

Albert the Great

1. His Life

- born at Lauingen, Swabia, 1205/1206; died at Cologne, 15 November 1280
- also called Albertus Magnus; "Doctor Universalis"
- proficient in all the branches of learning cultivated in his day
- eldest son of the Count of Bollstädt
- studies at the University of Padua, where he joined the Dominicans
- Where he did his further studies is unknown.
- taught theology at Hildesheim, Freiburg (Breisgau), Ratisbon, Strasburg, and Cologne.
- In 1245 he was ordered to go to Paris, where he received the Doctor's degree and taught from 1246 to 1248.
- In Paris he taught Thomas Aquinas, who then went with Albert to Cologne, where Albert was commissioned by his order to a *Studium generale*.
- In 1254 Albert was elected Provincial of his Order in Germany.
- He journeyed to Rome in 1256, to defend the Mendicant Orders against the attacks of William of St. Amour.
- He resigned the office of Provincial in 1257 in order to devote himself to study and to teaching.
- In the year 1260 he was appointed Bishop of Ratisbon (Regensburg), resigning the following year and returning, after a sojourn in Italy, to the Dominican *Studium* at Cologne.

- He spent the rest of his long life in Cologne, where his grave still exists today.
- The announcement of the death of St. Thomas at Fossa Nuova, as he was proceeding to the Council of Lyons (1274), was a heavy blow to Albert, and he declared that "The Light of the Church" had been extinguished.
- In 1277 he seems to have journeyed to Paris to defend Thomas Aquinas.

2. His Works

- The critical edition is being done in Bonn and published in Münster at Aschendorff.
- There exist two old editions of his enormous work, treating a great variety of subjects.
- two Summas
- He paraphrased in understandable Latin all of the works of Aristotle, beginning with the *Nicomachean Ethics* (the first commentary on this work in the West).
 - Albert freely added his own *digressiones* to his commentaries.
 - By including works of other authors in his commentary he filled our areas missing in Aristotle's own books.
 - Albert realized the importance of non-Christian, Greco-Arabian thought and wanted to master it and integrate it into Christianity.

3. Albert and Natural Science

- Albert was assiduous in cultivating the natural sciences; he was an authority on physics, geography, astronomy, mineralogy, chemistry (*alchimia*), zoology, physiology, and even phrenology.

-
- "The aim of natural science is not simply to accept the statements [*narrata*] of others, but to investigate the causes that are at work in nature."¹
 - He employed experimental methods.
 - In his treatise on plants he lays down the principle: Experiment is the only safe guide in such investigations.²
 - "In studying nature we have not to inquire how God the Creator may, as He freely wills, use His creatures to work miracles and thereby show forth His power: we have rather to inquire what Nature with its immanent causes can naturally bring to pass."³
 - In spite of his high regard for Aristotle: "Whoever believes that Aristotle was a god, must also believe that he never erred. But if one believe that Aristotle was a man, then doubtless he was liable to error just as we are."⁴

4. His Theology

- He defended the independence of philosophy from theology.
- His is the primary responsibility for the acceptance of Aristotle within Christianity, in spite of adamant opposition.
 - "Scias quod non perficitur homo in philosophia, nisi scientia duarum philosophiarum, Aristotelis et Platonis."⁵

¹ *De Miner.*, lib. II, tr. ii, i.

² Experimentum solum certificat in talibus. *De Veg.*, VI, tr. ii, i.

³ *De Coelo et Mundo*, I, tr. iv, x.

⁴ *Physic.* lib. VIII, tr. 1, xiv.

⁵ *Met.*, lib. I, tr. v, c. xv.

-
- Albert rejects the Greek distinction between theoretical and practical sciences, claiming that Christianity has made it invalid.
 - Thanks to the teaching on Salvation Christianity has resolved the Good and the True into one science.
 - Reason and affect belong together. Indeed, "the intellect is directed towards the affect as its goal."⁶
 - In the Pauline word *piety* Albert finds a means of uniting both aspects of theology.
 - In this way Albert justifies theology as a legitimate science in its own right.
 - Albert does not want to make theology into a universal science and thus he rejects the position of Thomas Aquinas who considers the object of theology to consist in everything that can be revealed by God (*divinitus revelabilia*).
 - Albert considers this opinion to be obviously false (*Et quod hoc falsum est, statim patet*).
 - Albert defines theology as a primarily practical and affective science (*secundum pietatem*), i. e. directed toward the attainment of eternal happiness.
 - *scientia affectiva*
 - the affective intellect (*intellectus affectivus*)
 - Theology is for Albert a preliminary stage of the eschatological *visio paszens*, which is the fulfillment of theology.

⁶ *I Sent.*, d. 1, a. 4.

-
- the groom's wedding gifts [*dotēs*] to the bride, when he brings her into his house

 - Albert: "They are given to the soul, or man, when she is brought into the house of glory, e. i., into the inseparable embrace of the husband, namely Christ. And thus is brought about the most enjoyable and most beautiful union."⁷

 - The vision means a "conversio super praesentiam", the comprehension brings about an "adhaerentiam" and love penetrates the beloved, causing an "inhaerentiam".⁸

 - The touch of love [*tactus amoris*], when one person enters into the other, is the highest kind of union.⁹
 - three different spiritual gifts: the vision, the love and the comprehension [or, sometimes, enjoyment is mentioned as the third]

 - The resurrection of the body as an "overflowing of consciousness" [*redundantia intellectus*]
 - the one totality and the many aspects
 - the analogy to light and colors: the lower flows out of the higher without leaving it

 - Eternal happiness is both a single whole and has many participations.

 - In other words, the intellectual vision of God is the cause of the resurrection of the body.

⁷ Dantur animae vel homini quando introducitur in domum gloriae, in amplexus inseparabiles sponsi, sc. Christi, [...] ad ornatum sponsae, ut per hoc efficitur coniunctio delectabilis et congrua. [...] Et ita fit coniunctio delectabilissima et pulcherrima. *Quaestio de dotibus*, Cod. Vat. lat. 781, f. 17^{ra}.

⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 1, a. 12 (Ed. Par. XXV, 29).

⁹ Tertia [coniunctio] est per inhaerentiam, quando unum quasi ingreditur alterum, et contrahit impressiones et affectiones a natura ejus: et hic est tactus amoris, et assimilatur tactui naturali, in quo tangencia agunt et patiuntur ad invicem, et imprimunt sibi mutuo suas proprietates. *In I Sent.*, d. 1, a. 12 (Ed. Par. XXV, 29–30).

- The *intellectus* is immediately united to God and the body is a participation in this union.¹⁰

- In the present life the movement is in the opposite direction. Albert calls it the *via abstractionis*.

- By creating the classical notion of the *Light of Glory* (*lumen gloriae*) he achieved a synthesis of two previously antagonistic positions on the question whether the content of eternal life (i. e. the object of the vision) consists in God Himself or merely in divine "theophanies".

¹⁰ Superiores immediate participant [...], aliae autem participant per redundantiam. Albert der Große, *De resurrectione*, Tr. IV, q. 2, a. 5.