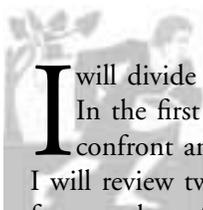


# ***Serpents and Doves: Being Smart in the Service of the Church Today***

**Rev. Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.**

*This address was given to the Midwest Association of Theological Schools at their annual meeting in September, 2008.*



I will divide my comments today into four parts. In the first part I will outline the challenges that confront an intelligent ministry, in the second part I will review two taxonomies of learning that can help form students for an intelligent ministry, in the third part I will suggest some applications of the taxonomies to the seminary curriculum, and in the fourth part I will offer reflections on a possible continuity with continuing formation. These remarks are somewhat episodic and autobiographical in character and I hope you will indulge me in this, but I speak as a practitioner not as an educational theorist.

## **I. The Challenge**

I am sure that many of us saw the film *Amazing Grace* last spring. For those who did not, it tells the story of William Wilberforce, the Member of Parliament who in 1807 successfully led the fight to end the slave trade in the British Empire, and in 1833 the institution of slavery itself. This year marks the bicentennial of the first of these successes. The film was well done in every respect, and I have to confess that I found myself with a tear in my eye at the end.

I had planned to see the film anyway, but the weekend before I did so I read a review of it in *National Review Online*.<sup>1</sup> Rich Lowry, the young editor of *National Review*, opened the piece with the arresting question:

*How does a society vanquish a social ill that is deeply ingrained, that benefits the economy and that directly harms only the utterly powerless?*

Sounds like a familiar challenge, does it not, as we face the power and panoply of the culture of death? He

**How does a society vanquish a social ill that is deeply ingrained, that benefits the economy and that directly harms only the utterly powerless?**

went on to observe:

*Wilberforce was a committed Christian, whose faith informed his opposition to slavery and steeled him against the reverses that inevitably attended his against-the-odds battle. His model is a useful corrective in the current debate concerning the proper role of faith in American public life. Defenders of faith's importance tend to get squeezed on one side by secularists railing against imagined offenses to liberty and the Constitution and on the other by the buffoonish antics of Christian leaders like Pat Robertson.*

Wilberforce prevailed by courage, persistence, and tireless argument. The film shows the gathering strength of his position, and the patience with which he constantly adapted his political strategies until he found one that worked. What impressed me about this film is the simple truth that the Gospel has faced steep cultural challenges before, and the stouthearted did not shrink back. They made a tremendous difference in human history, and we today are called to do the same.

In 2007, on the occasion of receiving the Pope

John Paul II Seminary Leadership Award from the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), Father Louis Camelli, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, gave a talk entitled, “Do You Have to Be Smart to Be a Priest?” Fr. Camelli is well-known in seminary circles, the editor of two documents of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB): the *Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests* (2001), and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (2006). No one was surprised that the answer to the question posed by his title was “yes.” I will let him speak for himself:

*We very much need a priesthood and priestly ministry that are marked by a strong and integral intelligence. The needed intelligence must be analytical, synthetic, and practical: able to understand, able to bring ideas together, and finally able to make things work. Why do we need intelligence in priesthood and ministry? There are pressing issues and questions in our day, and they will be worked out in the course of mission and ministry if they are worked out at all.*

*Neither the academic theology of the university nor the church’s magisterium meets these issues on the front line. Priestly ministry does. . . .*

*It takes penetrating intelligence to sort out what is this American culture and what is good in it and what is bad and what is neutral: individual initiative? individualistic pursuit of personal goals? freedom from external constraint? autonomy and independence from objective values? the priority of convenience in the face of life choices? the decency evident in trying to give everyone a fair break? making what is difficult invisible or putting it out of sight if it has to do with race, unborn status, disability, foreign birth?*

*It is a complicated dance to make faith come alive in a culture and at the same to critique and purify that culture, to embody faith in culture and to resist the culture prophetically. All this takes wisdom and intelligence. And it is a task that daily confronts a knowing priest.<sup>2</sup>*

I like that expression. It takes wisdom and intelligence. And I agree whole-heartedly that these must be analytical, synthetic, and practical. Priests must be able to size up situations and put them together with the correct ideas. They must be able to self-assess and self-

correct. They must be able to see real needs and organize the resources to meet them.

**We are facing a vast, ever-changing, and endlessly inventive culture.**

We are facing a vast, ever-changing, and endlessly inventive culture. In many ways it is being betrayed by its elites, who no longer believe in its foundations. Recently the European Economic Community could not even bring itself to mention its Christian heritage in its constitution. For others in the West, the tendency is to denounce that Christian heritage as the Dark Ages. This is not a matter of indifference to the church or to her ministry. A secular society is striving mightily to push us to its edges. And we must push right back. We have to be smarter than the elites. We have to be snappier. For instance, we never have come up with a good reply to the old canard, “You can’t legislate morality.” I mean, we know that you can’t legislate anything BUT morality, but that’s too many words to fit on a bumper sticker. And in a sound-bite culture, that is about as much time as we will get for an opening.

From a slightly different angle we also have to recognize that contemporary Western culture is not an alien regime that landed here from another planet. It is a direct descendant of medieval Christendom, and Christians today remain a part of it. Where the Protestant Reformers replaced a corrupt church with the stark image of man alone before God, the Enlightenment simply removed God. Now the post-Enlightenment is removing the notion of truth. What results is Babel. Richard Weaver once wrote that ideas have consequences. To a busy and practical pastor, it may seem quite a stretch from the intellectual history of the West to the young woman he is counseling against abortion, or the man he is counseling against vasectomy, or the couple he is counseling against *in vitro* fertilization, but the line is direct. We have to understand that. Our students have to understand that. We have to understand the philosophical and theological counter-positions that constitute that direct line. And we have to be genial and ingenious about the task of reversing their damage.

Jesus once told his disciples, “Behold, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as serpents and simple as doves” (Mt 10:16). Surely

**Jesus once told his disciples, “Behold, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as serpents and simple as doves” (Mt 10:16). Surely in this he was commissioning his disciples to an intelligently effective evangelization.**

in this he was commissioning his disciples to an intelligently effective evangelization. In the Catholic Church the priesthood will continue to play a crucial role in that evangelization, and seminaries and other formation programs will continue to play a crucial role in forming that priesthood.

## II. Taxonomies of Learning

As some of you may know, Kenrick-Glennon Seminary is in the process of restructuring its collaborative undergraduate program with Saint Louis University, in order to allow the seminary to staff its own philosophy department and to grant its own Bachelor of Arts degree. Our regional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, demands a fairly extensive description of program design and resources before it will authorize new degrees. While this has entailed a good deal of work, it also initially entailed a systematician’s dream—the opportunity to design a philosophy curriculum without any philosophers around.

Last year over one of our breaks, the director of the new program and I sat down to etch out the basic outline of the courses we wanted, and we recognized after about four outlines that the only type of learning activity we had described ran something like this: “The student will understand . . .” With my years of experience in dealing with accreditors, I recognized that this description was somewhat vague and monochromatic, and I thought to look for alternatives. In this I have to confess that I was moved by one the fixed features of an academic dean’s professional experience, namely, the anticipation of possible negative feedback from accreditation visitors. (To paraphrase the popular T-shirt, if the

accreditors ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.) But I would like to take credit for a little more than that. I had at least heard the term “taxonomy” at one or another educational meeting, and I knew that it had nothing to do with either taxidermy or tax law. So I went to the Internet, and thus began my introduction to the wonderful world of learning taxonomies.

### *The Bloom Taxonomy*

A taxonomy is a system of classification. The most famous taxonomy of learning activities was devised by a committee of the American Psychological Association and published under the editorship of Benjamin Bloom in 1956—hence the name Bloom’s taxonomy.<sup>3</sup> The taxonomy consists of cognitive, affective, and performance activities, but I will restrict myself to the activities of the cognitive domain, of which there are six: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. A word on each.

- 1) In *knowledge*, a student recalls information in approximately the form in which it was presented. Test questions to assess knowledge would ask the student to list, state, define, etc.
- 2) In *comprehension*, a student translates or interprets information based on prior learning. Test questions would ask the student to explain, paraphrase, illustrate, etc.
- 3) In *application*, a student uses data or principles to complete a task on his or her own initiative. Test questions would ask the student to use, solve, demonstrate, etc.
- 4) In *analysis*, a student distinguishes and classifies the suppositions, the evidence, or the structure of an argument. Text questions would ask the student to categorize, compare, contrast, etc.
- 5) In *synthesis*, a student combines or integrates ideas into a viewpoint or argument that is originaive and new for him or her. Test questions would ask the student to create, design, develop, etc.
- 6) In *evaluation*, a student assesses or critiques a viewpoint or proposal on the basis of explicit standards or criteria. Test questions would ask the student to judge, recommend, deprecate, etc.

The taxonomy involves several suppositions that I have found helpful in thinking about my own courses and in working with my faculty. The first supposition is that the taxonomy proposes a hierarchy of learning activities, in which later activities are more complex and

demand more skill than earlier activities. The second supposition is that the simpler activities are easier to assess, and so tend to receive disproportionately more attention than the later activities. The third supposition is that the later, more complex activities require prior mastery of the simpler activities, and that effective assessment of these latter encompasses assessment of all. The upshot is that education would profit from spending more time in teaching students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate. While a certain amount of knowledge, comprehension, and application is necessary to help students initially arrive at these levels, ultimately the achievement of the higher levels will create a cycle in which students can raise their own questions, integrate their answers, make use of the results, and cycle through again as needed—in other words they will grow in knowledge, comprehension and application on their own.

As I apply this taxonomy to my own teaching and to that of my colleagues, it allows me to make some fairly simple observations. Most of us are inveterate lecturers, and many of us are quite good lecturers. Many of our students, especially the brighter ones, respond well to a lecture pedagogy and complain about any variant. But a pedagogy based only on lecture and examination involves only the first of the Bloom activities, namely knowledge. If this is the student's only educational experience, where and when will the other learning activities take place? In the context of the challenge that I posed in the first part of this talk, how will the student learn to adapt and re-adapt to the vast, ever-changing, and endlessly inventive culture that we must evangelize? Alumni aficionados of lecture pedagogy would be continually obliged to find new lectures on the inventiveness and changes, and my general impression is that the presbyterate as a whole, with relatively few edifying exceptions, does not do this well.

I am of course overdrawing the point for effect. The only place where I experienced a pure lecture and examination pedagogy was in some of my courses in Rome, and that was long ago and far away. In U.S. seminaries today even our good lecturers require research papers or at least reflection, reaction or summary papers, and these indeed involve some of the higher levels of learning. Essay examinations or oral examinations do the same. Seminar presentations can involve good synthesis work. Theological reflection in conjunction with supervised field experience can encompass many of the levels of learning. And a summative evaluation exercise like a thesis or a comprehensive examination can truly be

a capstone experience that brings together all levels of learning—and generates good assessment data as well.

Let me resume my autobiographical reflections. After I found the taxonomy materials, I wrote a set of goals for each philosophy course proposing at least one goal for each of the six activities. It was an elegant achievement on paper, if I say so myself. I received some feedback from colleagues at other schools and tweaked the goal statements. Then we hired a philosophy faculty, and the cool dry air of the taxonomy encountered the warm humid air of reality, with predictably stormy results.

### **The Shulman Taxonomy**

So let me change the subject. How about another taxonomy? In June 2006 the Association of Theological Schools released Section Eight of its *Handbook on Accreditation*, “A Guide for Evaluating Theological Learning.” This publication was part of an ongoing project in the Association called the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation. The publication is a useful tool for institutions as they grapple with Standard One of the ATS General Institutional Standards, “Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation,” and with Section Five of any pertinent ATS Degree Program Standard, “Educational Evaluation.” Unlike most official accreditation literature, it names its author, Dr. John Harris, of Sanford University in suburban Birmingham, Alabama—and this may explain its tone. Accreditation standards, for instance, are usually written in a voice that sounds something like God in Cecil B. DeMille’s “Ten Commandments;” Harris’ pamphlet sounds something closer to “The Little Engine That Could.” In the most crucial part of the publication, Section Three, “Identifying Goals or Outcomes,” he proposes that theology schools might find another learning taxonomy more useful, that of Dr. Lee S. Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Shulman<sup>4</sup> proposes a taxonomy of six categories, each named by a pair of activities: engagement and motivation; knowledge and understanding; performance and action; reflection and critique; judgment and design; and commitment and identity. A word on each.

1) In *engagement and motivation* the focus is on active learning and on the students’ initiative and involvement in structured educational experiences. The extent to which these happen in initial formation can serve as an indicator of the extent to which they might continue to happen in ongoing formation after the degree. Harris writes, “A hoped-for outcome

of theological education is that M.Div. graduates found learning so meaningful that they continue to learn in and from their ministry. Documentation that graduates become lifelong, self-starting, active learners would be an indication of an educational program's success." But engagement and motivation do not address simply the question of a student's preparation for the future; they are also immediate ends in themselves. As Shulman observes, "Our institutions of higher education are settings where students can encounter a range of people and ideas and human experiences that they have never been exposed to before. Engagement in this sense is not just a proxy for learning but a fundamental purpose of education." Engagement, in other words, counters the widespread assumption that reality lies somehow outside but not inside the walls of the academy or the seminary or the theology school. Education and formation may indeed be limited experiences of reality, but they still afford real experiences, a reality worth investing in. Learning is something enjoyable in its own right.

- 2) In *knowledge and understanding* we find Shulman's equivalents to the first two activities of the Bloom taxonomy. Where knowledge involves the mastery of information, understanding involves the appropriation and ownership of what is known. Harris writes, "Understanding is knowledge that connects with the learner's experiences." And Shulman adds a marker: "Understanding means knowing the difference between paraphrase and plagiary."
- 3) In *performance and action* learners move from ideas based in their heads to a praxis situated within the world. This transition involves the acquisition of skill-sets related to professional standards, and the exercise of these skill-sets in a way that brings about change. Harris writes: "A student's learning of the theological dimensions of leadership is not ultimately gauged by knowledge of the concept, but by the ability to *exercise* leadership that reflects those theological dimensions" [emphasis added]. Shulman cautions us, however, against assuming that one must first understand before performing. He notes that this is not the case, for instance, in child-rearing. And he cites his own research on physicians and the art of medical diagnosis. "Internists," one of his sources told him, "make a diagnosis in order to act. Surgeons act in order to make a diagnosis." Many people learn by acting first, and many situations afford no more than learning of this kind.
- 4) In *reflection and critique* students learn by examining their work in its suppositions and consequences, its successes and failures. This is a second-order skill and paradoxically it is the contrary of the learn-by-first-acting that Shulman just described. Harris writes: "Professionals learn by critiquing their work. Such reflection not only allows them to improve their work, it also allows them to question the truthfulness or validity of the understanding that shaped it." If for example a new strategy or program does not work, the professional will question not only the specific failure but the ideas and values that shaped it in the first place. Harris concludes: "The ability to reflect on experience drives continuous learning."
- 5) In *judgment and design* both Shulman and Harris describe what a Catholic audience would recognize as the virtue of prudence. In judgment, "learners adjust a general understanding to differing circumstances and realities" [Harris]. This sets the stage for design, "which exercises understanding and applies skills under a variety of constraints and contingencies" [Shulman]. As Shulman observes, a home designed for California will look different from one designed for Michigan. In the same way, an educational program designed for an affluent suburban parish will look different from one designed for a poor urban area. It is worth noting that the circumstances and constraints addressed by this type of learning involve more than simply resource management. They also include political realities and a variation on what has been referred to as "the scandal of particularity"—the need to work with *this* particular ordinary or *this* particular colleague or *this* particular congregation, difficult or limited as any of these may be.
- 6) In *commitment and identity*, as Harris says, "people *become* what they understand, perform, critique, and evaluate." Shulman adds: "we internalize values, develop character, and become people who no longer need to be goaded to behave in ethical, moral, or publicly responsible ways." This level of activity also involves a conscious connection to larger groups, to society, and to the church herself, so that, as Shulman says, "we make a statement that we take the values and principles of that group seriously enough to make them our own." At this point, in Bernard Lonergan's terms, the learner becomes an "originating value," an instance of "incarnate meaning."<sup>5</sup>

Shulman is an experienced educator and knows the limits of taxonomies. In a complex world they always represent a simplification, meaning that some aspects of reality are given prominence while others fade into the background. He expresses misgivings, for instance, about his own taxonomy, noting that others might give more prominence to the important roles of emotion, collaboration, and trust in the educational enterprise. He is also wary of the ease with which taxonomies are pressed into service as ideologies or Procrustean beds. He proposes that his own taxonomy, for instance, may not unfold in any given student in the order that he describes, and speaks of the advantages of “shuffling the deck,” of recognizing that a student may start at any of the levels of learning and proceed haphazardly through the rest. Our programs and courses must be flexible enough to deal with this.

I am a systematic theologian and by temperament I am attracted to frameworks, architectonics, and grand schemes. As I assemble these thoughts, I am conscious of the fact that in addition to taxonomies of learning activities there are also compelling descriptions of multiple intelligences and varieties of learning styles. For that matter, I am conscious of the fruitfulness of the Myers-Briggs approach to the question of differing temperaments. What all of these schemata have in common is the realization that there is more than one way to do things, more than one kind of learning activity or style, more than one kind of intelligence or temperament. What they also allow us as educators to do is to vary our own programs and approaches so as to reach as many diverse learners in as many differentiated ways as possible.

### III. The Seminary Curriculum

Since Shulman is not a seminary educator, Harris takes care to relate Shulman’s taxonomy to the curriculum of a typical theology school. He does this by arraying the activities of the taxonomy on the vertical axis of a chart, against the areas of the M.Div. curriculum on the horizontal axis. He refers to the activities as levels of learning, and he takes the four areas of the M.Div. curriculum from ATS Degree Program Standard A.3.1, namely, Religious Heritage, Cultural Context, Personal and Spiritual Formation, and Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership. He intends the resultant figure to be useful for educators as they develop a variegated set of goals or outcome statements for their M.Div. programs. The levels of learning can serve as effective markers of student growth in each area of the curriculum.

At the same time, they can flesh out the comprehensive goals of the M.Div. program as a whole, including all the dimensions of formation.

**Harris: Shulman/ATS Chart**

Shulman's Levels of Learning	ATS M.Div. Program Areas			
	Religious Heritage	Cultural Context	Spiritual Formation	Ministry and Public
Engagement and Motivation				
Knowledge and Understanding				
Performance and Action				
Reflection and Critique				
Judgment and Design				
Commitment and Identity				

The fifth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, following the outline of the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, also speaks of four areas of formation (it seems the medieval *quadrivium* is making a triumphant comeback!), but the convergence with the ATS standards is not precise. I suggest that the one PPF category, Intellectual Formation, conflates the two ATS categories of Religious Heritage and Cultural Context, though not without remainder. I wonder, for instance, if our theology programs really do enough with the questions of cultural formation and critical engagement with contexts. In a similar way, the two PPF categories of Human Formation and Spiritual Formation are drawn out from the one ATS category of Personal and Spiritual Formation. Thus, although the horizontal axis of Harris’ chart would look slightly different for programs based on the PPF, the overall usefulness of the chart would remain.

### Shulman/PPF Chart

Shulman's Levels of Learning	PPF M.Div. Program Areas			
	Human Formation	Spiritual Formation	Intellectual Formation	Pastoral Formation
Engagement and Motivation				
Knowledge and Understanding				
Performance and Action				
Reflection and Critique				
Judgment and Design				
Commitment and Identity				

Charts of this kind look like an explorer's paradise to a systematician-dean. Which boxes do we put x's in and which ones o's? Well, at least the x's. As I thought about it, though, I found myself asking, would any of our formation programs really neglect (or admit to neglecting) any of these levels of learning? An argument could be anticipated that perhaps pastoral formation would be less focused on simple knowledge and understanding than on the other activities, and perhaps intellectual formation would be less focused on performance and action, but I doubt that practitioners in either area would completely agree. If this be the case, then what is the use of the chart? I would like to suggest that with bigger boxes or bigger flip pads it would allow us to see how each program addresses each goal in a distinctive way. Engagement, for instance, looks different in the areas of human and spiritual formation, with their intense interior focus, than it does in intellectual formation, with its emphasis on acquiring a body of knowledge, or in pastoral formation, with its emphasis on field experience. By the same token, reflection and critique would apply across the chart in all areas, but perhaps its internal objective would differ for each.

Another possible application might be to look to relative percentages. In each program, what percentage of emphasis or time is devoted to each level of learning? It might be difficult to generate a total of 100% over all 24 boxes of the chart, but it would be an interesting exercise to see how each of the four columns could add up to 100%, and what difference it might

make to the way that each program conceives and realizes its goals.

Last year for a faculty workshop at Kenrick I generated two versions of a third kind of chart. I put the taxonomy activities on the horizontal axis instead of the vertical, and in their place on the vertical axis I placed the names of all the courses in our curriculum. Then I asked the faculty to check off which of the levels of learning they each thought occurred in their respective courses. I was not surprised to learn that on the Bloom taxonomy, most courses incorporate all the taxonomic activities. On the Shulman taxonomy the response was somewhat more differentiated, but still mostly inclusive. Again I was not surprised.

### Sample Kenrick Chart

	Engagement & Motivation	Knowledge & Understanding	Performance & Action	Reflection & Critique	Judgment & Design	Commitment & Identity
1 Pentateuch & Hist Literature						
4 Synoptics & Acts						
7 Patristic Church						
11 Fund Theo & Hermeneutics						
18 Liturgical-Sacramental Theo						
24 Fund Moral Theo						
31 Intro Homiletics						
40 Spiritual Life of Priest						
44 Supervised Min: the Poor						
53 Summative Eval Seminar						

So far this effort remains incomplete, but in the spirit of the Shulman taxonomy, I hope it has been an initial Performance and Action exercise to facilitate faculty thinking about goals. This year at our opening faculty meeting I informed my colleagues that we will be working more diligently to assemble an assessment folder for each course, containing syllabus, goal statements, learning activities, accountability exercises (tests, presentations, papers, projects), scoring rubrics, grade results, and course evaluation material. My hope is that as an institution we can begin to have a greater clarity about two things: the derivation of course goals from

program goals; and the linkage of both sets of goals to the learning activities and accountability exercises of each course. My larger hope is that the taxonomies will afford us an opportunity to ask ourselves some questions about what we are doing in our courses, that they will give us a language and a frame of reference for the ensuing conversation, and that they may lead at least some of us to consider revisions or alternatives.

The effort will initially require a good amount of one-on-one work with faculty members, in which I will be asking whether and how course goals incorporate the various levels of the taxonomy—or any levels at all. Here I am not really looking for a distinct course goal for each level, and I believe in starting small. I will be happy if in at least some cases the conversation yields a new or reformulated goal, or a better-phrased examination question, or failing that, maybe a bigger font on the examination form, or failing that, even a vague acknowledgment that somehow Jesus is the judge of us all. Once again the cool dry air of the taxonomies meets the warm humid air of reality, and I leave you to imagine the rest.

**A clearer definition of goals can give us a clearer sense of purpose, of balance, of collaboration, and of comprehensiveness. This sense in turn can allow us to avoid excessive content overlap, misplaced curricular emphasis, or unreasonable workload demands.**

As a student of the thought of Bernard Lonergan, I am aware that his differentiation of eight functional specialties in theology represents yet another taxonomy, but I think I have said enough about taxonomies just now. I mention Lonergan only because of what he says about the need for the differentiation. The need is fourfold. First it distinguishes different tasks and prevents them from being confused. Second, it defines each of the tasks and the different methodologies proper to it. Third, it prevents one-sided totalitarian ambi-

tions among the tasks. And fourth, it resists excessive demands.<sup>6</sup> I would apply this wisdom to our use of taxonomies of learning in the following way. A clearer definition of goals can give us a clearer sense of purpose, of balance, of collaboration, and of comprehensiveness. This sense in turn can allow us to avoid excessive content overlap, misplaced curricular emphasis, or unreasonable workload demands. Or at least one may hope that it can.

#### IV. Continuing Formation

The most important thing, of course, is how any of these efforts improve student learning in our formation programs. The salient questions, as I read Shulman, are these: how can we foster the student engagement that leads to knowledge and understanding? How can we foster the student understanding that leads to or is found in performance and action? How can we foster the critical reflection on practice that leads the student to prudence and sound judgment? How can we foster the sound judgment that leads the student to the meanings and values, the faith and love, the ambiguity and questioning, the vocation and the identity that are all found in commitment? And at what points in the seminary's program are each of these questions most fruitfully addressed?

I have been working with outcomes and program assessment since 1993. It is tedious work, as I need not convince anyone here. But it is important work at many levels, not least because it forces us to hold ourselves accountable. Basing curricular decisions in a culture of evidence is much preferable to basing them on impressions of the unvoiced expectations of the guilds or on faculty memories of the ethos of their own alma maters. Assessment says: these are our goals, what does the evidence tell us about how well we are performing?

This is important not only for the institutional improvement it brings about, but also for the example it sets, in two directions. Last year, for instance, a former director for priest personnel in the Archdiocese of St. Louis told me that a recent Kenrick alumnus had asked him for information on an evaluation structure for priests in the archdiocese. As luck would have it, this former director had devised the process and knew where to locate a copy of it, as otherwise it would have taken an Indiana Jones to find it. I was deeply impressed with this alum. In the other direction, a bishop acquaintance of mine, a former seminary rector, told me some time ago that he was facing the Dallas Charter compliance review with a great deal of equanimity because his ex-

perience of accountability in the accreditation process of his seminary had been so positive. Another bishop acquaintance, also with an education background, has urged his presbyterate to adopt a performance evaluation procedure and has himself volunteered to be its first subject. I have nothing but admiration for these men.

**It is not enough for the priest simply to lead. He must have a reflective self-awareness in his professional and leadership activity, and from time to time he must be able to step back and to ask questions about what is working or not working—and why this is so.**

As far as I am concerned, the Shulman activities of reflection and critique are at the heart of professionalism and effective leadership. It is not enough for the priest simply to lead. He must have a reflective self-awareness in his professional and leadership activity, and from time to time he must be able to step back and to ask questions about what is working or not working—and why this is so. Self-examination is a pre-requisite for self-correction or self-improvement. In a ministerial context, this is most aptly connected to a functioning system of accountability and performance evaluation—the absence of which is the gravest lacuna in the professionalism of the ordained Catholic ministry today. If we give our students a good example of holding ourselves accountable to professional standards and peer evaluation, if we give them a good experience of being evaluated themselves, we have done much to set the stage for their continuing formation.

Evaluation is the highest of the activities of the Bloom taxonomy, and it stands to reason. When we are capable of critique, we are capable of looking for alternatives, whether in positions, in programs, or in ourselves. If we experience a gap in our knowledge, a defect in our judgment, an insufficiency in our values, we are capable of reaching for a remedy. That outreach logi-

cally leads to continuing formation. The nature of the program, if a program is chosen, or the nature of the resources, if resources are sought, is not as important as the process that leads us to reach out in the first place for either. This process must begin in the years of initial formation, in the formative and summative evaluation procedures of the program, in the example of a multi-layered institutional assessment program, and above all in the milieu of a pervasive fraternal feedback, challenge, inspiration and support.

In Bernard Lonergan's functional definition, theology is a process by which the meaning and value of religion are mediated to the meanings and values of a given culture,<sup>7</sup> a process in which the Gospel takes its rightful place among the stories by which the culture lives. If we picture culture as a tapestry, theology weaves the golden thread. If we picture culture as a conversation, theology translates the words of Jesus. If we picture culture as a bread dough, theology adds the leaven. All three of these images point to the challenging nature of the task, because even without substantial experience we recognize that weaving, translating, and kneading require a good amount of work.

In conclusion I return to my example of William Wilberforce—because he did the work. Through his instrumentality and that of many compatriots, the value of the Gospel was woven into the fabric of a slave-owning culture that changed because of him. From the point of view of the ministry what is most noteworthy is the fact that he did this as a layman. I do not mean this remark either as an indictment of the clergy or as a put-down of the laity. I mean it as an observation that in postconciliar Catholicism this is the way things are meant to unfold. The clergy do their work behind the front lines, and this requires humility and skill. If the work is done well, though, what is visible is an engaged and effective People of God. May we witness ever more of this in our lifetimes.



**Rev. Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.**, is director of continuing formation in the Diocese of Colorado Springs and was formerly academic dean at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis.

#### Endnotes

1. Posted in NRO Articles ([www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com)) on Friday Feb 23, 2007.
2. *Origins* 36 (2006): pp. 318, 319.
3. Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*

(Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1956). This summary of the taxonomy is taken from several Internet sources, principally: <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/cogsys/bloom.html>.

4. Lee S. Shulman, "Making Differences: A Table of Learning," *Change* 34, n. 6 (November/December 2002), p. 36 ff.; online at Heldref Publications Archives: <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/heldref>.
5. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder, 1972), pp. 51, 73.
6. Lonergan, pp. 36-37.
7. Lonergan, p. xi.

### Discussion Questions

1) In general, how does your assigned pillar of formation most effectively address the challenge of an intelligently effective evangelization? Do you have a story similar to the Wilberforce story to help illustrate either the challenge or any success in dealing with it? Feel free to suggest modifications to the sketchy outline of that challenge in section one of this paper.

2) How might the Bloom or Shulman taxonomies help impart a little more variety to the learning activities typical for your assigned pillar of formation?

3) Are there any learning activities in your assigned pillar of formation that are not adequately addressed by the taxonomies? How might they be incorporated?

4) What learning activities in your assigned pillar of formation might best contribute to an effective commitment to continuing formation after ordination? Do you have any success stories to share about alumni commitments to continuing formation?

5) Can you share information about any accountability structures or personnel evaluations in place for priests in the communities or dioceses your institution serves?

6) Can you share any "best practices" at your institution that help instructors derive course goals from program goals or link course goals to learning activities and assessment?

7) Can you share any experience of the article's hope that a clearer definition of goals can give us a clearer sense of purpose, of balance, of collaboration, and of comprehensiveness? Of the hope that this sense in turn can allow us to avoid excessive content overlap, misplaced curricular emphasis, or unreasonable workload demands?

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT: THE TESTING AND SCREENING OF CANDIDATES FOR ADMISSION TO THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE U.S. CATHOLIC CHURCH

A Survey Study Conducted by the NCEA Seminary Department  
In Collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

A must-have resource for bishops, vocation directors, seminary administrators, formation teams and psychologists. Published by the National Catholic Educational Association.

8.5 x 11 inches, soft-cover, 64 pp. Includes introduction, appendices and commentaries. 2010. \$15 member/\$20 non-member. Shipping & handling added to each order. Discounts for 10+ copies: \$12 member/\$16 non-member.

The report examines the psychological assessment practices and procedures used by dioceses, men's religious institutes and seminaries in the testing and screening of applicants to priestly formation programs in the United States. The executive summary reviews the major findings, while commentaries by a bishop, canon lawyer and psychologist reflect on significant issues. Includes appendices on assessing international candidates, choosing a qualified psychologist and a glossary of psychological tests.



NCEA Member Service Center • 1005 N. Glebe Road • Suite 525 • Arlington, VA 22201  
Online Store [www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org) • Email: [seminary@ncea.org](mailto:seminary@ncea.org) • Tel: 800-711-6232 • FAX: 703-243-0025