But there is no clear-cut guide for determining a self in our society. Securing the conditions for the exercise of self-determination is not the same as providing assistance for the wise exercise of such freedom. As a formal concept self-determination is undoubtedly a good, but as a lived reality the achievement of an authentic self is often frustrated by a lack of wisdom and insight concerning the choices available to the person. Finding communities of wisdom that can mentor the self in developing and pursuing a life plan is a vital complement to self-determination. In our society, the search for wisdom communities is possible but perilous owing to the expansive freedom of association afforded Americans. Possible because our culture permits a broad range of action by communities to influence both public life and individual persons. Perilous because our open society permits the dissemination and promotion of many false narratives as well as the unregulated establishment of many communities of folly rather than wisdom.

Communities founded upon the gospel can find the freedom of association afforded us in this culture to be of great assistance in helping Americans in the exercise of their self-determination. Required is the ability to present the truth of the Catholic tradition in a way that is accessible and convincing. But undoubtedly, speech will be insufficient in this regard when people find themselves faced with the cacophony of voices vying for a hearing in our society. Needed most will be communities who witness to the truth by the quality of the lives of their membership. If Franciscans can build communities of faith capable of a genuine public witness to the gospel, then the freedom of association that marks American culture will permit those communities to flourish and attain wide influence.

As with the other elements characteristic of American life the implications of freedom are neither inevitably positive nor negative. There is darkness and light in the culture of the United States. Ministry today needs the skill and courage to work with those elements of our culture that reflect something of the truly human as well as the willingness to withstand those aspects of our culture that undercut the truth of the gospel to which Franciscan men and women are devoted.

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Franciscan Tradition as a Wisdom Tradition
Zachary Hayes, O.F.M.

To anyone who looks carefully at the history of religions and religious movements, it is obvious that religion is capable of remarkable good. But it is likewise capable of horrible atrocities. What appears to be serious religion to one person may seem to be nonsense to another. People have wreaked havoc on one another in the name of God and for the sake of God. They have killed each other on battlefields of holy wars and crusades waged in God’s name. They have offered each other to the gods in bloody sacrifices on stone altars and in sacrificial fires. They continue to murder others in the name of life and for reputedly religious motivations.

It is simply not enough to “mean well” when it comes to religion. It is not enough to think that any program which claims to spring from religious motivation is by that fact alone worthy of serious commitment. We must learn to distinguish between genuine religious motivation that can make authentic ethical claims on us and blind, unthinking fanaticism. This can be difficult to do. It is particularly difficult in the context of our highly secularized culture, with our current awareness of the wide diversity of cultures and religious traditions. “Whose God? Which religion?” we might wish to ask. And each serious believer is convinced that he or she is somehow concerned with the true God. But how is it possible that the true God can reveal such diverse and contradictory messages to people who presumably mean well?

By what criteria are we to judge right and wrong, true and false? In view of the weighty problems that are so widespread in our culture and our time, pastoral leadership that is morally responsible must face these issues at some point. Difficult as it may be, it is nonetheless critical for responsible religious leadership that we learn to think carefully and critically about the implications of what we believe. Somehow we need to move beyond the tendency to isolate religious concerns from hard, critical thinking. One of the “here-
For communities who take their inspiration from the life and example of Francis of Assisi, a simple, direct appeal to the vision of the founder is virtually impossible. Joseph Ratzinger, now Cardinal Ratzinger, explained why years ago in his early Habilitationsschrift on the theology of history in Bonaventure. Heim noted the tendency of all the early legendae dealing with the life of Francis to provide not a simple, neutral, objective account of the life of the saint, but rather to lay out elaborate theological interpretations of his work. Usually these interpretations were intended to provide an image of Francis appropriate to a particular ideological position about the meaning of the order. Such interpretations make it difficult for the modern reader to discern where the “Francis of history” ends and the “Francis of interpretation” begins.

The significance of this becomes clearer if one compares the question of the legendae to the question of the New Testament. It is an exegetical and theological commonplace that the Christian Scriptures do not present a pure, straightforward account of the history of Jesus and of his teaching. We are always confronted with faith-inspired interpretations of that history from the perspective of the post-Easter community. The beginnings of Christianity are found not solely in the work of the historical Jesus but in that work together with the impact which it had on others, especially on the early disciples. Similarly, if the problem of the legendae is taken seriously, the original documents of the Franciscan movement take us back not simply to Francis in his historical individuality, but to Francis and his impact on others. We know that impact was diverse. The many legendae suggest differing views as to what is most important about Francis, and how one might most appropriately be true to his inspiration.

The impact was shaped in part by the growth of an intellectual tradition that, from the earliest years of the Franciscan movement, interacted with the spiritual tradition and was the source of an important dynamic in the life of the community. It is in this combination of a spiritual tradition and an intellectual tradition that Franciscans will best find the meaning of their origins.

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1Heim, 1993: pp. 41-42

a) The Defense of the Spiritual Tradition

For most of us who live seven centuries after Francis, what Francis seemed to be about appears solid and self-evident. For Francis himself, and for his contemporaries, however, this may not have been the case at all. If anything can be said about Francis with confidence, it is that he was a man of profound, even radical religious experience. But not everyone trusted that experience. The experience, a puzzle at first to Francis himself, was never given adequate institutional expression among Francis’s followers. Then and now, it was an experience that was potentially incendiary. If there is any truth to Plato’s pronouncement that the unexamined life is not worth living, this experience of Francis deserved serious examination. Now as then it challenges our ordinary understanding of the gospel. Taken as an authentic religious experience, it places pressing ethical demands on those who take it seriously. Perhaps Francis’s greatest bequest to later generations is a vision of human life and an insight into the meaning of the gospel that demands and deserves serious reflective thought.

Within his own lifetime, the Order of Friars Minor was torn internally by debates about fundamental issues, debates that eventually reached to the highest levels of the Roman church. The presence of Franciscans in centers of higher studies provoked the well-known poverty controversies within a few years of Francis’s death. Thus, the early history of the friars shows an order that, within a few years of its founder’s death, was riven within and threatened without by conflicts over issues that seemed to be precious to the spirituality of Francis. The controversies revolved precisely around the nature of the following of Christ and the nature of the apostolic life.

Basic in these controversies was a particular image of Jesus. The “poor Jesus” was the exemplar of the radical poverty that seemed to be so much a part of the Franciscan inspiration. We need not debate here the objections brought against the radical mendicancy represented by the Franciscans, merely indicate that people of the stature of Bonaventure came to the public defense of the spirituality of the mendicants early in the order’s history. Bonaventure himself did this twice, once while still a student at Paris, in his well-known *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, and again during his years as min-


b) The Theological Underpinnings of the Spiritual Tradition

Around 1209 there were only twelve Franciscans. By 1250 there were 30,000. This was not simply a remarkable growth in numbers. Early on the order of Francis began to attract members from a more educated level of the population. The entrance of Alexander of Hales into the order signals the changing composition in the membership. The followers of the *simpex et idiota* of Assisi soon found themselves in the universities at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and elsewhere. And an order whose ministry at first involved a simple, moralizing form of popular preaching now found its members engaged in forms of public ministry that called for more sophisticated training than Francis ever envisioned for his followers. The order of Francis had quickly become an order of studies.

With this, something new took place. The situation of the friars in the universities placed the spirituality and values of the Franciscan spiritual tradition in the mainstream of Western Christian culture. It significantly widened the outreach of the order. In this situation, the friars reflected on the meaning of their founder’s spirituality in two ways. First, they reflected theologically about the meaning of Francis’s spiritual journey. This sort of reflection we have already noted in the tradition of the *legendæ*. Then the friars in the universities began to translate fundamental concerns of Francis’s spirituality into what would become characteristically Franciscan theological and even philosophical doctrines. We might say they drew out the presuppositions and implications of the spirituality of Francis and gave them explicit formulations.
Here I have in mind Franciscan theology’s distinctive emphasis on the nature of God as the supreme Good; its great sense of love, respect, and responsibility for the world of God’s creation; and the way in which the Christocentric spirituality of Francis was eventually developed into the metaphysical and cosmological visions of the theologians of the order. In moving from spirituality to systematic theology, these friars took on in a critical way some of the major claims of the leading philosophy of the time. They thus engaged major cultural categories of their time in a critical, creative way. Within the world of medieval theology, the way in which Franciscan thought differs from that of Aquinas is evidence of a genuine theological pluralism.

In all of this, the early theologians were inspired by the spirituality of Francis. In that spirituality they sensed implications that far transcend the pedestrian assessments of most of us even today. They presented a vision of a Christian humanism inspired by the saint of Assisi. This is something unique. I know of no other case in which the religious experience of a founder of a religious order provided the basis for specific doctrinal positions in systematic theology. Neither Albert the Great nor Thomas Aquinas did this with the experience of Dominic, nor does it seem to have happened with Benedict or with other founders of religious orders.

The Intellectual Tradition as a Pursuit of Wisdom

The attitude of Francis toward studies, like most matters in Franciscan history, is a matter of debate. Without going through the different viewpoints, we might summarize Francis’s view toward studies in the following way. While he never seemed enthusiastic about education, he conceded the need of studies at least for some friars. Such studies were to be integrated into the ongoing personal transformation of the spiritual life of the friars involved. Friars involved in studies should act in the light of what they have come to know. And studies would commonly be related to forms of ministry.

Having said this, we must also state that Francis was concerned with the danger of pride and self-esteem involved in studies.

Perhaps the major issue here is not learning as such, but rather the way in which a Franciscan relates to learning. How does one transcend the pretensions of the academic world and cultivate humility in one’s learning? The poverty and humility of Francis ought to mean that those who engage in studies learn to avoid taking even knowledge as their personal possession. Moreover, as is true of any work, studies should not be allowed to extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion.

These reflections about Francis and the question of studies set the stage for the next reflections on the shape of the early Franciscan tradition as a wisdom tradition that embraces both a profound spirituality and a level of critical, reflective theology. First, though, some observations about the historical background for wisdom theology with its roots in Augustine and its chief exemplification in the world of monasticism. This style of theology would eventually have a significant impact on the early school of the Franciscan friars at Paris and, through this school, on the greatest of the Franciscan wisdom theologians, Bonaventure.

a) Augustine, the Master of Wisdom

In Western Christianity, the wisdom tradition of theology is greatly indebted to the work of Augustine. Indeed, his style dominated the theological scene in the West until well into the High Middle Ages. The Augustinian approach is emphatically concerned with integrating many levels of human and religious meaning into a unified vision of the whole of reality. It reflects a conviction that a deep knowledge of oneself leads to a deeper knowledge of God, for of all the reflections of God in the cosmos, the human being is preeminently the “image” of God. And it is in a better understanding of the inner cosmos of human consciousness that we come to a more appropriate knowledge of that divine mystery of which we are the image. In Augustine’s terms, “I wish to know God and my soul. Nothing else? Nothing whatever.”

This knowledge is not simply a neutral, theoretical knowledge of God. It roots itself in the wonder of contemplative awareness of

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7 Soliloquium 1.2.7.
the divine. Augustine holds that one desires to know better the one whom one loves. In this sense, the move toward deeper contemplative wonder begins with an initial love of God who is the ultimate object of human love. Reflection upon the myriad ways in which the mystery of God is reflected in the created universe, and particularly in the human person, leads to a deeper knowledge of the mystery of God and hence to a deeper love of God.

The Augustinian wisdom tradition is practical, pointing the individual toward a richer experience of the deepest mystery of human life and its relation to God. Wisdom theology gives a priority to devotion, but understands the intellectual dimension as important though subordinate.

Given this basic orientation, it is easy to understand that the wisdom tradition tends to concentrate on the spiritual journey. The journey is a helpful metaphor that portrays life as a movement through a personal history to a goal that is never fully attained so long as the history is incomplete. Therefore, wisdom theology is concerned with stages of maturation along the journey. The space between initiation and full maturity is filled by certain rhythms and patterns of spiritual growth.

b) The Wisdom Tradition and the Challenge of Aristotle

The wisdom tradition maintained its dominance in the Christian West for centuries until the appearance of the fuller corpus of Aristotle’s writings in the university setting of the High Middle Ages. Aristotelianism challenged the older word “wisdom” (sapientia) with the ideal of “knowledge” (scientia). The shaping of theology in relation to this new world view led, as in the case of Aquinas, to a new model that saw theology as clear and certain knowledge—scientia. The shift vested theology with a distinctly intellectual character that distinguished it from the affective, volun-
taristic qualities of the Augustinian wisdom style.8

c) Bonaventure and the Wisdom Tradition

Whether and to what extent the Christian believer might court the pagan Aristotle was not at all clear, though there were various attempts to deal with the obvious areas of tension. Aquinas made one, Bonaventure another. In Bonaventure’s view, Aquinas went too far in courting Aristotle. On the other hand, Bonaventure was well acquainted with Aristotle and, as his great scholastic writings indicate, was enormously skilled in the logic and general methodology of the university that was Aristotelian in style. It would not be accurate to say he was either anti-Aristotelian or anti-intellectual. Yet, there is a stronger retrospective tone in his way of dealing with the new challenge.

Bonaventure’s approach to theology in a sense retrieved the richness of the wisdom tradition in a new context. It represents what today we might call a more “holistic” vision of spirituality and theology. Aware of the claims of the new and challenging Aristotelian views, and capable of employing the philosophical principles and techniques for the development of theological positions, Bonaventure sees all of this to be instrumental in realizing the only final goal of human life—the goal known not through philosophy but through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. One does not reject the claims of reason in principle, but one attempts to integrate them into the broader vision of the journey of humanity and creation to a final, mystical union with God.

For Bonaventure, theology in its intellectual dimensions is an important discipline, but it cannot be allowed to be limited to this level. The theological endeavor as intellectual must lead the human person beyond the neutrality of mere cognition of the true to affective-contemplative delight in the good and the beautiful. In Bonaventure’s work, the affairs of the heart and those of the head are kept in a remarkable, living relation to each other.

The outstanding Bonaventurean expression of the wisdom model is found in the Journey of the Mind into God. One might well see this work not as a theoretical statement, but as an account of Bonaventure’s own spiritual journey through which he came to inform the life of scholarship with the Franciscan ideal of the imitation of Christ. Perhaps nowhere else in his writings do we find such a compact statement of his integral vision of reality and of its Christ-centered focus. The spiritual life is a journey into this unified reality. The initiate with the appropriate motivation enters on the way. The way is found above all in the person, history, and destiny of Jesus Christ. The journey can be described as an imitatio Christi

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8 Aquinas, Summa I, 1, q.1.
through which the individual's relation to self, to other people, to the whole of creation, and to God is shaped primarily by the paradigmatic values of the life of Christ. The journey moves through all levels of external reality (nature mysticism) to the many levels of the interior world of human consciousness (mysticism of the soul), to the mystery of God as triune mystery of life-giving love (metaphysical mysticism). The goal of the journey is the experience of loving union with God in this life in the form of mystical experience; and in the next life, in the form of beatific vision. If we take the vision of this miniature masterpiece together with the vision of the De reductione artium ad theologam we find the charter for a Christian humanism that is immensely rich. It draws all levels of reality and all the disciplines, arts, and sciences through which human beings organize their knowledge of reality into the context of the spiritual journey. All aspects of creation are fair game for the study of the friars. All can be and ought to be drawn into the spiritual journey to God. We might suggest that this vision is rooted in the spiritual vision of Francis of Assisi, who perceived a fraternal relation among all the creatures of God.

Theology, in such a context, is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It is, rather, knowledge for the sake of deepening love. Theological wisdom is, for Bonaventure, principally a wisdom of the will including both intellectual knowledge and affect. More specifically, it is a habitus affectivus that lies in the middle between that which is purely speculative and that which is purely practical or ethical, embracing both of these and partaking in both. In this framework, at least ideally, knowledge is integrated into a process of human transformation, and oriented specifically to the deepening of human love for the good, and above all for God, the ultimate Good.

In Bonaventure's own words, we study theology principally "ut boni fiamus." Thus, theology is not practical in the sense of contemporary pragmatism. It is practical, rather, in the sense that it contributes to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual transformation of the human being. Obviously, if that transformation is authentic, it will flow into a transformed style of life.

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I would suggest that this orientation as it is found among the early friars with clear roots in the Augustinian tradition reflects the concerns of Francis that theological knowledge should not be allowed to become mere ideas or words, but should move to some appropriate form of action, since "action speaks louder than words." Without genuine spiritual depth, action can be mere formalism. Without appropriate action, knowledge can be pure speculation. Theological wisdom as described by Bonaventure embraces both the speculative and the practical. Theology, viewed in this way, can be seen as a reflection on the experience of discipleship, both at the personal level and at the ministerial level, and then on the cognitive structures through which this experience is expressed.

Implications for Today

At least part of the reason for the rise of studies in the Order of Friars Minor may be found in the role that the order came to play in the public life of the medieval church, particularly in new forms of preaching, confessional work, teaching and disputations, and dealing with a variety of heresies. In pursuing their role, the followers of the simplex et idiota of Assisi found themselves operating at many levels within the church and in society in ways that demanded considerable intellectual skills.

There is a sense in which we may see the relation between Francis and the theologians of the order such as Bonaventure as a relationship between intense, personal, religious experience on the one hand, and serious, sustained, critical reflection on the other. When we look at the roots of the Franciscan tradition from this perspective, we are challenged not simply to retrieve the experience of Francis: we are challenged as well to retrieve the spirit of critical, constructive reflection on that experience. The roots of the Franciscan tradition are both spiritual and intellectual, both experiential and critical. These stand as creative polarities in the tradition. In this light, the following implications about ministerial leadership suggest themselves:

1. Ministry and formation for ministry pursued from the basis of this tradition would highlight the importance of the religious dimension in human experience at the personal level and at the larger social levels. At the personal level, the place of God in a per-
son’s life is the most fundamental issue, for this shapes the person’s relationship to everything else. What we name as God is that which effectively motivates us in life. What we name as God, therefore, is crucial. Can that reality, whatever it is, bear the weight of ultimacy for us? Religion is a way of dealing with the “big questions” about human destiny. Whence, whither, how, why? A ministerial preparation that fails to awaken the minister to these questions and to significant ways of dealing with them is a failure in relation to the needs of the church today.

2. In the spirit of the great Christian humanism of the past, training pursued from this tradition would investigate the relation of religion to other dimensions of human experience. How has religion interacted with the social and political areas? How has it interacted with the arts and the sciences? What are some of the positive and some of the negative factors that an educated person ought to be aware of? How are we to understand and deal with the religious factor in the shaping of society and culture? And particularly today, how are we to listen to the wisdom of other religious traditions and allow that wisdom to engage us as Christians?

3. A critical attitude would involve a number of important and difficult issues. People commonly take religious faith to involve some sort of knowledge, that is, they make cognitive claims in the name of religion. Or they claim to have special revelations from God. These claims are commonly understood to reflect God’s will for the believer, and often this understanding goes on to shape the believer’s expectations of those who do not share his or her belief. But not all religious believers seem to receive the same communications from God.

In view of this, a responsible religious leader must have some sense as to how one ought to assess such claims to knowledge together with their implications. What is the basis for making such claims? If we truly “know something” through religion, how is this form of knowledge related to other areas of human knowledge and experience? What sort of limitations must be put on these knowledge claims? Both with respect to ourselves, and with respect to others?

A model of ministry and ministerial training moving from this tradition would be suspicious of any uncritical religious claims. Clearly we need knowledgeable friars in all our ministries. How can we best respond to the often narrow movements within the church and in our society from a genuine spiritual richness? How can we avoid the all too frequent quick fix that is so prevalent in our age, and is often more destructive than helpful? In dealing with complex issues, simple goodwill is not enough. Nor are slogans. One needs to be able to think critically.

Specifically, we should be suspicious of fundamentalism in all its forms, whether it be scriptural fundamentalism or dogmatic fundamentalism (or scientific fundamentalism). The human mind is a gift of God and is to be accepted and used as such in the area of religion as in other areas of our life. God’s word is addressed to creatures whom the Creator has endowed with the gift of intelligence, together with other gifts. Only if we are willing to engage in serious reflection will we be able to distinguish deep, authentic religious conviction from mindless fanaticism. This is particularly difficult, because religious claims cannot be tested in the same way as the claims of the positive sciences. They operate at a very different level. Yet they have a profound influence on human self-understanding and on human behavior, and it is important that they be tested.

4. Finally, an understanding of religious, ministerial leadership laying claim to the Franciscan tradition would give pride of place to the wisdom tradition that played such an important role in early Franciscan history. Knowledge itself is not yet wisdom, but it is a step in the direction of wisdom—and if anything is needed in today’s world, it is wisdom. Such an understanding would attempt to engage serious religious convictions in a critical dialogue with the questions and values operative in our culture. It would be concerned with this not simply in a theoretical way, but in the hope of shaping a healthy style of life and learning to make wise and responsible judgments.

It would aim at communicating a sense of synthesis or unity. For this reason, it would be concerned with the relation between the various dimensions of human experience. It would hope to communicate significant insight into the human situation and to develop some sort of usable road map of reality. Inspired by the experience of Francis, Bonaventure created such a map that was intelligible for his own time and place. This might be an appropriate way to understand the task of ministerial preparation today. But this task must be carried out in circumstances that are fundamentally different from those of the past. While the major arteries of
today's road map may look the same or at least very similar, the
details will be considerably different. It will be a road map made for
us people of the latter part of the twentieth century, understandable
to us, and a guide to help us make our way through the complexity
of our human experience of the world with a sense of meaning and
purpose.

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A reading of representative publications dealing with envi-
ronmental issues reveals that there are striking differences
among those who are convinced that there is a serious prob-
lem in the way human beings relate to the world of nature. Some are
convinced that the solution to the problem lies in the area of religion
whereas others are convinced that it is precisely religion, and speci-
fically the biblically based Christian tradition, that is the funda-
mental source of the problem. It is with this latter position that I
would like to begin our reflections on the Christology of the
Franciscan tradition and its possible relation to the environmental
issues.

Our concern is to single out three major elements of this critique
to provide a context for our discussion. First is the persistent criti-
cism of the alleged anthropocentrism of the biblical tradition. In gen-
eral terms, it is often argued that in this tradition, the chemical
world, the world of plants, and the world of animals have no intrin-
sic meaning or value. They exist only for the sake of human beings—
for whatever use humans may choose to put them to. It is felt that as
long as we see things in this way, there is little chance that we will be
able to deal with the environmental issues that seem to flow from
this fundamental conviction.

One persistent reaction to this anthropocentrism is the call to a
sort of egalitarian perspective. This usually involves the rejection of
any sort of hierarchical thought that would place humanity at the
top of the created order and the recognition of a fundamental equal-
ity among all creatures. The question this raises for us is: Is it possi-
ble to recognize a distinctive role for humanity with respect to the
world of nature and still see real value and meaning in other crea-
tures? Some elements in the Franciscan tradition might help us deal
with such a question.