

# The Early Franciscan doctrine of Divine Immensity



**The Early Franciscan Doctrine of Divine Immensity:**
**Towards a Middle Way Between Classical Theism and Panentheism**

*This contribution is dedicated to Paul Fiddes.*

**ABSTRACT:** Since Augustine, Western medieval thinkers have largely identified 'simplicity' as the most fundamental feature of the divine nature. Although the Western tradition of thinking about God has often been regarded as relatively continuous, I will demonstrate in this paper that a separate line of thought developed amongst early thirteenth-century Franciscan thinkers. This new tradition stressed God's immensity or infinity. In doing so, I will argue, it instigated a fundamental shift in the way of conceiving the nature of God that holds profound promise for reconciling factions in systematic theology today, particularly between Classical Theists and Panentheists.

**KEYWORDS:** Classical Theism, Panentheism, Franciscan, Divine Immensity, Divine Simplicity, Divine Infinity

Since Augustine, medieval thinkers in the West have largely identified 'simplicity' as the most fundamental feature of the divine nature. Indeed, the doctrine of divine simplicity—now frequently referred to as 'classical theism'—has been propounded by such noteworthy scholars as Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas, who articulated this doctrine in its mature form. Although the Western tradition of thinking about the general nature of God has often been regarded as relatively continuous, I will demonstrate in this paper that a second and separate line of theological thought developed amongst the founders of the Franciscan intellectual tradition, who worked in the first half of the thirteenth century.

Where the preceding tradition emphasized the basic simplicity of the divine, this new tradition stressed God's immensity or infinity. In doing so, I will argue, it instigated a fundamental shift in the way of conceiving the nature of God that holds promise for reconciling factions in systematic theology today, especially between Classical Theists and so-called Panentheists. In order to substantiate this claim, I will start by offering an overview of the unique structure of the early Franciscan doctrine of God and its possible historical sources. This analysis will highlight the respects in which early Franciscan theologians appear to have departed from or developed past precedent in treating the nature of God.

In a second part of the paper, I will briefly outline the traditional teaching on divine simplicity, as advocated by Augustine, by way of a foil that will throw into relief the innovativeness of the early Franciscan doctrine of divine immensity, which I will then treat in more detail. In the third part, I will defend the suggestion that the early Franciscan doctrine of God as immense holds significant promise for reconciling the concerns of contemporary Classical Theists and Panentheists.

My source for this discussion is the so-called *Summa Halensis,* a collaborative work on the part of the founders of the Franciscan intellectual tradition—most notably Alexander of Hales, who oversaw the project, and for whom it is named. Although the Summa was mostly completed between 1236-1245, twenty years before Aquinas set his

hand to the task of authoring his magisterial *Summa Theologiae,* final sections of the text may have been written as late as 1256, possibly even by the likes of Bonaventure.

Until recently, the *Summa Halensis* has been very little studied, for a number of possible reasons. One has to do with questions surrounding its authorship. Although the editors of the third volume of the Summa corrected the longstanding assumption that the entire work was composed by Alexander of Hales himself, and made significant progress in identifying the likely authors of different sections of the text, it is still difficult decisively to determine who wrote what in the Summa.[1] This difficulty has deterred scholars from appreciating the Summa for what it was seemingly meant to be, to wit, an indicator of the collective mind of the early Franciscan school.

Another reason for the Summa's neglect has to do with the notion, espoused by generations of medievalists, including the initial editors of the Summa, that the text served primarily to systematize the longstanding intellectual tradition of Augustine at the beginning of a period in which Aristotle's works were rapidly rising in popularity.[2] One motive for my discussion here is to query this assumption and to show that the *Summa Halensis* and the early Franciscan tradition of thought more generally is highly sophisticated and multi-dimensional. In this connection, I will demonstrate further below that the Summa represents, first and foremost, an effort on the part of early Franciscans to lay down a Franciscan intellectual tradition for the very first time.

In other words, it seeks to translate the spiritual and ministerial vision of Francis of Assisi into philosophical and theological principles that provided a basis at the time for Franciscan education and especially for participation in the larger University context, which was quickly becoming the touchstone of all spiritual and intellectual credibility.[3] On these grounds, I submit that Franciscan doctrines—such as divine immensity—must be interpreted against the backdrop of the early writings by and about Francis, which served as the principle by which early Franciscan scholars selected and deployed authorities. This is the sort of interpretation I will offer in what follows, after treating the structure and sources of the Summa's treatise on the one God.

**The Structure of the Summa's Doctrine of God and its Sources**

The treatise on the One God in the *Summa Halensis* consists of six tractates. The first covers the necessity or essentiality, immutability, and simplicity of the divine—in a mere 13 pages; the second deals with divine immensity in nearly 60 pages; the third covers the unity, truth, and goodness of God in almost 100 pages; the fourth, fifth, and sixth sections deal with God's power, knowledge, and will, respectively, in approximately 200 further pages. The coverage of some of these topics, such as divine immutability and simplicity as well as divine power, knowledge, and will, is relatively

[1] See Victorin Doucet, 'The History of the Problem of the Authenticity of the Summa', *Franciscan Studies*, 7 (1947), 26–41, 274–312.
[2] See the Prolegomena to Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica*, 5 vols (Florence: Quaracchi, 1924–48), section IV: Patres Latini.
[3] Neslihan Senocak, *The Poor and the Perfect: The Rise of Learning in the Franciscan Order 1209-1310* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2012).

unremarkable. These topics are dealt with in Lombard's Sentences.[4] Moreover, they are treated albeit in more disparate fashion in the works of Augustine and Anselm, not to mention Aquinas.

More extraordinary is the primacy given to divine necessity and the amount of space devoted to the discussion of divine immensity and to the so-called 'transcendentals' of unity, truth, and goodness. While it would be very interesting to explore the early Franciscan arguments concerning divine necessity and the transcendentals—which seem to come to them through the work of the Arab scholar Avicenna—this would take me far beyond the scope of my current project.[5] Thus, the focus of this paper will remain on matters directly related to divine immensity.

A search through the volumes of the *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, and of the *Patrologia Latina,* reveals only scant and relatively unremarkable references to divine immensity prior to the twelfth century. Isidore of Seville seems to be our best source for a definition of the doctrine. On his account:[6]

> The immensity of the divine greatness is such that we understand him to be inside everything, but not enclosed [in it]; outside everything, but not excluded [from it]. Insofar as he is inside, he contains everything; insofar as he is outside, he contains all things by the uncircumscribed immensity of his magnitude. Thus, it is shown that insofar as he is outside, he is creator. But in so far as he is inside, it is proved that he governs everything. And in order that none of the things that are created are without God, he is inside everything. Truly, in order that they are not outside God, God is outside so that he contains everything.

As the quotation above suggests, the doctrine of divine immensity provided a way for early medieval scholars like Isidore to affirm the simultaneous immanence and transcendence of God. While this proximity-in-distinctness was perhaps one logical outworking of the doctrine of God as simple for such scholars, it was arguably just one of any number of other attributes that could be derived from that doctrine. In short, it was not necessarily central. This situation appears to change in the twelfth century as a result of the popularization of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius by Hugh of St Victor.

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[4] Peter Lombard, Sentences, vol. 1: simplicity (distinction 8); God's knowledge (distinction 35); God's omnipotence (distinction 42-4); the will of God (distinction 45-8).
[5] Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing,* trans. Michael E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005). Meldon C. Wass draws attention to the Avicennian influence on the Summa in his, *The Infinite God and the 'Summa fratris Alexandri'* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1964).
[6] Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, Book I, ch 2, 3: *Immensitas divinae magnitudinis ita est, ut intelligamus eum intra omnia, sed non inclusum; extra omnia, sed non exclusum. Et ideo interiorem, ut omnia contineat; ideo exteriorem, ut incircumscripta magnitudinis suae immensitate omnia concludat. Per id ergo, quod exterior est, ostenditur esse creator; per id vero quod interior, gubernare omnia demonstratur. Ac ne ea quae creata sunt sine Deo essent, Deus intra omnia est. Verum ne extra Deum essent, Deus exterior est, ut omnia concludantur*. (There are 8 references to divine immensity in total in this work).

Frequently throughout his corpus, Dionysius refers to the *immensurabilitas* of God. In his commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy,* Hugh picks up on this and translates it into comments on divine *immensitas*. While the doctrine is not the main focus of Hugh's theology, it seems to enter through him, among others, onto the theological scene, recurring in a number of Hugh's other works, including his great *De sacramentis fidei.*

The slightly later popularization of John of Damascus' *De fide orthodoxa* by Peter Lombard may also have contributed to the rising trend to refer to God in terms of his immensity. After all, John makes frequent reference to divine infinity, an attribute that was often employed interchangeably with immensity.[7] Although the Lombard himself introduced Damascus' work cautiously and somewhat defensively, knowing the Greek Father's authority might be questioned in the West, early Franciscan authors lived at a time when such timidity had ceased to pose a major hindrance to appropriation. In that sense, the new emphasis in the West on divine immensity or infinity might be attributed at least in part to the reception of Greek theological and even philosophical influences.

The initial introduction of immensity by these means evidently proved a considerable inspiration to Hugh's successor, Richard of St Victor. In his *De Trinitate,* Richard bemoans the fact that he finds in the Western tradition no fully satisfying, purely rational explanation as to how God can be both one and three, even though he finds that the Tri-unity of God is constantly affirmed on authoritative grounds. As a result, Richard sets out to provide such an explanation, which he subsequently works out entirely in terms that can be accessed by reason.[8] In this regard, he initially seeks to defend the claim that God is one.[9] Here, the doctrine of divine immensity quickly comes to the fore of his discussion, albeit in the wake of an argument for the necessary existence of only one God.

In order to support his claims on this score, Richard postulates three possible modes of being, seemingly drawn from the work of John Scotus Eriugena, whose interest in Greek thought is well known, and whose translation of the Dionysian corpus would have been the one of several available translations which Richard would likely have consulted.[10] These modes of being are: from eternity and deriving its existence from itself; neither from eternity nor from itself; or from eternity but not from itself. According to Richard, a fourth possibility—the opposite of this last one—is impossible, because there cannot be any being that is not from eternity but which is nevertheless from itself, lest there have been a time when nothing existed that could have given rise to the existence of other things.

In Richard's account, two such non-identical beings cannot exist, otherwise one would be superior to the other, and would not therefore be the most powerful being.[11] On

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[7] Jacques-Guy Bougerol, 'The Church Fathers and the Sentences of Peter Lombard', in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West,* ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 113-64, esp. 133-7.

[8] Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate (DT),* in *Patrologia Latina,* vol. 196, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1855), III.I, p. 115. Page numbers taken from the translation by Ruben Angelici. *Richard of St Victor: On the Trinity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

[9] *DT,* I.V, 76.

[10] *DT,* I.VIII, 79; cf. John Scotus Eriugena, *Divisione* I.1, 441b.

[11] *DT,* I.XIV, 83.

the basis of this four-fold distinction, consequently, Richard concludes that a single, supreme being, both eternal and from itself, necessarily exists. To bolster this conclusion, he invokes Anselm's famous argument and thereby appropriates it for the purposes of defending divine necessity, in a way the Franciscans take up in their own discussion of this matter.[12]

In this context, Richard further contends that since God is infinite in terms of his eternity, he must also be infinite as regards his greatness.[13] That is to say, he is immense—there is no measure to his goodness, which cannot be comprehended. As such a being, God is immutable: he cannot deteriorate or improve, since his greatness is unsurpassable.[14] Once again, Richard insists, there can only be one immense being, otherwise there would be multiple beings that cannot be comprehended by others, such that each would be superior to the others, which entails a contradiction.[15]

Such a supreme being cannot lack any desirable attributes: his definition is to be all that is good.[16] In that sense, Richard follows a longstanding tradition, upheld by Anselm, which posits a unity of God's essence and his attributes.[17] According to this tradition, God is or is the definition of the properties he has—he has them in their fullness—whereas creatures simply have those properties in limited or qualified ways. God is whatever it is best to be. As such, he is one thing, and simple, not subject to the complex components or alterations that characterize his creatures.[18]

While Richard thus concludes his discussion with a brief nod towards the doctrine of divine simplicity, that feature is mentioned only after much more attention has been given to the immensity of God. In Richard's work, therefore, we witness the beginning of a shift in the doctrine of God, whereby simplicity and many other features are subjected to immensity rather than the other way around—a trend which the Franciscans would pick up and popularize in their own way. This brings us to a discussion of the Franciscan doctrine itself, which I will contrast in the first instance with the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity, as articulated by Augustine.

**The *Summa Halensis* on Divine Immensity**

In his *De Trinitate,* Augustine explains the doctrine of divine simplicity by offering examples of things that are not simple.[19] As he notes, bodily substances are not simple because they are comprised of parts which are subject to accidental changes, that is, changes in the properties of shape, color, etc. In his view, even the human soul is composed of parts in the sense that it is present throughout the body, while not located at any one place in the body, and it is subject to changes in thoughts or feelings.

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[12] *DT,* I.XI, 81.
[13] *DT,* II.V, 95.
[14] *DT,* II.III, 93.
[15] *DT,* II.VI, 95.
[16] *DT,* II.XVI, 104.
[17] *DT,* II.XVIII, 105.
[18] *DT,* II.XX, 107.
[19] *DT,* VI.6. 209-10.

By contrast to embodied beings, God is incorporeal and thus invisible. As such, he is not composed of parts.[20] For the same reason, he is not changeable, given that change implies an alteration in the accidents or properties that are attributed to a substance or entity and a corresponding adjustment in the shape or size of its component parts. Thus, he cannot become wiser or more merciful, or become just where he previously was not. In fact, all of the properties that can be associated with him are not attributed to him as accidents, which are subject to alteration, but to his substance. As many medieval authors following Augustine famously quipped, 'God is what he has: his essence is his accidents'.[21] This means that God is whatever it is best to be, and is always completely so. To sum up: God always completely is what he is, which is the essence and source of all that is good.

As noted already, the Franciscan Summa treats the idea of divine simplicity, albeit in a mere four pages, in a section on the essentiality or necessity, immutability, and simplicity of God. Although the placement of this discussion just prior to that of divine immensity does suggest a certain deference to longstanding tradition, the Summist's approach to the question of simplicity represents quite an unusual theological departure. His account focuses on a conceivable threat to the possibility of a simple God, namely, the Christian assertion that God subsists in multiple persons, which could be taken to imply that God is composed of parts and therefore fails to count as simple.[22]

With this threat in view, the Summist insists that the three persons in God do not undermine divine simplicity, because they do not represent diverse substances but rather diverse modes of relation in God, which actually enact his simplicity. In supporting this contention, the Summist appeals to Richard of St Victor—a key authority for early Franciscan Trinitarian theology. In his *De Trinitate,* Richard argued that a plurality of persons does not detract from the unity of the divine nature, just as a plurality of substances—specifically, body and soul—does not detract from the unity of a human person.[23] Thus, we see that for early Franciscans, the doctrine of divine simplicity is not a statement about the fundamental nature of God but a ground-clearing exercise, whereby they illustrated that their belief in the Trinity can be reconciled with the unity of God.

When it comes to determining the most basic attribute of this one God, however, the early Franciscans turn—straightaway from the discussion of simplicity—to elaborate on the immensity of God, in a treatise that runs nearly sixty pages. For all practical purposes, consequently, they appear to have substituted immensity for simplicity as the defining feature of the one God. Thus, it remains to consider what the founding fathers of the Franciscan school have to say about the immense nature of the divine.

Their treatment of this topic is divided into four main parts, which pertain to the immensity of God in his own being, which is defined in terms of divine infinity; in relation to the human mind, which concerns divine incomprehensibility; in terms of his location, which pertains to his incircumscribability; and in relation to time, or God's

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[20] *DT,* V.1-2, 171-3.
[21] *DT,* VI.7, 210-11.
[22] *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica (SH)* (Florence: Quaracchi, 1924), Tr 1, Qu 3, Ch 1, Ad 2, p. 50. All references taken from volume 1 unless otherwise stated. All translations mine.
[23] *SH,* Tr 1, Qu 3, Ch 2, Respondeo, 52.

eternity. With the exception of divine eternity, which would take us rather beyond the scope of the present discussion, I will survey these parts below before offering an analysis of them.

*Divine Infinity*

The first chapter of the first part of this discussion inquires whether the divine essence is infinite or finite.[24] In favour of the idea that God is finite, the Summist marshals a number of arguments, for example, that the terms 'finite' and 'infinite' imply quantity. On the grounds of Augustine's claim that God does not have quantity, the Summist insists that he cannot be either finite or infinite.[25] Furthermore, the Summist notes along the lines of Aristotle that finitude implies completion or 'being finished', and in that sense, God must be 'most finite'. Finally, he observes, finite things better lead to the knowledge of God than infinite things, such that God must be finite.[26]

In working towards a solution to the question at hand, the Summist quotes a passage from Pseudo-Dionysius, which states that we should not try to say anything about God that is not in the Scriptures.[27] As the Scriptures do not define God as finite, the Summist thus concedes, we should say that he is infinite, unless we want to say that he is finite in the sense of being complete. To support this contention, he invokes John of Damascus, who argues that God is incircumscribable, uncreated, and infinite.[28] With the support of these two central Greek authorities, therefore, the Franciscans exchange infinity for simplicity as the fundamental feature of God.

*Divine Incomprehensibility*

The next question treats the immensity of God with respect to the intellect, that is, his incomprehensibility. In answering the question whether God is comprehensible or incomprehensible, the Summist states that there can be a comprehensive cognition of the intellect, insofar as it adheres to the truth, or a comprehensive cognition of the intellect, which encompasses the object known.[29] In the first way, God is comprehensible, because the intellect must adhere to the First Truth, which is God, in order to know anything at all, as I will explain further below. This comprehension is nothing but a certain type of

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[24] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 1, Ch 1, 54-7.
[25] Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 3.
[26] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 1, Ch 1, Ad 1, 2, 4, 5, p54-5.
[27] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 1, Ch 1, Solutio, 56; cf. Psuedo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* I.1: *universaliter non audendum dicere aliquid de insuperabili et occulta divinitate, quam ea quae nobis divinitus ex sacris Eloquiis claruerint.*
[28] John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.8: *deus est incircumscriptus, increatus, infinitus.*
[29] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 2, Ch 1, Respondeo, 59-60: *dicendum quod potest appelari comprehensio cognitio intellectus apprehendentis sive adhaerentis veritati, vel potest appelari comprehensio cognitio intellectus includentis. Sumendo comprehensionem primo modo, dicendum quod Deus est comprehensibilis, quia intellectus noster adhaeret veritati quae Deus est…Et haec comprehensio nihil aliud est quam quaedam apprehensio….Si dicatur comprehensio cognitio intellectus includentis…hoc modo impossibile est Deum comprehendi, quia impossibile est quod intellectus includat divinam essentiam.*

apprehension. On the authority of Augustine, however, the Summist insists that the mind cannot comprehend God in the sense of seeing him in full, for he cannot be circumscribed by the intellect in this life.[30]

*Divine Incircumscribability*

The third section and final section I will consider in this context treats God's immensity with respect to location, that is, his incircumscribability. In the first instance, the Summist establishes that God is the only being that can be properly defined as incircumscribable—not bound, as John of Damascus says, by place or time or understanding.[31] After all, he is the creator even of other purely spiritual or inscircumscribable beings, such as angels.[32]

In this light, the Summist next explores the question as to where God can be found. Is he anywhere? Everywhere? Nowhere? In response to these questions, he distinguishes between two ways of being in a place, namely, by definition, as a spirit or quality can be said to fill a place without respect to spatial dimensions, or physically, as a body fills a place. While God is not located in the latter respect, he is locatable in the former sense, in much the same way—as Augustine says—that wisdom fills the wise, such that the wise conversely participate in wisdom.[33] When he is conceived along these lines, God is nowhere—or not anywhere in specific—because he is everywhere, not so much in the sense that he is in all places, albeit spiritually, but insofar as all places virtually exist in him.[34] For this reason, it is possible simultaneously to say that God is everywhere and yet to assert that his presence to other places does not take him outside himself, indeed, that God is in himself.[35]

Following on from this discussion is a section of the existence of God in things (*existentia Dei in rebus*).[36] This section treats the way in which God is 'inside and not included, outside and not excluded' from things, as Isidore put it.[37] In explaining how God is inside things, the Summist continues a longstanding tradition, stemming at least from Pseudo-Dionysius, of affirming that God is in things by essence, power, and presence, citing Richard of St Victor and Anselm in favour of this opinion.[38] While he is in things by essence insofar as he makes them to be what they are, he is in them by power

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[30] Augustine, *De videndo Deo* 9.21.
[31] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 3, Tit 1, Cap 1, a, 62; cf. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I.13: *incircumscriptibile est quod nullo horum continetur.*
[32] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 3, Tit 1, Cap 2, Solutio, 63.
[33] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 3, Tit 2, Cap 1, Solutio, pp. 64-5; cf. Augustine, *Epist.* 184, 4.11: *sapientia replere sapientem.*
[34] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 3, Tit 2, Cap 1, Solutio, 64, quoting Boethius, *De Trinitate* 4: '*Deus est ubique' ita dici videtur non quod sit in omni loco, sed quod omnis locus ei adsit ad eum capiendum, cum ipse non capiatur in loco.*
[35] *SH,* Tr 2, Qu 3, Tit 2, Cap 1, III.a, 64.
[36] Peter Lombard also treats this topic in his *Sentences*, distinctions 36-7, which cover the presence of things in God and God in things.
[37] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 1, 70-1.
[38] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 2, I.a, b, c, p. 71; cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy,* ch. 11; Richard of St Victor, *De Trinitate* II, 23; Anselm, *Monologion* 13.

in terms of the abilities he gives them, and by presence, through their corresponding acts or operations.[39]

Since God is in things in these three ways, it remains to be considered whether they exist in him in those three ways as well.[40] On this score, the Summist contends that things are in God by presence, because they are in his knowledge, and by power, because they are in him as their cause. By essence, however, they are not in him, otherwise the divine essence would depend upon the essences of creatures, which are not the cause of God but instead depend on him as their cause.[41] In this connection, creatures are said to participate in God, whose being does not depend on participation in another but which is derived from himself.[42] While there is no variation in essence, power or presence on the part of God, there is variation on the part of creatures, insofar as they participate differently and sometimes unequally in God.[43]

Whereas Richard's discussion of divine immensity was simply part of an attempt to reason to the one God, this section on the 'location' as it were of God throws into relief the Franciscan motivation for prioritizing this concept. To do so was to lay absolute emphasis on the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God, or to highlight his intimate relationship with creatures and their complete dependence on him, while preserving his own independence from them. Stated otherwise, it was to picture a God whose fundamental attribute pertains to the fact that he knows and makes himself known—and can therefore be found—in all things without by the same token being captured fully by any of them—much in the way that Francis of Assisi famously envisaged.

This emphasis on the specific terms of God's knowledge and knowableness is reinforced in the treatise on divine knowledge, where the Summist argues that God knows not only universals but also singulars or individuals, because he is the artificer of great and small things equally.[44] By contrast, the Summist states, in a discussion that anticipates the later Franciscan distinction between abstractive and intuitive cognition, that human beings can only know universals, because they must infer them from sense knowledge, which bespeaks the imperfection of human knowledge at the intellectual level by comparison to God's.[45] Although the wisdom of God is one, consequently, he in

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[39] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 2, 72-3.
[40] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 4, II, 74.
[41] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 4, II, Respondeo, 75-6.
[42] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 2, II.2, 72.
[43] *SH,* Tr 2, Tit 3, Memb 1, Ch 5, Solutio, 76.
[44] See Rega Wood's article on Alexander's discussion of the divine ideas in his Gloss on Lombard's Sentences and *Disputed Questions:* 'Distinct Ideas and Perfect Solicitude: Alexander of Hales, Richard Rufus, and Odo Rigaldus', *Franciscan Studies* 53:7 (1997). See also, *Magistri Alexandri de Hales Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* (Quaracchi 1951-7).
[45] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 3, Ch 6, Ad objecta 1, p. 256: *hoc est ex imperfection intellectus nostril quod non potest intelligere singulare, non autem ex eius immaterialitate. Aliter tamen dicendum et verius quod intellectus humanus intelligit singularia; intellectus enim accipit speciem rei et intelligit rem ipsam…nota igitur quod*

fact possesses many ideas, indeed, an idea for each individual thing. These ideas are the same in substance as that wisdom but differ in their mode of existence. That is to say, they subsist in the mode of the thing known, namely, the mode of creatures, rather than that of the knower, namely God. As such, they can be multiplied without undermining the unity of God.[46]

As the Summist contends, divine ideas are infinite, precisely because God is infinite.[47] Since, however, his disposition to create is finite, God has many ideas that are not instantiated. Thus, the divine knowledge consists of ideas for things that do exist as well as for things that do not exist, just as an architect possesses ideas for things he could but does not create.[48] In a section on the immensity of divine power, the Summist elaborates on the distinction between the ideas God chooses and does not choose to instantiate, through a discussion of God's absolute versus his ordained power. In this regard, he differentiates between what can be done *de jure* (by permission) and *de facto* (in principle). While human beings are only able to act *de jure*—for example, they can disrespect authorities *de facto* without being able to do so *de jure*—there is no difference between what is possible *de jure* and *de facto* for God, because he is the one who determines what is possible and what is actual in the first place.

On these grounds, the Summist concludes that the exercise of God's power is not limited by any factor—including his own will or action. In this regard, he recognizes that some might argue that God's power is limited, employing the following syllogism:

1. At the initial moment of creation (A), God was either able to create all that is creatable or not.[49]
2. If not, then his power is limited in creating.
3. If so, then he is able to create everything creatable in A.
4. But if God creates everything creatable in A, then he is not able to create anything after A, which implies that his power is limited by his initial action.

In response to this argument, the Summist contends that the affirmation that 'God makes everything creatable in A' does not necessarily imply that he is not able to create anything after A. For he only exhausts what he is able to do in the case of A, and even that limit is not essential to his nature but to the boundaries of A itself. After insisting that God's action does not limit his immense power, the Summist goes on to make the more extraordinary claim that God's power is not limited even by his own justice, goodness or wisdom. While God evidently does all things justly, because that is who he is, he is not unable to do anything unless it is just, because to attribute this inability to him would be to limit him.[50] One theologically surprising implication of this claim is that God is in

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*intellectus humanus intelligit singular per speciem vel similitudinem eius acceptam adminiculo sensus.*

[46] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 4, Ch 1, II, Respondeo, 258.
[47] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 3, Ch 2, Respondeo, 252.
[48] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 3, Ch 1, Respondeo, 250-1.
[49] *SH,* Tr 4, Qu 2, Memb 2, Cap 1, I.1, 218.
[50] *SH,* Tr 4, Qu 2, Memb 2, Cap 2, Ad objecta I.1-3, 220.

principle able by his absolute power, or *de facto,* to damn those who are good and save those who are wicked. Although he declines to do this by his ordained power, or *de jure,* he does not derogate his power in doing so. Rather, he illustrates the immutability of his ordained power which functions in keeping with the justice of his will.[51]

This excursus on the immensity of the divine power aside, the Summist affirms that the wisdom of God—and by implication, his ideas—are the same as his essence. From this, it follows that the instantiations of ideas in creation are in the divine essence. That is not to say that they *are* the divine essence, as if creatures comprised God, and he depended upon them for his existence, as in a sort of pantheism.[52] As I have conveyed, this essence, that is, the Being of God, is first and foremost immense or infinite. In knowing himself as such, he knows all finite beings that could or do exist. Incidentally, this includes evil on some level, and to explain how so, the Summist distinguishes between simple knowledge and a form of knowledge that entails approval.

While God does not know evil in the second way, he does know it in the first.[53] Though he is not the cause of evil, therefore, he allows it by giving human beings the freedom to choose or reject what is good. In doing so, he makes it possible for evil to be made good, not without qualification or *simpliciter,* but by reason of that which human beings elicit from evil circumstances.[54] While evil is not good, useful, or expedient in itself, consequently, it can become good when it is ordered towards a good end by a human will that is conformed to the will of God, who makes all things good.[55]

For this purpose, God further provides human beings with recourse to knowing him—and to knowing beings as they exist most truly in him—by implanting in them an innate knowledge of his immense Being. [56] Though this knowledge does not afford the

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[51] *SH,* Tr 4, Qu 2, Memb 2, Cap 2, Ad objecta III, 221. Another particularly interesting—and related—section treats that which is possible for the divine power (*SH,* Tr 4, Qu 3, p. 229ff.). In discussing this matter, the Summist distinguishes between the usage of the term 'possible' *de dicto* or *de re*. On his understanding, the *de dicto* application of the term does not apply here, because it refers to general categories of rather than specific beings or states of affairs. Possibility *de re* in his view can be defined either as proper or characteristic of a thing (*proprie*) or as appropriated by it (*appropriate*). What is appropriate is made possible by a superior cause, but what is proper is possible by its inferior or intrinsic cause. While it is not possible for a virgin to conceive and a blind person in terms of an inferior cause, it is possible by way of a superior cause (*SH,* Tr 4, Qu 3, Cap 1, Respondeo, p. 231.). Thus, such things are only possible unconditionally (*simpliciter*) where there is a superior cause.

[52] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 4, Ch 1, VI, Respondeo, 260.

[53] *SH,* Tr 5, Sectio 1, Qu 1, Memb 3, Ch 3, Respondeo 1, 253.

[54] *SH,* Tr 6, Qu 4, Ch 1, Respondeo, 403.

[55] *SH,* Tr 6, Qu 4, Ch 3, Respondeo, 404.

[56] *SH,* Tr 3, Qu 1, Memb 1, Caput 1, Respondeo, p. 113: *'Ens' sit primum intelligibile, eius intention apud intellectum est nota (Avicenna, Metaph. I.6); primae ergo determinationes entis sunt primae impressions apud intellectum: eae sunt unum, verum, bonum, sic patebit; non poterunt ergo habere aliqua priora specialiter ad sui notificationem. Si ergo notificatio fiat eorum, hoc non erit nisi per posterior, ut per abnegationem vel effectum consequentem.*

full comprehension of the Infinite Being of God mentioned above, nor does it provide the actual content of his ideas about finite creatures, which must be derived from sense knowledge, it apparently supervises human efforts to abstract universal concepts from sense experience.

In this way, the innate knowledge of the Infinite Being doubles as the knowledge of the First Truth whereby we may know the truth of all things as they correspond to an idea in the mind of God. By discerning this correspondence—what Bonaventure would later call 'contuition' (*contuitio*)—we simultaneously gain direct, albeit finite, insight into some aspect of the nature of God. We encounter him palpably. Of course, such knowledge is only accessible to those who have fulfilled the pre-condition for obtaining it.

As the Summist makes clear in the very first and last sections of the volume on the doctrine of God, which respectively treat the nature of theology as a 'practical science', and the question of the will's conformity to God, the orientation of the human will to the will of God, through piety or love for God, satisfies this pre-condition. It purifies the mind and thereby opens the door to the knowledge of Infinite Being whereby all finite beings can truly be known—and whereby God himself can be known through these beings to the extent that he currently can be.

When laid out along these lines, the Franciscan reasons for adopting the doctrine of divine immensity—not to mention the notion of an innate human knowledge of Being, which is clearly derived from Avicenna—can hardly be ignored.[57] As I have noted already, these thinkers were endeavoring, first and foremost, to lay down a distinctly Franciscan tradition of thinking theologically. Since the authorship of the Summa began only a decade after Francis of Assisi's death, they were doing so very much under the inspiration of his example and vision for his order, which must therefore be consulted for the sake of interpreting where their allegiances to authorities actually lie.

In perusing the biographies of Francis that were circulated around this time, which Thomas of Celano had been commissioned by the order to compose, not to mention Francis' own writings—most famously the *Canticle of Brother Sun*—what we find is in some respects the Francis that we all know: a man with a profound sense of the love of God that is poured out in creating and sustaining beings of all shapes and sizes—beings that reflect his love in turn. Coupled with this is a deep feeling of responsibility to care for all creatures as individuals, regardless of their status, after the manner of the divine. On this theme, Celano recounts the famous legends in which Francis kisses a leper;[58] calls both inanimate and animate creatures by the name of 'brother' or 'sister';[59] and even preaches to an attentive flock of birds.[60]

As Celano writes in more general terms, Francis saw in every work of the divine artist a reason to

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[57] See Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West* (London: The Warburg Institute, 2001).

[58] *Celano 2,* in *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources, vol. 1,* ed. and trans. Marion A. Habig, Paul J. Oligny, Leo Sherley-Price (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2008), 369.

[59] *Celano 1,* in ibid., 296.

[60] *Celano 1*, 277.

> Praise the Artist; whatever he found in the things made, he referred to the Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord and saw behind things pleasant to behold their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself. All things were to him good. 'He who made us is the best' they cried out to him. Through his footprints impressed upon things, he followed the Beloved everywhere. He made for himself from all things a ladder by which to come even to his throne.[61]

In light of this brief excursus onthe early understanding of Francis, we can infer that the doctrine of divine immensity gave first-generation Franciscans a perfect resource for capturing the nature of the God as Francis envisaged it, and indeed for capturing Francis' vision as to what it meant to imitate the life of the Son of God on earth. While it achieved its ends within the context of the Franciscan order, I would like to turn now to the last part of my discussion concerning the theological function it might perform for contemporary theology.

**Towards a Middle Way Between Classical Theism and Panentheism**

In this context, many readers will be aware, there is an ongoing debate between two main schools of thought regarding the general nature of God. While there is considerable room for ideological variation within these schools, they are normally categorized broadly in terms of Classical Theism or Panentheism. Classical Theism is usually traced to the likes of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, and indeed to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Although Panentheism has a long history in Hinduism and other religious traditions, it was popularized in the West largely as an offshoot of the so-called 'Process Theology', which was introduced in the twentieth century by Alfred North Whitehead.[62] The main thrust of Panentheism is this: while God cannot be conflated with the world, as in pantheism, he does not differ from it in terms of his general nature, but only in the sense that he ultimately transcends or 'prehends' it by containing it and all that it entails.

By this account, God is subject to change, evil, suffering, materiality, and all the other features of finite, creaturely existence. These are the very features that Classical Theists abhor in discussions of God, who must on their account be completely immutable, impassible, spiritual, and good, precisely because he is a simple being who always completely is what he is, which is all that is good. For many Panentheist Christian theologians, the motivation for offering an alternative to this construal of God is to affirm his radically immanent nature and his intimate involvement in his creation—something they believe is sorely lacking in the Classical account's emphasis on God's transcendence.

For many Panentheists, in fact, the Classical emphases on divine immutability and impassibility portray a detached and unfeeling God who cannot possibly empathize with

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[61] *Celano 2,* 494-5.

[62] As an anonymous reader of this article helpfully pointed out, however, Whitehead's metaphysics is not the only means by which Christian theology has been introduced to Panentheism. See for example, Sergius Bulgakov in his *Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 2008).

or show compassion for his creatures. Arguably, this objection to Classical Theism can be evaded by offering a more sophisticated exposition of the doctrine of divine simplicity, such as one finds in the work of Thomas Weinandy and David Burrell.[63] Such scholars point out in different ways that the doctrines of divine immutability and impassibility were introduced to reinforce God's fidelity to his own nature, which is ultimately Love. In their view, a God who is subject to change—and thus to changing his mind, not least as a result of changing feelings, or passibility—would be a God who might prove fickle when it comes to extending compassion to his creatures. This is an implication of the classical doctrine—and its rejection—that Panentheists have seemingly overlooked. Furthermore, it seems to defeat the purpose of Panentheism, which is to affirm God's ability constantly and compassionately to identify with his creatures.

Be that as it may, the terms on which Aquinas affirms God's immanence, compassion, and so on, are clearly not as self-evident to contemporary scholars as they are in the case of Panentheism. It takes a good deal of sophisticated theological maneuvering to see how he achieves similar ends to Panentheism by different means. While that maneuvering may be worth the while, there is a much more straightforward intermediary solution, which does not resort like most versions of Panentheism to *reducing* God to his immanence in the effort to illustrate it. This solution, I submit, can be found in the doctrine of divine immensity.

According to this doctrine, God is radically other and wholly independent from his creatures, precisely because of his immensity or infinity. There is no sense, as in Panentheism, in which a certain 'pole' of his being might entail the qualities of finite creatures. While he manifests his nature in them, they do not conversely constitute his nature. On this showing, consequently, the transcendence of God is upheld in the strongest possible terms. At the same time, however, God individually knows and expresses himself in every single creature; he is present to each one of them, and makes his presence palpable through them in turn.

This is the sort of account that many panentheists have been seeking, namely, one which adequately accounts for God's involvement in his creation. Thus, it is one that I suggest holds promise for finding middle way between Classical Theism and Panentheism. Although early Franciscans were not aware of the debate between proponents of these positions when they developed this doctrine, they provided a resource for resolving them nonetheless, through the simple effort to systematise the thinking of the 'little poor man' whose legendary experience of God and compassion for creatures served as their overwhelming source of inspiration.

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[63] David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: University of Scranton Press, 2008); Thomas Weinandy Burrell, *Does God Suffer?* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); *Does God Change?* (St Bede's, 2002).