course, there needs to be an *ecological balance*, an intrinsic relationship between all three reasons of being and its corresponding goals (challenges of growth); and all ministries of the church (including the educational ministries, done within the church and in theological institutions) need to exist for these stated terms (1997d, 52-53).

### C. The Guiding Principle for the Theory

Having defined the human sciences and theological foundations, Schipani states the guiding principle for his theory. This guiding principle will be “the unifying factor and ultimate inspiration of Christian education principles,” (1984, 117) providing both the *background* and the *clue*—using Randolph Crump Miller’s terms—for the educational ministry, answering questions to both, the scope (what?) and the process (how?), and being both theologically and educationally sound (1983, 21, 22, 105, 110, 194; 1984, 122; 1988, 94).

Which is this guiding principle for Schipani? It is the “Reign of God.” Why? First, because it will provide much of the substantive content (subject matter), which in turn, “is intimately related to issues of structural content and context.” (1988, 94) Second, because it will also evoke the tension between the “already” (Kingdom as gift and promise of God) and the “not yet” (reminding us of the demands of the Kingdom). Third, because it will be a corrective and creative (offering alternatives) evaluation tool to assess “the theological critique of alienating Christs taught, or indoctrinating instructional techniques, and the theological endorsement of dialogue, critical discernment, and a utopian-hopeful orientation.” (1988, 94; 1995a, 303)

The reign of God, of course needs to be connected with the reason for being of the church, and hence, Schipani gives following summary:

Therefore, simply put, the guiding principle calls for the educational task of discipling to be perceived, oriented, and evaluated in the light of the gospel of the reign of God. And such a task, as far as the church's life and its threefold reason for being is concerned—that is, worship, community, and mission—must serve three fundamental functions: a) enabling for worship. . . ; b) equipping for community . . . ; c) empowering for mission . . . . Simply stated, Christian religious education for the reign of God must be comprehensibly concerned with the fulfillment of the great commandment regarding love of God and neighbor. (1995a, 303-304)

Having pointed out the guiding principle, we now are ready to look at the theory of Christian religious education.

#### D. The Theory of Religious Education

An introductory comment to theory building is given by Schipani: “the whole endeavor of theory building and rebuilding in Christian education is dynamic, multidirectional, and theory is to be seen closely and continuously interrelated with practice. Actually, the integration of theory and practice is an imperative for religious education.” (1984, 120)

In light of this comment, we will now look at some key issues for which the theory will give principles.

##### 1. The Overall Purpose

Schipani defines the overall purpose of Christian religious education as follows:

. . . the overall purpose is to sponsor people to appropriate the gospel of the reign of God by growing in the life of the Christian faith, and by existentially responding to the call to conversion and discipleship in the midst of the ecclesial community whose vocation is to promote faithful citizenship and social transformation for the sake of

freedom, justice, and peace, make accessible knowing and loving God, and foster human emergence and wholeness. (1995a, 304)

The above statement, already indicates that the theory will be “in continuity with ‘reconstructionist’ or ‘sociopolitical’ perspectives on education” (1997b, 29). We will now take a closer look to key terms and phrases in the purpose statement.

a) “To Appropriate the Gospel of the Reign of God”

“Appropriation” (make their own) connotes

- [1] existentially responding to Jesus Christ and fulfilling the call to discipleship . . .
- [2] promoting social transformation for the increase of freedom, justice, and peace . . .
- [3] to know and to love God as creator, redeemer, and Holy Spirit. . . .
- [4] to become more human, or ‘to be more’ (1988, 99).

All this applies to both, the persons involved, as well as to the ecclesial communities as a whole, who are to be a sign of the reign of God (1988, 100).

b) “Promote faithful citizenship and social transformation for the sake of freedom, justice, and peace”

Christian religious education in Schipani’s theory, needs to aim both, at having concern for the personal, as well as the social transformation (1997b, 25). Hence, there needs to be involvement in society’s political and socioeconomic realms.

The forms and manifestations of power, the expressions of oppression and suffering as well as the quest for justice and peace, the role of ideology and interest, and the dynamics of social conflict, including political and educational strategies, must be included in a committed and contextualized religious education. (1995a, 304)

This will involve both confronting surrounding cultures, as well as participating “in God’s reign as compassionate, courageous, and caring citizens.” (1995a, 305) Schipani stresses, together with John Coleman that, “discipleship and citizenship must be integrated,”

(1997b, 32) that God's grace also is at work outside of the contours of the church; and hence, that Christians need to "put flesh on their hopes for a transformed future, the new creation based on the transforming power of Christ in history." (1997b, 32)

c) "Foster Human Emergence and Wholeness"

Schipani defines this in following way:

*Human emergence* denotes a process of becoming "more human" in terms of God's gift and promise of freedom and wholeness, living according to the ethical, political, and eschatological framework of the reign of God. Hence, the process of "emerging" involves a holistic process of formation as well as transformation. *Formation* is gradual growth and maturation, *transformation* is a process involving radical change and crisis, often characterized as *conversion*, which leads to the reorienting of the faith and life of persons as well as communities. (1997d, 26-27)

"Emergence", thus, points toward what commonly is called spiritual and moral growth; but it is by no ways "equated with psychological notions of development and maturation." (1995b, 4) In line with traditional understandings, human emergence would be connected to terms such as "formation," "discipleship" and even "sanctification." (1995b, 5) Schipani, also clarifies his convictions, by saying that he affirms that,

growth and maturation in the life of the Christian faith is first of all a gift from God as a divine promise to be grasped eschatologically. . . . also . . . I affirm the need to assume responsibility—at the faith community level as well as at the personal level—for the dispositions and for the "sponsoring" with which we collaborate with God's own Spirit. (1995b, 5)

The norm for human emergence is Jesus Christ, the central figure in the reign of God: "we must grow up in every way . . . into Christ." (Eph 4:15) Now, when describing the domains or dimensions of the human self that need to be conformed to Christ, Schipani suggests a reformulation of the "domains" that are used in today's psychology and that go back to Aristotle. Instead of using labels such as "mind," "heart," and "will," and

“thinking/knowing,” “feeling/willing,” and acting/doing,” he will suggest the use of following expressions: “vision of the living God” (key for knowing), “virtue of Christ” (key for being), and “vocation of the Spirit” (key for the daily living). And interrelated to growth in vision, virtue and vocation, of course are the following goals: “to enable for worship,” “to equip for community,” and “to empower for mission.” (1987, 12-15; 1992, 121-123; 1994, 53-54; 1995b, 6, 8; 1997a, 171-175; 1997b, 29-32; 1997d, 26-27)

What do these goal statements imply?

*To grow in the vision of the living God*, means to increasingly see reality with the eyes of God, and hence also be more compassionate with those who are suffering and are alienated (1995b, 9).

*To enable for worship*--which goes hand in hand with growing in vision—implies

to become more aware of and open to God’s presence and grace; to appropriate the biblical story and biblical faith; to gain understanding of the history and significance of Christian worship, to appreciate the role of ritual, symbol, story, music and other arts in worship, to learn the practices and disciplines of prayer, confession/repentance, offering/giving, and others; to acquire skills for worship participation and leading, etc.(1997d, 26)

*To grow in the virtue of Christ*, means that “the self becomes conformed to the heart of Christ” (1995b, 15) and includes being

a person of virtue (or character), meaning consistent moral integrity and strength. . . . Further, . . . we must focus especially . . . on the church’s becoming *community*—that is partaking of the divine reality of *koinonia* as people and family of God, body of Christ, and fellowship of the Spirit. . . . Further, this process must become analogously manifest in individual persons as well as in faith communities as such. Indeed, character as virtue must be seen as, fundamentally, a gift of the Christian community to which in turn individual persons are invited to contribute guided by the same Spirit of Christ. (1995b, 15-16)

*To equip for community*, which needs to be seen together with growing in the virtue of Christ, means

to help persons become aware of self/selves in God's presence; to embrace the biblical story of God's people and the historical tradition of the church; to gain interpersonal skills such as listening and communicating effectively; to learn to mediate conflicts and to resolve disputes; to develop attitudes and aptitudes for all forms of family life such as parenting or singleness; to learn and to grow in mutual support and, mutual discipling, group and community leadership; to genuinely embrace marginalized groups and persons (the unschooled, disabled, mentally ill, victims of abuse, and other), etc. (1997d, 26-27)

*To grow in the vocation of the Spirit*, means "that the self increasingly participates in the life of the Spirit in the world," (1995b, 18) which includes

the call . . . of God to human participation and partnership in the creative, liberating, and sustaining—renewing purposes and activity of God in the world, and, . . . also . . . a response with the total self to God's address and calling.

Second, . . . to find our ways of being and living in the world that are consistent with the purposes and activities of God[:] . . . God's work of creation, governance, and liberation and redemption . . . God as . . . (creating) "Parent", . . . (saving) "Lover", . . . and (sustaining) "Friend." (1995b, 19-20)

*To empower for mission*, which of course is correlated to growing in the vocation of the Spirit implies

to learn to recognize the Spirit's voice and work in the world; to receive and share God's loving invitation to good news/good reality in Jesus Christ; to develop awareness, sensitivity, compassion and solidarity in the face of prejudice due to gender, sexuality, race, culture, etc.; to join the struggle against structural injustice and oppression; to share and give generously, to serve the poor, weak, disabled, and marginalized, to relate responsibly to the non-human environment, etc. (1997d, 27)

Two final comments. First, it needs to be emphasized that, all of these goals are intimately related, so that, one affects the other, and can't happen without the other. Second, what has been said regarding Christian religious education, is not only pertinent to education that is done in church, but also to education done in the so called Christian schools, and in the

theological institutions. All Christian education, needs to be church based, serve the church and be done according to the threefold reason of being of the church (1993, 192-194; 1992, 123-128; 1995b, 13-14, 17-18, 20; 1997d, 21-32).

## 2. The Persons-in-Context

The above stated purpose only is achievable if there is the appropriate context, and as already stated several times, for Schipani the context for Christian religious education is the church. So, the question is what characteristics must the ecclesial context have, in order to foster appropriation of the gospel of the reign of God, faithful citizenship and social transformation, and human emergence in the light of Jesus Christ? Schipani will mention following:

a) The ecclesial context must promote mutual support. For this to happen, there needs to be equality, deep commitment, and interdependence, as Paul describes the body of Christ (1 Cor 12). Where these characteristics are present, there is confidence to explore, to risk, to change; denial and avoidance mechanisms are lowered, vision and power are generated (1983, 165-166; 1988, 245-246; Schipani and Freire 1998, 93).

b) The ecclesial context must foster a sense of self-worth and affirmation. This is based on the conviction, that “all human beings are called to be active, creative agents who participate with God in the ongoing liberation and re-creation of the whole world.” (1988, 47) Hence, the contributions of all involved in the educational process (teachers and participants) are important and need to be taken seriously, without being looked down upon. Interdependence and the possibility of co-creation are stressed, and the result is the liberation of creative powers (1983, 166-167; 1988, 247; Schipani and Freire 1998, 93).

c) The ecclesial context must affirm personal differences and vocational ministries. The contrary, i.e., uniformity and conformity, would not allow for the creative potential in people to come forth. The ecclesial context needs to welcome all people (and the poor even have an epistemological privilege), and affirm at the same time, the apostolicity on the part of the lay people, i.e., the principle of the priesthood of all believers (1983, 167-168; 1988, 248-249; Schipani and Freire 1998, 87, 93-94).

d) The ecclesial context must be increasingly open to the wider milieu. In no way may the ecclesial community come to be ghetto for pious people. No, it needs to exist “for sharing and service, in word and especially in deed.” (1988, 249)

e) The ecclesial context must embrace complexity and engage existential conflict. Simplistic and prefabricated approaches, as well as authoritarian and dogmatic answers are to be avoided. The church needs to develop tolerance for ambiguity and ambivalence in light of complexity of the situation in which it exists (1983, 169-171; 1988, 249-250; Schipani and Freire 1998, 94).

For this to happen, the sharp, rigid and traditional distinctions between ‘teachers’ and ‘learners’ needs to disappear. Hence, Schipani will often choose to use the word “sponsor” when describing the task of the educators: e.g., “sponsor people to appropriate” (1995a, 304), “sponsoring human emergence” (1995b, 3). This does not exclude the need for preparation and competency on part of the educators, but the emphasis will be on learning together and of being willing to learn from one another. Educators will be directive, but they will never interfere with the creative, seeking/questioning capacity of the participant, for that would mean to manipulate them. For this openness to be there, the educators needs to have

following virtues: have coherence between word and action, be able to live with a creative tension between word and silence, be humble and vulnerable, be willing to take risks, live with a creative tension between his/her “here and now” and that of the participants, overcome the “manipulation”-“spontaneity” polarities, have a dialectical tension between patience and impatience, be able to read critically the text and context, be open to risk, be willing to be displaced and relocated (Phil 2:5-8), foster mutuality and companionship, be agents of freedom to grow, love and create (1994, 69-73; Schipani and Freire 1998, 95-98, 110).

A final word yet concerning the educators. Schipani, will stress, that what makes religious education Christian, is not so much the Christian philosophy of education (although this is very necessary). What makes Christian religious education truly Christian, is the Christian and pastoral heart of the educator; that he/she be a true expression of the virtue of Jesus Christ, and be aware of only being a partner with the Spirit of God who already is at work in the participants. Educators need to be aware that, they are not bringing God to the participants. It is the other way around: God is bringing them to work along his side in those whom he already is at work with! Revelation being a gift of divine disclosure, must remind educators that, they “can neither guarantee nor ‘facilitate’ revelation. Nevertheless, the teaching ministry at its best is a ministry of grace, and as such participates in the gracious work of God, especially in terms of the realities of mystery and revelation.” (1997a, 168) This ought to cause educators to be engaged even more in respectful attendance (growth in vision) to God, the world around them and the people with whom they work, and to expect wonderful surprises to happen (1995a, 24-25; 1999a; 1999b).

So, following quote of Paulo Freire's words, is very fitting to put education (and the efforts of the educators) in the right perspective: "No caigamos en ese sueño pedagógico de atribuirle a la educación una fuerza fantástica que en realidad no tiene. Por otra parte. . . aunque no es la educación el motor mismo de las transformaciones sociales, las transformaciones no se dan sin ella".<sup>7</sup> (Schipani and Freire 1998, 99)

### 3. The Content and Process

What has been said above about the educators, i.e., their lifestyle, cannot be separated from the process (methodology) and the content. When educators teach about peace and justice (content), they need to do this in a peacemaking and just manner (process), and be peacemakers and just people themselves (lifestyle). Process and content are so intimately related, because the process is *structural content*--since the method is a form of process, and process is a form of content (1995a, 311; 1997b, 35; 1999a; Schipani and Freire 1998, 78).

To begin with, we need to say that, the process "necessitates the action-reflection-action paradigm as overarching dialectical process of learning, teaching, and transformation." (1995a, 305) This approach is characterized by three movements: *seeing, judging, and acting* and three main "mediations": the *socio-analytical* (or *historico-analytical*) *mediation*, the *hermeneutical mediation*, and the *practical mediation*. We will look at them a little closer.

*Seeing* or the *socio-analytical mediation* operates in the world of the oppressed and the suffering. It analyses the situation with the objective to discover and comprehend why the

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<sup>7</sup>"Let us not fall into a pedagogical dream by attributing a fantastical power to education which it in reality does not have. On the other hand, . . . although education is not the engine for social transformations, transformations do not happen without it".

oppressed are oppressed. *Seeing* (as well as the next movement, *judging*) has to do with *growth in the vision of the living God*. Such growth can be promoted through (a) respectful attending (to God, the world around us and ourselves), (b) perceiving with godly lenses (looking at and seeing people, like Jesus, with compassion and generosity, and also letting them know their shortsightedness), (c) critical consciousness (getting a deeper awareness of reality, and then denouncing and calling to repentance), (d) creative imagination (imagining better alternatives based on divine promise), and (e) spiritual discernment (“testing the spirits” in the midst of ambiguities). As can be seen, this is connected with what Freire called “the move to critical transitive consciousness.” (1995a, 306; 1995b, 9-13; 1997a, 172-175; 1997b, 33)

*Judging* or the *hermeneutical mediation*, operates so to say in God’s world. We need to discover God’s dream and plan for the oppressed, by prayerfully reinterpreting God’s own revelation—the Bible. With the Spirit’s participation, as well as the help of other resources of the Christian faith and tradition (e.g., teachings on freedom, peace, and justice), we try to link the present social situations with the gospel of the reign of God (1995a, 306; 1997b, 34).

*Acting* or the *practical mediation* operates in the realm of action. It consists “of exploring, implementing, and evaluating operational approaches consistent with both the people’s hopes for liberation and the revealed divine will for human emergence and wholeness.” (1997b, 34)

These three movements and mediations, are a reflection of conscientization pedagogy, which is fundamental in Schipani’s theory. At the core of conscientization pedagogy are following dimensions, which will serve as a summary for the process:

a) a collaborative and dialogical, communal context in which people can share stories and visions; b) participants engaging in critical and creative reflection beginning with problem-posing or “problematizing” their reality while; c) actively and concretely seeking better alternatives as partners in an ongoing liberation praxis (1995a, 308).

Some proposals for Christian religious education, in light of what has been said thus far are following: (a) education for peace and justice, as a “curriculum of service”; (b) transformative Bible study, based on the hermeneutical circulation (it doesn’t matter so much with which of the three contexts one starts, as long as all three are included); and (c) willful contextual dislocations, with its two movements of “going and seeing” (participants leave their comfort zone and immerse themselves in situations of oppression and poverty) and “welcoming” (openly inviting the oppressed and marginalized to become part of their community and being willing to learn from them). These dimensions, as can be seen, are content, as well as process and goal (1995a, 308-313; 1997b, 35-38).

Schipani, at a recent conference for Christian educators in Paraguay, has summarized it well: in order to educate in a Christian way, education will always need to be an artistic, moral, and political, task. It always needs to be fresh, creative, forming character and influencing for change. Hence, the rhythm of education always needs to have five movements: (a) contemplate/ admire (start out and be sustained by an expectant anticipation, respect and preparation for positive surprises that will happen in the learning situation), (b) commitment (interaction with participants characterized by love - “the pedagogical eros”, (c) give/receive form (respectful interaction with participants, acknowledging that God gives the final “form” to all involved in the process), (d) emergence (the interaction in the educational process will bring forth unique forms, that may be different from what originally planned),

and (e) give freedom (not binding participants to the educator). Such a rhythm, such a movement indeed makes education an exciting process for all involved in it (1999a)!

#### 4. The Content and Timing

When involved in the teaching process described above, it also is very important to be aware of the “when” question, for it to be effective and fulfill its goals. Four areas need to be taken into consideration in an interconnected way: (a) the past and future of the experience and praxis of the faith community; (b) the flow of history in society and world; (c) the timing of God (*kairos*) in church, society and the whole creation (be sensitive to his activity in eschatological perspective); and (d) the timing of human emergence, at a personal and communal level, i.e., perceiving what is happening in terms of learning and growth, formation and transformation, and hence, being able to better empower them for faith and life (1983, 182-184; 1995a, 306).

### III. Assessment of Schipani’s Christian Religious Education Theory

After having read and studied Schipani’s Christian religious education theory, as said in the introduction, nobody can remain indifferent; all will be challenged. And in fact, Timothy Arthur Lines, when reviewing Schipani’s book *Religious education encounters liberation theology* in *Review and Expositor*, writes

Two types of people need to read Daniel Schipani’s latest book: the passive and the naïve. The passive include those who assume religious education is a quiet, non-confrontive activity responsible only for the transmission of information. The naïve are those who think “shared praxis” is just another teaching method to be inserted into religious education. A reading of Schipani’s book should disturb the passive and enlighten the naïve. (1990, 368)

But, Schipani's publications are not only for the passive and the naive. They are also for the active and "enlightened." Of course, not all will say "yes" to everything, but all will be enriched, challenged and encouraged in their educational ministries. We will start by reviewing the major contributions and strengths, and then point out areas which leave some questions and lead to further reflection.

#### A. Major Contributions and Strengths

Among these, following can be listed:

1. Thorough research and serious study. What Schipani writes, is not just a spontaneous reaction and response to a given situation. It is the product of lived experiences, both negative (he has grown up and worked in the contexts he addresses) and positive (a family who has raised him counterculturally, but not closed to different views in others; a church that has played a significant role in his life and accompanied him in his development; personal vocational activities), and it is the product of serious, interdisciplinary study and research. Readers of his publications, will be led to many more sources of investigation through the references he gives.<sup>8</sup> He's also thorough in that, he seldom will "buy into" anything wholeheartedly. He will usually also point out the weaknesses and problems of the theologies and theories which he draws upon.

2. As an interdisciplinary practical theologian, Schipani is not simply eclectic. Other disciplines, which he takes up with much seriousness, are not just "thrown into a

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<sup>8</sup>Devitt, while reviewing *Religious education encounters liberation theology*, states that "the ratio of footnotes to text is about 1:3." (1991, 91)

melting pot” together with theology. He very insightfully applies the Chalcedonian pattern to very crucial aspects of Christian religious education (like the definition and dimensions of self, of humankind, and of the goals of Christian religious education), grounding them, not in secondary concepts, but in the Source of all sources, i.e., in nobody else than the Triune God (1995b, 4, 8, 22-23). Much trivia and superficiality, contradictions and deficiencies could be avoided in current Christian education theory and practice, if interdisciplinary studies were taken more seriously, and if the Chalcedonian pattern were applied more consistently, as Schipani has done it.

3. Schipani also is quite successful in avoiding extremes. Here some examples.

Although he stresses very much that God is present and at work in this world and our history and that epistemology is a matter of orthopraxis, he nevertheless, also admits that God needs to reveal himself (which is a gift to humankind) so that we can know him, and that church traditions can't be neglected (1997a, 168-169). Although he will stress that God is on the side of the poor, and hence the church also needs to take sides, he will add that they have no moral superiority; they also need to be confronted with their sin (1993, 263). Although for Schipani, growth in the Christian faith, is to a great extent a matter of formation (process), he will also admit that it is a matter of transformation (crisis, conflict) (1997d, 26-27).

4. Hand in hand with what just was said, also goes another strength: Schipani is very successful in bringing together traditional “dialectical” concepts into a “synthesis.” Here some examples. By pointing out to the intimate relationship between ontology, epistemology and ethics in education, Schipani makes null the common (naive) separation

that many make between theory and practice, being a Christian and a disciple of Jesus Christ. By pointing out that there is but one history in which the Reign of God has “set foot” on earth, there is no room left for the “spiritual/secular” categories. By grounding the goals of education in the threefold reason of being in the church, and by insisting that the church is the context for Christian religious education, the separation between Theological Education (formal) and Christian Education (non-formal), between clergy/ professionals and laity are set aside.

5. Schipani has given very pertinent answers for the contexts he writes for. For instance, (a) by insisting that the image of God in humankind needs to be grounded in God as Creator, i.e., humankind has an ontological vocation of being co-creator, maker of history together with God, (b) by insisting that Jesus was working /teaching in response to a social-political context, that “shalom” for humankind was in his agenda and that only he is Lord, (c) by insisting that knowing is a matter of praxis based upon the reflection-action-reflection movement, and (d) by insisting on conscientization, he will give solutions for common problems such as fatalism, “banking” model educational practices, domestication, pseudo-revivalism, ethical problems in the churches and others.

6. Schipani makes his Christian religious education theory very credible, dynamic and sound by insisting that content, process and methodology are intimately integrated and can't be separated. And what is the goal, needs to be content and process as well. By doing so--i.e., considering process as part of content—the participants in the educational process will feel more respected, and will hence, be eager to be pro-active agents

and not just re-active subjects in the educational process. They will have the sense, that when discussion and dialogue are used in the educational process, it is not just for the sake of making the educator feel satisfied with having been able to arouse “a good discussion,” and the educator will not be seen as a “cool observer of the methodology,” but rather a compassionate co-learner in the educational context. Hence, participants will not feel manipulated, but rather taken seriously in their context, eager to participate and will grow in self-esteem.

7. The characteristics of the ecclesial context and the list of virtues that an educator needs to have, make the educational environment very inviting, dynamic and inspirational. Participants in such contexts truly are motivated to be creative. In such an environment participants are not mechanically changed, but uniquely developed. Further, the emphasis on educators being truly Christian, on them growing together with the participants in the vision of the living God, the virtue of Christ and the vocation of the Spirit, will practically in and out of itself, change the whole outlook, process, goals and results of a Christian religious education in every setting. This emphasis needs to be recovered in our age, in which “how tos” and Christian rituals are stressed, in order for an education to be Christian; and consequently, instead of becoming more “salt and light”, it becomes more “gift-wrapping paper” with little to offer as a gift, while this world, that desperately needs the gift of *shalom* in the full sense, is left with torn “gift-wrapping paper” in its hands.

#### B. Areas Which Leave Some Questions and Call for Further Reflection

Unless one is very narrow-minded, it is difficult to critique Schipani's theory of Christian religious education, since he really tries hard not leave "loop holes", and to be all-encompassing. Hence, at the most, we will point out some areas that leave questions and call for further reflection and challenge.

1. Epistemology : it is very refreshing to be reminded that revelation is more about the unveiling of and encounter with Someone, instead of the transmission of static concepts. It brings dynamic to the written Word of God as we are reminded that, "God has spoken to us by his Son," (Heb 1:2) and that Jesus is the Word (*logos*) of God. It is most pertinent to emphasize that the church needs to become revelation, needs to be God's sacrament, icon, agent and sign on this earth. It is crucial and biblical to emphasize that knowing can't be separated from following Jesus with obedience. We also need to admit the fact, that we all interpret the Bible within a context and pretext; there is no neutral interpretation, no going "only" to the Bible and teaching "only" what the Bible says. And at the same time, the dialectical movement would probably be heightened if these truths were seen more as "one side of the coin" which need to remain in dialectical tension with "the other side of the coin." René Padilla tries to remind us of this other "side of the coin" by saying that, there is the danger of reducing the concept of revelation to an existential encounter, and that we need to remember that the knowledge of God has a belief-content (1989, 41), that

God's *logos* is an incarnate *logos*, but he is also a *logos* who has spoken, and his words (his *rhemata*) are spirit and life (see John 6:63)

.....  
 The obedience of faith—praxis—does not take place *despite* biblical texts but in dialogue with them in their concrete historicity. If theology is to serve praxis, and praxis is faith working through love, theology will have to be both a critical reflection on praxis *and* a critical reflection on the word of God which is addressed to faith *at the same time*. (1989, 42)

And in regards to hermeneutical circulation, Padilla says,

If it is true that the historical situation poses questions to Scripture (How can God be proclaimed as Father in an inhuman world?), it is also true that Scripture poses questions to the historical situation (Where are you?). . . . If theology is to be a reflection on praxis in the light of faith, it will have to read the situation in the light of Scripture and the Scripture in the light of the situation. (1989, 44)

When reading Schipani's publications, one sometimes has the impression that he not always does justice to "both sides of the coin," or that, although he acknowledges them briefly and corrects the one-sided views in the theological foundations, he doesn't always allow both sides to be seen as clearly in the development of the theory. For instance, while stressing that praxis needs to be reflective and contemplative (1988, 137), he doesn't let this be seen so clearly in the theory.<sup>9</sup>

On other occasions, he could allow for more dialectical tension to exist. For instance, while on the one hand admitting that "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxis" need to remain in dialectical unity (1988, 137), on the other hand, he will hold to a relational view of revelation (1997a, 169) and seemingly differentiate between the "normative" Word of God (Jesus) and the more "open-ended" word of God (Bible) (1995a, 298-299). He also says rather emphatically, that the church doesn't possess revelation, it rather becomes revelation (1997a, 170-171). Couldn't there be room for more dialectical tension to remain in all these cases, by allowing both to stand side-by-side, and not looking too soon for a resolution and synthesis?

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<sup>9</sup>It is more noticeable in his autobiographical reflection, in which he describes the movements in his spiritual journey.

Schipani very rightly has applied the Chalcedonian pattern in the relationship between theology and human sciences. Could/should a similar pattern also be applied to the hermeneutical circulation, where it seems that the text (Bible), the context (the ecclesial community) and the pretext (the real life situation) are almost equal partners in the multiway conversation (1995a, 299)? Could/should the Bible be in a more asymmetrical relationship with the other two partners? Could/should the Bible have more conceptual priority over them?

2. Anthropology: in order to offer a corrective to the alienating situations in which so many find themselves, Schipani defines the image of God which is in humankind, predominantly in its ability to be creative co-workers with God, making history and not just allowing it to happen (1993, 47-50). It is interesting that he will not define the image of God so much in terms of humankind's ability to reason and make decisions, although conscientization (analytical thinking) is emphasized very much in his foundations and theory. Could this be so because the first would lead more readily to orthopraxis, and the second more to orthodoxy? And how define the presence of the image of God in people who have neither ability (whether to create nor to reason)? Schipani will stress the need to talk about the self as spirit, but more emphasis could be put on the transcendent aspect of human beings, on "eternity" which flows in them and which makes them different from all other beings, and more elaboration could be made on how this would impact a theory of Christian religious education, without it necessarily having to be dualistic.

3. Description of context: Schipani will mainly concentrate on the socio-political challenges that the church encounters in the midst of history, and hence the given

emphasis that he has chosen in epistemology, foundations, guiding principle and questions to which the theory will give answers. He indeed has chosen a very pertinent slice of life of the church on this side of history. Now, there are also other “slices of life” which can’t be left out, at least not for churches in Latin America, like syncretism and occultism.

4. Application of methodology: could/should conscientization be used more, and with the same compassion as with the poor/oppressed, also with the rich/oppressors? If they are the “enemies”, should they be loved more, so that also they come to be willing to be a faithful part in the Reign of God? If conscientization works with the poor/oppressed, why shouldn’t there be hope that transformation would also occur, in team work with the Spirit, in them? At least, Jesus was a friend of tax collectors (oppressors) and as they were confronted with genuine love and correction, as their eyes were opened, they were willing to follow him as Master and Lord (e.g., Matthew, Zacchaeus).

5. The goal of Christian religious education: since Schipani occupies himself with the church in its socio-historical context, with educational ministries in the here and now (and there are practical reasons for doing so), he seems to overlook other aspects. He does not ignore them. He will even warn not to fall into a one-sided socio-political interpretation of history and of Christ. But, when it comes to the theory, there is little said about, what Padilla calls, “the supra-historical and personal dimension of the Gospel, . . . . on the question of the ultimate meaning of a person’s life” (1989, 44). To indicate that the educational ministries need to focus on sponsoring human emergence, on sponsoring appropriation of the reign of

God within the historical reality without alluding to something/Someone beyond humankind can put the present out of perspective. For the present (and the past) to have a fuller meaning, they need to be put over against the future. For human emergence to have a fuller meaning, it needs to be put within a bigger frame of reference that goes beyond it. When Jesus sponsors human emergence during his ministry on earth, he will often point out to a purpose that goes beyond human emergence: “so that the work of God might be displayed in his life,” (John 9:3) “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified,” (John 11:4) “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” (John 17:4) And of course, Paul, will point to this as well (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). Schipani in no way leaves God out! No, he very pointedly will stress that educators only are God’s fellow workers, that it is God who is at work (1 Cor 3:3-9), both in the church as well as outside of it. Indeed, he will be stressing the centrality of God in the educational ministry perhaps more than others who hold to more conservative views of Christian religious education. But, at times it seems as if God exists for the sake of humankind, and not so much the other way around.

## CONCLUSION

To get to know Daniel S. Schipani and his theory of Christian religious education indeed has been a challenge in many ways. And since the theory is to be “communal, dialogical, collaborative and discipleship/ ministry-oriented,” (1997d, 30) the challenge has not yet achieved its final destiny. The theory will continue challenging the praxis and allowing praxis to challenge it in return.

The challenge will continue being there because we live in a world which is in tension, and “in between the times.” In tune with Schipani’s emphasis, this will include that, educators follow the example of Lady Wisdom, who calls out “on the heights along the way, where the paths meet, . . . beside the gates, leading into the city, at the entrances” (Prov 8:2-3);

these locations indicate a loci of responsible activity ‘where cross the crowded ways of life.’ This sentiment is conveyed particularly by the image of the city gates, the place in the ancient world where decisions were made and justice was meted out. Wisdom invites her apprentice to enter the public arena and assume the responsible role the wider community expects and demands.

.....  
 Wisdom promises to serve as a faithful friend and teacher, one who patiently walks with the novice through the city streets, past the danger to the city gates. (Hinds 1997, 28)

As educators work alongside God, who is making all new, sponsoring human emergence in the light of Jesus Christ, they need to learn to rejoice, seeing it as a big privilege to work alongside the Creator, as Lady Wisdom described her work in partnership with God at creation: “Then I was the craftsman at his side, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.” (Prov 8:30) And at the beginning, as well as at the end, of the educational process it will be heard: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10)—there is but one Lord who needs to be worshipped and

honored through a humble obedient walk. This remains the lifelong challenge for educators and participants alike!

These are but some of the challenges that come through as one reads Schipani's publications on Christian religious education. And should we think that we have grasped his challenges, there is the possibility that he would join Paulo Freire in saying: "La mejor manera que uno tendría de homenajearme, de comprenderme, de entenderme, no es seguirme. Si uno me sigue, ya no me entiende. Hay que re-hacerme y no seguirme".<sup>10</sup> (Schipani and Freire 1998, 132)

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<sup>10</sup>The best way to pay a tribute to me, to comprehend me, to understand me, is not to follow me. If someone follows me, he/she no longer understands me. It is necessary to re-make me and not to follow me".

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