

SPIRITUALITY TODAY



Albert the Great
by Sr. M. Albert Hughes, O.P.

Autumn 1987 Vol. 39 Supplement

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Introduction

READING Sister Mary Albert's lively portrait of her patron saint, we come to grasp the attractiveness of Albert's robust vigor, his breadth of intellect open to the world, and his depth of soul so rooted in God that even his contemporaries were led to call him "great." We can understand why Thomas Aquinas was so taken with his older confrere's desire to explore, his willingness to dialogue, and to take bold stands. Such shared values -- integrated and held in balance by a clarity of faith and consurning love of neighbor -- put them both on the cutting edge of theological development and made them "risk-takers" in their service of Church and society.

History has accorded Thomas the greater role. Indeed, when Dante (*Paradiso X*) approaches the garland of lights that seemed caught up in dance, it is Thomas Aquinas who steps forward to introduce the luminous band, beginning with "Albert of Cologne, my friend and teacher."

A few years ago the late Father James A. Weisheipl, O.P., explored Thomas's relationship to his friend and teacher. While Thomas derived much from his master, as his writings show, the reverse is not true. Albert, it seems, did not keep up with his student's work until after Thomas death, when he took it upon himself to defend what had been their common stand against traditionalist critics. By then well advanced in age, Albert had Thomas' works read to him, so the story goes. Thus it is only in Albert's later works, written mostly after Thomas' death, and the scripture commentaries in particular, that Thomas' influence is apparent.

These facts lend force to Sister Mary Albert's desire to allow Albert to stand outside the shadow of his student. The image that takes shape through her brush strokes is one of independence, humanness, and the optimism that permeated everything he undertook. His was a humanity so enlivened by grace that it was raised to greatness without severing its roots in this world. This, no doubt, more than anything else, inspired Thomas. And it is this that can be our inspiration, because our own times parallel Albert's in terms of discovery, expanding knowledge, new vistas, and the importance of human relations. Albert's optimism with regard to the goodness of human nature, the world, and the accessibility of God's grace encourage us to carry on in the same pioneering spirit.

Little needs up-dating in Sister Mary Albert's narrative save for a few details, and a number of these concern Thomas more than Albert. Among the works on Albert's life and work published since her little book first appeared in 1948, the following would provide a good starting point for further reading: *Albertus Magnus -- Doctor Universalis 1280/1980*, ed. Gerbert Meyer and Albert Zimmermann (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag 1980); *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays*, 1980, ed. James A. Weisheipl (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), and Fr. Weisheipl's entry on St. Albert in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, Vol. I.) pp. 254b-258a. Critical editions of Albert's works (to number forty volumes, some in several parts) are being produced under the auspices of the Albertus Magnus Institute of Cologne (Munster: Aschendorff, 1951 ff.).

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Foreword

This book was originally written for the use of the Dominican nuns of St. Dominic's Priory, Carisbrooke, with no thought of future publication, and it seemed best to retain the family atmosphere even when it is now offered to a wider circle of readers. It was not meant to be a learned, nor even a complete biography of St. Albert the Great. Rather it was an attempt to draw for his sisters, from the scanty materials available, the portrait of one who, although among the most attractive and most illustrious of the sons of St. Dominic, may by reason of his very greatness appear less lovable.

In revising it for publication every effort has been made to bring it into line with the latest research, but this has only been possible thanks to the generous assistance of the Very Rev. Daniel Callus, O.P., S.T.M., D.Phil. (Oxon), Regent of Studies of the English Dominican province, and Dr. Sherwood Taylor, M.A., Ph.D., Curator of the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, both of whom read through the manuscript and offered invaluable suggestions and criticisms.

The debt to *Albert the Great*, by H. Wilms, O.P. (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1933), and *Sant' Alberto Magno*, by A. Pucetti, O.P. (Rome, 1932), will be obvious to all who are familiar with those studies; and the timely gift of a copy of Rudolph of Nymegen's *Legenda B. Alberti Magni* (Cologne, 1928) from the Brethren of the St. Albertus Magnus Akademie, Waldeburg, is here gratefully acknowledged.

The chronology of the life of St. Albert is still a matter of some dispute, but it is hoped that the most probable dates have been given.

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Albert the Great by Sr. M. Albert Hughes, O.P.

1

Foundations



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

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A life which combines religious perfection with the study of Wisdom has a marvelous power of arousing and lifting up the hearts of the faithful.

WHEN, on 16 December 1931, Pope Pius XI proclaimed as Saint and Doctor of the Church a German friar who lived in the thirteenth century, and was known even to his contemporaries as Albert the Great, (1) he declared that "the present moment would seem to be the time when the glorification of Albert the Great was most calculated to win souls to submission to the sweet yoke of Christ. Albert is exactly the Saint whose example should inspire this modern age, so ardently seeking peace, and so full of hope for its scientific discoveries..." Ten years later, in the second dismal year of World War II, Pope Pius XII strongly endorsed the action of his predecessor by declaring Albert Patron of all the Natural Sciences -- "*ob tristissimam quoque nostrorum dierum condicionem* -- on account of the especially sad situation of our times."

What can there be in common between the thirteenth and the twentieth centuries? Rather more, perhaps, than one might have expected.

The thirteenth century was a period of transition, of unrest in every sphere. In the realm of politics, the growth of the central power at the expense of the vassal provinces, the "lesser states" as it were, marked the beginning of the rise of the national state which would supersede the feudal regime with its numerous petty lordlings. In the social and

economic spheres, too, feudalism, the capitalism of the day, was being undermined.

The sudden expanse in trade and commerce had drawn to the rapidly growing towns serfs, who either bought their freedom, or else departed without any such formalities. They were usually the bolder and more enterprising of their class, and they soon were molded into the restless, volatile urban masses, so familiar to students of the Middle Ages. They were mentally alert but uneducated, fundamentally pious but uninstructed, and being conscious of their newly won independence and anxious to make the most of it, they offered an easy prey to agitators of any sort. As the Church was closely bound up with the feudal system, it was not able to meet the religious needs of this new class. The heretics of the day, the Albigensians, Cathars, and Waldensians, took advantage of this and made religion the cloak for a reaction against the established order, by which they became the anarchists and communists of the day.

The growth of commerce also produced a new wealthy middle class, who likewise combined against the Church and the feudal nobles from whom they extracted liberties and virtual independence, only to fall into feuds and rivalries between families and cities. All through society, individual was at loggerheads with individual, family with family, and state with state; and all the time, on the eastern frontier of Europe, the Turks and the Tartars, the ancestors of the modern Russians, were threatening the very existence of Christendom.

In addition to the military menace from the east, a more subtle danger to Christian thought was posed by the spread of Jewish and Arab philosophy, which had filtered into Europe through the Spanish Moors. This was a distorted version of the philosophy of Aristotle, and even in the form adopted by the Christian Averroists under Siger de Brabant, it led logically to agnosticism, atheism, and the denial of all moral responsibility, and threatened to undermine Christianity from within.

Education too was entering a new phase. The rapid rise of universities and grammar schools opened the road to learning to many "poor scholars," and there was a growing interest in secular subject, even though education still remained, in the main, the monopoly of those destined for the ecclesiastical state. Hitherto, even the rank and file of the clergy themselves had been grossly uneducated, and the efforts of the popes to make them into fit teachers of their flocks were to succeed mainly thanks to the support they found in the new Order of Preachers.

The Church, as we have said, was bound up with the feudal system. Her higher clergy were feudal lords, preoccupied with worldly business, wealthy and not infrequently immoral. Her lower clergy, as a class, were ignorant and often no more edifying than their superiors. The days of St. Bernard were long past, and the legates, whose luxury and pomp were obstacles to the success of their preaching against the heretics, were Cistercian abbots. Preaching was considered the duty and privilege of the bishops, but few of them exercised it. The parish priest was supposed to give a formal sort of commentary on the Pater and Creed on Sundays, but regular weekly preaching was not made obligatory until the Council of Trent.

Such was the society from which Albert sprang, for which he labored, in and through which he attained to sanctity. And yet as Pope Pius XI pointed out, he worked and prayed and sanctified himself, not for himself alone, nor even for his own age alone, but "for all that seek the truth." The saints of God are glorified, not primarily for their own sakes, for the accidental glory of their cult is as nothing compared with their essential happiness of the Beatific Vision, but for ours. Through them we are led to praise God who is "wonderful in his saints." In them we see some reflection of his perfection which we are told to imitate, "other Christs," which we also wish to become, and so we are encouraged to strive to imitate the virtues which they possess and to ask for those graces which God wishes to bestow through their intercession.

The pope, therefore, offered Albert as an example to the modern age, "so ardently seeking for peace, and so full of hope for its scientific discoveries." There are, indeed, other things worthy of note. As an antidote to a narrow nationalism Albert provides an example of a German who lived and taught in France and Italy. In contrast to the modern tendency toward specialization he offers the spectacle of one who in his day "knew all that was knowable." He was a progressive, an experimenter, an innovator, yet he "gathered together with painstaking industry every grain of ancient wisdom." Albert was a scientist of the first rank, yet as great a theologian, and an even greater saint. But the quest for peace and the progress of science are indeed the great preoccupations of our time; the survival of our civilization may well depend on them.

St. Albert the Great, variously called Albert the German, Albert of Cologne, and Albert of Ratisbon (i.e., Regensburg), was born in Bavarian Suebia, at the castle of Lauingen near Ulm, sometime between 1193 and 1206, possibly near the latter date in view of the numerous testimonies to his entry into the order at an early age, but more probably near the earlier one since biographers say he was well over eighty at the time of his death. His family belonged to the military nobility, and both his father and his uncle appear to have been imperial officials. Information concerning his family is scarce, but we are certain of the existence of a younger brother Henry, who also entered the order and was Prior of the Convent of Visburg when Albert made a will of which he was named an executor. According to

tradition he also had a sister who was a Dominican nun, and documents referring to members of the family in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries show that he must have had other brothers. The male line became extinct in 1607. The high social rank of the family is confirmed by their possession of the castle of Bollstadt, the home of Albert's childhood. He retained a vivid recollection of it in later years, describing it in his commentary on St. Luke as an example of the ideal fortress.

The wealth of his parents enabled Albert to receive an education suitable to his rank, and in those days the rudiments of knowledge were acquired in the cathedral or monastic schools. Arithmetic and grammar would be learned -- by heart because of the shortage of books -- and then the child was given the Psalter, receiving the first inspiration to sanctity from the liturgical prayer of the Church. Albert must often have taken an active part in the Divine Office, and even at this early age he added to this sense of Christian piety a great watchfulness over self and a complete obedience to the wishes of his parents. His early education also included instruction in all the arts, activities, and diversions proper to one of his rank, and in his outdoor occupations he gained that detailed knowledge of natural phenomena which was to be later manifested in his botanical writings. To these early influences must be added those emanating from the world in which he lived. It was the age of romance and of chivalry, yet one which realized fully the significance of Christianity, and in it the still youthful northern races were imbibing the ancient civilization of southern Europe. Such was the setting of Albert's childhood.

Then came the time for his first departure from his home -- a prelude to the later and more complete one when God had called him. At that period Germany possessed few centers of learning, France and Italy being the great schools of Europe. Therefore, when Albert's uncle was going into Italy in the service of the Emperor Frederick II, the youth accompanied him. Since Albert's interests were already directed towards the liberal arts, Padua, the center of that branch of learning, as Paris and Bologna were the hub of the theological and legal worlds, was the university of his choice.

The study of the liberal arts covered a seven years' course divided into the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. (2) During the *trivium* the student devoted himself to grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics or logic: that is, to learning how to speak and write, how to convince others, and how to distinguish the true from the false. During the *quadrivium* his attention was centered on music, regarded as the theory of sound; astronomy, i.e., the knowledge of the stars, their revolutions, relations, and positions; geometry and arithmetic, which concerned respectively material forms in the abstract, and in the number of their infinite possibilities of representing concrete phenomena. When this course was complete, he passed on to the study of theology, law, or medicine, of which the first secures the intellectual and moral life, while the others direct social activities.

Albert did not take his degree at Padua, but he extended his knowledge of the arts and medicine and became acquainted for the first time with Aristotle's treatises on physics and ethics. His love of study, however, went hand in hand with a deep piety, which expressed itself in strong devotion to our crucified Savior and our blessed lady, and in a great purity of life. Consequently, when the problem of his future began to occupy his mind more and more, his leaning was towards the Church; and the Order of Preachers, then in all the freshness of its first spring, had already attracted his attention.

Albert entered the order in the spring of 1223. St. Dominic himself had gone to Padua in 1220, and the university had provided a crop of fine vocations -- Stephen Piacentino, Geoffrey of Bergamo, Reginald, and Richard Borgogno, to mention only a few. The spectacle of so many learned and saintly men embracing the life of a friar attracted the imagination of the pious young nobleman. Their evangelical poverty, their zeal for preaching, their constant study of the sacred sciences, their tender devotion to Mary, and their heroic dedication to the service of God for the salvation of their fellow men, together with the attractiveness of St. Dominic, whose memory was still fresh among those with

whom he had lived so shortly before, were further incentives to Albert's generosity. The decisive factor in his vocation was, however, the invitation of the Mother of God herself, who appeared to him when he was praying before her image in the Dominican church, and said, "O Albert, leave the world and enter the Order of Friars Preacher which I have obtained from my Son for the salvation of the world in these last days, and of which I am the special patroness. In it apply yourself ardently to the practice of the Rule and to study, because God will fill you with such wisdom that the whole Church will be enlightened with the doctrine of your books." But the saints are truly human, differing from the rest of us only in the way they triumph over the sinfulness and frailty of fallen human nature, and so Albert did not escape the difficulties which beset the path of so many of the young souls whom God wants for himself. A vocation meets with family opposition, giving rise to doubts and uncertainty. Is God really calling, or is it just selfishness and escapism as people assert? And even when the decisive step has been taken, the novitiate is in a very real sense a period trial and testing by God and man, and early fervor and enthusiasm may give place to discouragement and renewed doubts as to the reality of the vocation.

Thus it was with Albert. The seed was already sown, but before it could bear fruit a period of sacrifice loomed ahead. The words of Our Lady constantly rang in his ear; but on the other hand his uncle, always dear to him, but doubly so now that his parents were dead, was violently opposed to the scheme. He hoped to see Albert occupy a position worthy of his rank, and he gave the boy no peace until he promised not to frequent the church and the company of the Preachers for a certain period. The conflict between grace and nature was violent, and gave rise to a thousand doubts and scruples, but Albert was helped by the prayers of the Master of the order, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, who had heard of his trials. Jordan also enlisted the support of Blessed Diana d'Andalo and her Sisters in Rome in his effort to win for Albert the grace to follow the call of God and his Mother. These prayers and Blessed Jordan's exhortations were the means Our Lady used to break down the wall of resistance.

We read in the *Lives of the Brethren* how Blessed Jordan described in a sermon the state of mind of one who felt the call of God, but whose mind the devil filled with a thousand anxieties and fears that the life would be too difficult and perseverance impossible. Albert recognised this as a divine illumination of the saintly Master as to his own state of mind, and, disregarding all further objections, he received the habit of the Friar Preacher. Jordan immediately wrote to Diana and her Sisters, thanking them for their prayers and describing how, when he had become almost discouraged and was preparing to go away, many students, influenced by his preaching, were touched by the grace of God and joined the order, among them "two sons of German noblemen; the one a high official; the second truly noble in mind and body, enjoying great revenues. We hope that many others similarly endowed will follow their example. Pray to God that his hope may speedily become a reality." It is not evident which of the two young Germans was Albert, but Jordan is probably referring to his vocation. The Master, himself a naturalist and philosopher, would have a special predilection for his compatriot of similar bent, and he would realize that such studies, united to so spiritual a nature as Albert's, would lead to God and not away from him, and would be of immense value in the work of a Friar Preacher.

The transformation which took place in Albert was manifest to all. The surrender of his patrimony, his family, and all that the world offered him -- and it offered many things -- was no small sacrifice. But once it was made generously, he realized that the poverty of Christ, the mortifications of Christ, and the Cross of Christ were his sole inheritance on earth. This doctrine of self-renunciation which he practiced so perfectly he was later to preach with equal ardor. Religious life, he writes in his commentary on St. Luke, is a carrying of the Cross behind Our Lord, though some religious, like Simon of Cyrene, carry it unwillingly. To carry the Cross means to stifle the voice of sin, to exchange earth for heaven, vice for virtue, the stirrings of concupiscence for the grace of God, being spurred on by the Spirit, comforted by the power of God, helped by grace. The law of religious mortification may

be reduced to three heads: the first consists in the pain at being deprived of acceptable things for the love of Christ; the second in embracing austerities contrary to nature; the third in supporting sorrows for the love of Christ. The first is the taming of concupiscence; the second the crushing of the petulance of nature; the third a participation in the passion of Our Savior.

It was the will of God that Albert should suffer further trials in his vocation even after he had received the habit. The story recorded in the *Lives of the Brethren* has been challenged by some authorities, but it is reported by Peter of Prussia, his principal biographer, and there seems to be no good reason for questioning its genuineness. Albert was certainly not wanting in intelligence and he had a wonderful memory for fact. But his interest in positive science, the attraction which he had for flowers and the stars and the sky, seemed to be in absolute opposition to the abstract studies demanded by the Church and the order; theology, exegesis, law, and the like. The prospect of submerging all his interests and his individuality in the formal studies of the community seemed too terrible, and perseverance appeared impossible. He was contemplating escaping by means of a ladder, when four noble ladies appeared to him, and asked the reason for his flight. Trembling and confused, he confessed his mental incapacity in the matter of his studies. But the Blessed Virgin, for it was she, assured him of his perseverance in the life he had undertaken and she promised him that in the midst of the network of error in which the numerous and contradictory philosophical opinions were entangled, his faith should never waver. She gave as a sign of this heavenly gift the assertion that before his death he would be deprived of all his knowledge in a public lesson. So runs the story. And so tremendous was Albert's mission in the field of Christian speculation that it is not surprising that he should have been the special object of divine Providence even from his childhood.

When once his vocation was settled, Albert applied himself with incredible ardor to his studies, profane and religious, so that he would later be well able both to meet and defeat adversaries of the Faith on their own ground and be a shining light to the Church. He became outstanding among his brethren for his virtue and his wisdom -- the two great passions of his life -- and when the graces of his profession and the priesthood had crowned these years during which he was hidden with Christ in God, his light was ready to shine forth before all, but his heart remained, as it would ever remain, deeply humble and filled with gratitude for God's mercies toward him. The spirit which could inspire him in his old age to write the following prayer, which is taken from his commentary on the Gospel for Septuagesima Sunday, was already his:

O Lord Jesus Christ, supreme Husbandman, who called me in the early morning to labor in your vineyard, leading me even from my youth to toil in religion for the wages of eternal life, what will you give me when the time comes for deciding the payment to be made to the workmen? What will you give me, who has stood all the day idle, not only in the market-place of the world, but also in the vineyard of religion? O Lord, you who weigh our works not in the scale of the world, but in that of the sanctuary, grant that I may make amends at least now at the eleventh hour, and seeing that you are good, grant that my eye may not be found evil.

NOTES

1. Cf. James Weisheipl, O.P., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 256a. (Ed. note.)
2. This division originated with Cassiodorus (A.D. 480-575) whose book *Institutions of Divine and Human Study* created the education system of the Middle Ages. He is the father of the universities.

*Friar Preacher
and Master in Theology*



**SPIRITUALITY
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THE Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 endeavored to find remedies for the evils by which the Church was beset in the High Middle Ages. Two of its canons ordained that suitable men should be chosen to assist bishops in the task of preaching and that every cathedral and conventual church should have a staff of priests who could administer the sacraments and labor generally for the salvation of souls. The bishops also decreed that while every church should, where possible, have some one to give free instruction in grammar, each metropolitan church should possess a theologian who could instruct the clergy and advise and guide them in matters of doctrine and in their pastoral cares.

The creation of such a preaching militia which should also be learned in sacred doctrine, was the basis of the religious order for which St. Dominic came to Rome in 1216 to seek papal approbation. So obvious was it that the designs of divine Providence, expressed through the voice of the Council, were here reproduced in concrete form, that despite that same Council's opposition to the creation of new religious orders, Innocent III gladly gave the desired approbation. Dominic, preacher and doctor, was the living realization of the two canons of the Lateran Council.

St. Dominic decreed, however, that a life of severe penance should be joined to his sons' intellectual and preaching activities, so that by putting to death the carnal life the friars would be ready to receive strength and enlightenment from God and to pass on to others the fruits of their contemplation. Albert was not only a shining example of this ideal, but a great master, and exerted a strong influence in impressing it on his disciples, his brethren, and popularizing it through his writings.

From his clothing in 1223 until his return to Germany in 1228, Albert remained at Padua, rapidly outstripping his companions in every branch of knowledge; both secular, so that he became known as "the Philosopher," i.e. scientist and naturalist, and religious, to which he applied himself with special ardor. And his virtue was even more striking than his learning. He is described as being "humble, chaste, affable, studious, completely given up to and lost in God."

Theological training in the order was still similar to that of St. Dominic's day. Owing to the scarcity of manuscripts, accurate copies of what books were existing and an accurate memory in the preacher were essentials. The novice, therefore, was obliged to transcribe the breviary and to learn by heart the Epistles of St. Paul. It was this training, coupled with the recitation of the Divine Office and the continual silence which allowed for meditation, which inspired St. Albert with that deep love and reverence for the sacred scriptures to which he frequently gives expression in his writings. Each convent had a course in Scripture given by the Lector, which each religious was bound to attend. But, since many of the novices were young and insufficiently educated, a more complete course of study was necessary. Thus the conventual school was instituted, called *studium* or *collegium*, where a more detailed course of theology could be pursued -- theology being, as yet, the beginning and end of a friar's education. Profane studies were forbidden unless the provincial or Master should dispense an

individual for some special course. Reference to pagan and philosophical writers was to be as rare and as brief as possible.

The theological course consisted of the sacred scriptures with commentaries, the *Book of Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and the *History* of Peter Correston. The students also engaged in disputations according to the scholastic method under the direction of their master. Such was the form of study to which Albert the scientist, naturalist, and philosopher subjected himself on his entrance into the order, and to which, to all appearances, he would in future confine his intellectual activities. He could have had little thought that Providence designed him to effect the synthesis of Greek philosophy with Christian theology, and to be the oracle of his age, the outstanding educator of his order in the thirteenth century.

Of his life at this time, as Pope Pius XI wrote in the Bull of Canonization, "he assiduously trained both his mind and heart in a holy eagerness.... Mingling and seasoning study with prayer, he fashioned his mind and shaped his whole manner of life so as to fit himself for preaching and for the salvation of souls, and to make himself a useful and capable Friar Preacher."

In 1228, having completed his course at Padua, Albert was sent as lector to the convent in Cologne which had been founded after the Chapter at Bologna in 1221. There he was to spend much of his time until about 1240 when he went to Paris to obtain his Mastership in theology (during this period he was probably lector at other convents including Hildesheim, Freiburg, Regensburg, and Strassburg) and to be the guide, example, and inspiration of his brethren; a living exemplification of wisdom and sanctity. His lessons in theology and philosophy immediately attracted widespread attention and applause, and in addition to his scholastic activities he preached, heard confessions, and was wholly at the disposal of all who sought his help. His gentleness equalled his wisdom and was second only to his sanctity. The universality of his knowledge was sanctified by an equally universal love. The whole secret of the success of his external activity lay in its being inspired by an internal force, the fruit of his intimate union with God. He enlightened others with the light of truth which he himself culled from his contemplation of the eternal light of the Godhead

During this period St. Albert acquired by observation, study, and contemplation, much of those treasures of secular and divine knowledge which he was later to hand down to posterity in his writings, but the only treatise which seems to belong to this phase of his life is the *Tractatus de Bono*. The *Summa de Creaturis*, and his *Commentaries on the Sentences*, sometimes attributed to this period, were written in Paris, the fourth book of the *Sentences* being completed in Cologne in 1249 after his return from Paris. In the beginning of his *Summa* St. Albert declares, as his disciple St. Thomas declared in his turn, that his knowledge came essentially from above, and was not acquired by his own efforts:

In the sacred sciences we profit more from prayer and devotion than from study ... for knowledge of divine things is imprinted on our minds by union with God, who is Wisdom itself, just as the wax molds itself to the seal -- not contrariwise (cf. second Antiphon at lauds of Feast of St. Albert).

But the German priories, including Cologne itself, were only provincial convents; the scholastic center of the order as well as of all Christendom, was Paris. Realizing that Albert's pre-eminence in philosophy and natural science was accompanied by an equally great capacity for theological studies, his superiors sent him to Paris about 1240, to receive the supreme consecration of his doctrine in the form of the doctorate in theology. Four years later he was joined by the young Neapolitan novice, Thomas Aquinas, who was escorted there by the Master of the Order, John the Teuton, the successor to St. Raymund of Pennafort, who had resigned his office only two years after he had been elected to

succeed Blessed Jordan, the second master. Paris, which a quarter of a century previously had received the early friars, was to be the scene of the studies, struggles, and triumphs of the order's two greatest doctors.

In the Middle Ages, the University of Paris was the theological center of Christendom. To have studied there, and still more to have received the bachelors or master's degree, was the highest distinction in the academic world; and hither resorted all those who were later to be leaders of the Church, including no less than nine Popes, clerics of every rank, secular priests as well as religious. Every country of the civilized world furnished its contingent of students, who formed a strange agglomeration of human beings, not always distinguished for their good manners or exemplary behavior, and among whom quarrels and dissensions would appear to have been lamentably frequent.

During the twelfth century, the University of Paris did not form one homogeneous body, but was composed of a number of schools, of which the oldest and most important were those of Notre Dame and of the Cloister. The first, situated near the episcopal palace, was directly subject to the archbishop, and students of every nation resorted there, but especially those who were destined to occupy ecclesiastical posts in the city and diocese of Paris. Of the smaller schools, which were usually held as close to the principal ones as possible, those of St. Victor and St. Genevieve are the best-known, but anyone who had obtained the requisite licence from the chancellor was free to open his own school. By 1200, however, the corporation or university -- *Universitas Magistrorum et Scholarium* -- had already been formed. The qualifications necessary for teaching philosophy had been laid down in 1215 by the Apostolic Legate, Cardinal de Courçon. They were: that the candidate must have reached his twenty-first year; must have attended the lessons of a master for at least six years; must promise to teach for at least two years unless this period were curtailed by special dispensation; must enjoy an unsullied reputation; and before he began his course, undergo the examination prescribed by the Bishop of Paris.

In the same year the cardinal legate had laid down the qualifications for the teaching of theology, limiting to eight the number of chairs of theology -- but this total was soon exceeded -- and decreed that those who taught in this school must be thirty-five years of age and have studied for eight years in the schools and for five years followed a course in theology. The professors were not to open their classes before the hour of Terce, when the masters gave their lessons. No one was allowed to teach or to preach whose morals were not irreproachable and whose learning had not been put to the test.

The members of the faculty of theology were divided into three classes, the students, bachelors, and masters. The students and bachelors were attached to one master, who was in some manner responsible for them, but they were allowed to attend other courses at the same time. After five years, the student could teach as *baccalarius biblicus*, i.e. he could expound the Holy Scriptures with the help of the glosses. After at least two more years of lecturing on the Bible *biblice*, i.e. without discussing difficult questions of exegesis, he became *baccalarius sententiarius* and was allowed to lecture on the *Sentences*, the exposition of these being the duty of the bachelors. After three years of teaching in this capacity, provided that they had reached the age of thirty-five, the bachelors were at liberty to present themselves before the Chancellor of Notre Dame to supplicate for faculties to preach and teach as masters, i.e. to obtain their "licence."

The duty of the masters was to teach, preach, and hold disputations. They usually expounded one book from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament each year -- Holy Scripture always being the text-book. Before the licence was conferred, the chancellor imposed a three months' delay during which he made inquiries of all the masters in theology, and others competent to give information concerning the candidate's morals, ability, eloquence, and possibilities for the future. If the replies were satisfactory, the candidate was examined. The granting or refusing of the licence lay with the

chancellor. Its possession enabled the licentiate to be enrolled in the ranks of the Masters' Corporation, on which occasion he swore in the presence of his new colleagues to observe the statutes of the Corporation, not to divulge its secrets or details of its deliberations, and to consent to all the laws which might be imposed in defense of the privileges of the university.

Such was the center of theological learning to which St. Dominic naturally sent his sons, who were to be the champions and propagators of the Church's doctrine. When St. Albert went there in 1240 conditions were still very much the same as in the holy founder's day. Beside being subject to the laws of the university concerning the obtaining of degrees, candidates from the order had to follow also the prescriptions of their superiors. These had ordained that candidates who were likely to be capable of teaching in the schools should be chosen each year from the French and non-French provinces by the general chapter and the master. During the first of their three years' course they would expound the *Sentences* in the school of some master, and at the end of the year the prior of Paris and the Master would present each candidate before the chancellor, declaring on oath that he was a fit subject for the honor of master. When the prescribed examination was passed, the licentiate took part in a solemn disputation in the Episcopal Hall, in which all the masters also intervened. Having thus earned his laurels, he was free to teach as master in his own school. During the third year he still taught, but now chose for himself the questions of which he wished to treat, held general disputations, and replied to questions. He had with him a bachelor who expounded the *Sentences* under his direction and whom he presented for the licence at the end of the year, vouching for his fitness as others had previously testified to his own. With this presentation of his pupil the master's course was completed.

It is interesting to note what text-books were in use at the time, and what was the general type of teaching to which Albert, like all other newcomers, would be expected to conform. For the School of Theology, the official text-book which was the chief subject of study for both masters and students was the Bible explained with the help of the gloss, while the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard was the manual of theology of the day. All other "summas" merely served as books of reference.

A special Paris Bible had been edited for the use of the university. It was expounded by both bachelors and masters, the latter often being honored with the title of Masters of the Sacred Scriptures, or of the Sacred Page, but the scope of their teaching differed considerably, as the bachelors were obliged to confine themselves to a literal interpretation of the sacred text. The student was bound to spend two years as a "biblical bachelor," either specializing in one book from each Testament, or studying the whole in a more general fashion, as was the custom in the Dominican Order, before he could teach the *Sentences*. They, like every book of theology, every theological dispute, every master's treatise, and every sermon were based on, steeped in, and impregnated with the Bible. "The theology of the Middle Ages lived on the sacred Scriptures," and therefore many of the most famous theological treatises are commentaries on different parts of the Bible, and were originally the masters' lectures to their pupils, such as St. Bonaventure's commentary on John's Gospel and those of St. Thomas on St. Paul, composed while he was teaching in Paris.

Albert's success was immediate and immense. His learning, his eloquence, and his sanctity drew all to him, his exposition of the *Sentences* being especially outstanding. Paris still bears witness to his popularity in its Place Maubert, or Place du Maître Albert, the square in which he held his classes being named after him, so the legend goes. He obtained his licence and was raised to the highest honor the university could offer, the chair of theology. He took part in public disputations, and his name figures in documents, one of which is a condemnation of the Hebrew Talmud, doctrines from which were being disseminated by a converted Jew of la Rochelle. This was dated the 14th May 1248, and it is the first time that Albert figures as a doctor in extant records and the first date in his life which we know with absolute certainty.

Despite his exalted position and overwhelming popularity, Albert retained that humility which ever had been and was always to remain so marked a characteristic. He attributed his knowledge to the blessed Mother of God, the Seat of Wisdom, and showed in all his writings and expositions a diffidence in putting forward an opinion of his own unequalled in any other doctor of the church. Seldom does he put forward an opinion without quoting it from some other authority and, if he must acknowledge authorship, he does so in the most apologetic manner.

In 1248 the general chapter of the Dominican Order met at Paris. Its first task was to arrange for the completion of that unification of the liturgy which St. Raymund of Pennafort had initiated. Next it directed the brethren to do all in their power to render effective the sentence of excommunication pronounced by the pope against the emperor. Its third great task was that which most intimately concerned Albert, setting up a *studium generale* in some of the more important provinces. The Convent of St. James in Paris, being the only such center of higher studies in the order, had grown to unwieldy and unmanageable proportions, numbering four to five hundred friars, whose expenses, despite the patronage of Queen Bianca and other benefactors, were more than the prior could meet.

The idea of separate *studia* in other provinces had been mooted in 1246, and was now put into effect, Bologna being chosen for Italy, Montpellier for Provence, Oxford for England, and Cologne for Germany. Thus was the good seed sown abroad. The friars, having gone to Paris to gather the fruits of its learning, now disseminated them, incorporating as it were, the university within the structure of the order.

The growth of the scholastic life of the order had been phenomenal, and presented a spectacle hitherto unparalleled in the history of the Church. The conventual schools had been instituted, as we have shown, to meet the need of the moment, when young men having various degrees of education, but of whom most were wanting in the knowledge of theology and preaching, were flocking to the Dominicans. Thus each convent was to have its doctor or lector, who was responsible for the instruction of the whole community, including the prior. But many of the new recruits were university-trained, and their intellects could not be satisfied with a simple course in theology, while the study of the Bible itself raised questions and opened up avenues of study -- history, linguistics, philosophy, even law -- which could not be neglected if the friars were to be truly men of culture and adequately fitted for their doctrinal and pastoral mission. Thus as early as 1228, the qualifications of a professor which have already been mentioned were laid down by the general chapter. Since many of the new members of the order were university men, the studies almost automatically molded themselves on those of Paris. The order had its own masters, bachelors, and students, and when instituted the *studium generale* was, as it were, a university in miniature.

There is no positive evidence of the part Albert played in the shaping of the intellectual life of the order at this critical formative period, but it must have been a vital one. He was an outstanding scholar himself, and under him Cologne had attained great renown as a center of learning. He was, too, closely associated with Blessed John the Teuton, the Master of the order. Thus we can be certain that Albert's influence in the growth of the structural side of the academic life of the order was proportionate to his influence over the whole field of speculative thought in the Middle Ages.

Already enjoying an undisputed supremacy in the intellectual life of the order, Albert returned to Cologne charged with the commission of erecting the priory into a *studium general*. Even previously to this the convents scholastic reputation was high and its geographical situation, on the highway between northern Europe and France, made it admirably placed for a center of learning. The natural attraction it would hold for students was powerfully reinforced by Albert's presence, which drew to his side, as if by some magnetic force, scholars from every comer of Europe, secular as well as religious, lay as well

as clerical. His sanctity, his whole personality, and the force of his doctrine and example drew everyone to him. A description of his mode of life by one who was long his disciple helps us to understand this influence:

I saw with my own eyes -- For I was a long time his disciple -- how that venerated Friar, Master Albert, every day for many years during the period that he held the professorship, gave himself with such assiduity to prayer day and night, that he recited the whole Psalter; and when he had said the Hours, and finished the lessons and disputations, he applied himself with great energy to divine contemplation and meditation. Is it surprising that a man so virtuous, holy and pure, should surpass all others in learning? And I can also assert that he was famous for many miracles, which testify to the merit of his life.

So wrote Thomas of Chantimpré about St. Albert, who could so devote himself to prayer despite his academic activities. He also wrote at least twenty volumes in folio, fulfilled his conventual and pastoral duties in an exemplary manner, and was for a period burdened with the offices of provincial of his order and Bishop of Regensburg. His energy of will must have been equal to his piety and learning.

Among Albert's many disciples appear several names of distinction -- Ulrich of Strassburg [\(1\)](#) John of Friburg, Paul Langio, Arnold of Saragossa, Blessed Ambrose Sansedonius, and St. Thomas, who outshone them all and surpassed even his master in the content if not the extent of his learning. The friendship between these two men, both men of genius and both saints, has many parallels in the history of the order and the Church, but it will always remain as one of the outstanding refutations; of the theory, obviously erroneous, but held by so many people either consciously or unconsciously, that human affection is incompatible with sanctity.

NOTES

1. Who later became provincial of Germany, and used the scientific and mechanical lore he had acquired from his master to build the great organ in Strassburg Cathedral.

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Provincial of Germany



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

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ALTHOUGH the general chapter had commissioned Albert to devote all his energies to the establishment of the new studium *generale* at Cologne, he was not for long allowed to confine his activity to a single priory. When the chapter held at Worms elected him Provincial of Germany, the whole of Austria, Serbia, Bavaria, Saxony, the Rhineland, Holland, Brabant, Silesia, Frisia, Westphalia, and Prussia became his responsibility, and a vast new sphere of influence was opened to him. "The Capitular Fathers were well aware of their need," wrote Pius XI, "and they knew the times in which they lived. They knew how the vanity of the world can sometimes creep into the cloister; they knew, therefore, that their ruler must be a man of holy life, of strong will, and conspicuous for prudence and every kind of virtue. Their hopes were not disappointed in Albert."

His apostolic spirit and his devotion to the virtue of holy poverty, in imitation of Our Lord and the Apostles and his father St. Dominic, now manifested themselves anew in his mode of journeying through his province. He went always on foot, pilgrimwise with staff and scrip, taking no provisions but relying on the charity of the faithful, and he demanded a similar spirit of poverty from his brethren. At the Chapter of 1257 the prior of Minden received a penance of five days on bread and water, five masses, three psalters, and three disciplines for having come to the chapter on horseback, and it was ordained that anyone at any time making use of any form of transport without necessity and leave should be punished as for a grievous fault. [\(1\)](#)

The same love of poverty inspired his letter to the province, in which he directed that any brother who spent money or retained in his possession any superfluous object should be deemed guilty of the vice of proprietorship. In a further provincial letter Albert enjoined upon the province the admonition made by the previous general chapter that every brother should once a year open his conscience to his own prior, disclosing to him all the faults found therein, so that the prior should be familiar with his inmost soul. This presumably was inspired by the decree of the Lateran Council that all the faithful should confess once a year to their own parish priest. The Chapter of Erfurt in 1256 repeated this injunction, ordaining also that no one should be allowed to preach outside the convent who had not frequently done so before his own brethren, and even then preachers were to be chosen from the elder religious, and it exhorted the religious to confine their conversation to God and subjects useful to the soul avoiding all useless and worldly gossip.

These extracts will serve to show the spirit of Albert's rule as provincial. It was also his guiding principle to "observe the Rule himself with the greatest possible strictness, and to see that others did likewise," but while he exacted perfect fidelity to their views from those who had solemnly professed them, he was strongly opposed to the imposition of burdens not demanded by the rule, and which were more than human nature could bear. He was most assiduous in making visitations of convents both of men and women, of his own or other orders, both as provincial and bishop, as well as in the capacity of legate. His strictness in correcting abuses where they existed, and in procuring fidelity to the rule, has led some people to consider him over-severe. His own statement that any superior, while maintaining humility as regards his person, should relax nothing of the dignity due to the office may seem to

confirm this view. Yet the testimony of contemporaries makes it quite apparent that the seeming severity was tempered by gentleness and the mildness of his character and by the burning charity towards God and neighbor which inspired all his actions; and that those who received his corrections -- provided that they were men of goodwill -- felt no resentment at his reproof.

Like a true son of St. Dominic and a disciple of Blessed Jordan, Albert did not confine his attentions to the brethren of the order, but extended his ministrations to the sisters also. According to the oral tradition of the order the first friars who entered Germany had found groups of holy women, some living in poverty as recluses, some also living in poverty and wearing a kind of religious habit, all of whom they grouped in monasteries receiving pecuniary assistance from the wealthy maidens and widows who hastened to join them. These religious wore a white woollen habit, having a long and ample tunic, a long scapular, a cloak and a small veil of coarse texture. These convents increased in number very rapidly, especially in the Rhineland, so that when the Province was divided into Saxony and Germany about a year before St. Albert's death there were sixty-five convents in Germany alone, more than those of all the other provinces together.

Perhaps the most famous of all these monasteries was that of Colmar, the history of whose supernatural favors so interested Albert that when he was bishop he commissioned one of the brethren to compile an account of all he had observed there. Another convent with which the saint had dealings was that founded at Marienthal in 1232. There, in 1237, had fled Iolanda, daughter of the Count of Vianden, who was nephew of the Emperor of Constantinople. She succeeded in being clothed in the habit before her family, whose wrath at the proceedings knew no bounds, invaded the cloister, and bore her back to the ancestral castle. The young girl refused to be intimidated and when Albert arrived at the castle, armed with full powers to decide her fate, she cast herself at his feet and begged him to receive her vows there and then. He hesitated for time but, vanquished by her generous ardor, decreed that she should be allowed to follow her vocation and like another Diana d'Andalo, she returned in triumph to the convent, being then eighteen years old. Her sacrifice had its reward, for her father died a crusader in the Holy Land, her mother took the veil in the same convent, where her daughter had become prioress, and a brother became a Friar Preacher.

Another convent with which the saint was connected was that of Soest, where a father of the Cologne Priory had assembled a group of pious women under a rule approved by the Master without, however, constituting them a proper community. Many noble ladies entered the community which flourished exceedingly, and Albert was requested to give the religious a complete rule of life. This he did willingly, and on the appointed day, after offering mass, he led them processionally through the town accompanied by clergy and laity to the spot chosen for their habitation -- Alvenhausen by name -- later called Paradise. The sisters went barefoot, clad in humble attire, singing hymns. In an ancient chapel dedicated to Our Lady, Albert received the sisters' vows to live henceforward according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the constitutions of St. Dominic. He addressed them in words full of spirit, instructing them in the mode of life they were to follow -- to renounce all things, deny themselves, obey humbly -- and promised them in God's name eternal life if they persevered to the end. Then, having blessed them, he closed the cloister door while the sisters changed the antiphon *Regnum mundi*, the onlookers being moved with emotion. Albert remained with them for some days giving further instructions. Later he revisited them as bishop to consecrate the church.

In 1254 a vision concerning the saint was granted to a member of a regular order, who had come to Rome from Bavaria and was praying in St. Peter's. He beheld a horrible serpent which invaded the church, and filled not only the church but the whole of Rome with its hissing. Suddenly a man in the habit of a Friar Preacher, whom an interior voice revealed to the religious as being named Albert, entered the Church. The serpent, hissing vilely, flung itself upon him, entwining itself around him from

head to foot, so that his whole body was imprisoned in its coils. But the friar, shaking himself free, mounted the pulpit from which the gospel of the day was usually read and read the Gospel of John as far as the words: *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*. The serpent, ceasing its hissing, fled, and peace reigned everywhere. The religious was mystified by the vision and when he communicated it to Albert, who arrived at Rome about that time, he too could offer no explanation. It was only later when the struggle between the University of Paris and the mendicant orders, in which Albert played a determining part, came to a head that the meaning of the vision became apparent.

This quarrel, which for a time seemed to threaten the very existence of the Friars Preachers and the sons of St. Francis, had its root, we are assured by many writers of unquestioned integrity, in the jealousy which the secular masters at the University of Paris felt at the amazing growth and popularity of the Preachers and Friars Minor. Hitherto the secular masters had held the monopoly of theological learning; now the friars, armed with the mandate of the Holy See, had beaten them on their own ground and had likewise attracted many of their most brilliant members into their ranks. The privilege of preaching had also been the monopoly of masters of the University, but here was an order whose very *raison d'être*, expressed in its name, was to teach and to preach. Moreover the popularity of the friars was enormous and they were everywhere in demand as confessors and directors. This was due to a large extent to the obvious sanctity and fervor of their lives, which were a silent condemnation of the lives led by so many of the secular clergy, especially among the higher ranks.

In February 1254 the university expressed its grievances in a book full of venom and hatred, and the quarrel became public and general. Even at this stage the nature of the attack on the friars was very thinly veiled: "They came to us and received mental and bodily food. But having enticed many of our masters into their ranks they have developed enormously in knowledge and numbers and now fill the whole world." Pope Innocent IV, who had at first supported the friars, eventually sided with the university and called the case to Rome (at which the university had made a levy of a week's dues on all students to pay its expenses). In July and November of the same year he issued two Bulls revoking all the privileges previously granted to the Dominicans. The work of Dominic, Jordan, Raymund, and John the Teuton, which had been carried out with the cordial approval and under the protection of the Holy See, was undone at a single stroke.

At the end of the year, however, the pope died. He was succeeded by Cardinal Rinaldo, who, as Alexander IV, showed his devotion to the order on the second day of his pontificate by officially announcing his elevation to Blessed Humbert de Romans, the Master, requesting the prayers of all the religious and cassating the dispositions of his predecessor. This he followed up in April 1255 with the Bull *Quasi Lignum*, wherein he administered a severe castigation to the Parisian masters, cancelled all the measures which had been taken against the friars, and restored all their rights. But the end was not yet. The university was unquelled and the condemnation of the Friars Minor still held. The whole order betook itself to fervent prayer, especially to its own saints and holy doctors, and manifested an obvious desire to compromise as far as possible with its opponents, desiring however the removal of the ban against the Friars Minor. On the occasion of the general chapter held in Paris in 1256, the sympathy of a vast number of people with the Dominicans was shown and the King himself, St. Louis IX, visited the convent and was admitted to participation in the suffrages of the order. The veneration of the relics of St. Peter Martyr attracted enormous crowds, who realized full well the difference in sanctity, culture, and greatness between the persecutors and the persecuted.

Meanwhile the university had returned to the attack, formulating its accusations in a book entitled *The Eternal Gospel*, which William of St. Amour, the leading protagonist, followed up with another *On the Danger of the Last Days*. The arrival of this book in Rome moved the pope to nominate a commission of four cardinals who would hear the representatives of both sides and bring the whole controversy to

an end by impartial judicial decision. Nor was it inappropriate that the questions should be so fought out and decided before the representatives of the pope himself, since it had become a struggle to the death for the rights of the religious orders to indulge in pastoral and apostolic work. Had the Parisians triumphed, religious would for generations, perhaps to the end of time, have been confined to their cloister, leaving all active work to the secular clergy.

The position of the friars certainly seemed grave. William of St. Amour had already been some time in Rome and had won over to his cause most of the clergy and people, and the pope himself seemed to be faltering in his support of the Dominicans. The master, however, directed the order to recite the litanies for an end to be brought to the war -- those litanies which had inspired the proverb "beware of those Preachers' litanies, for they work miracles." His choice to defend the friars' case alighted on Albert, to be seconded by his pupil Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas of Chantimpré described the effect of the saint's presence:

Before the Venerable Albert came to the Roman Curia, Master William, the chief author of so many calumnies, had together with his accomplices amazingly seduced the Roman clergy and people by many fine discourses and had won them over to their course. But when Master Albert had by request of the Pope and all the Cardinals expounded in a stupendous and unheard-of fashion St. John's Gospel and the Canonical Epistles, he brought the ugly dispute to so successful a conclusion that all the Friars' enemies were put to confusion, while the supporters of truth were left in peace and joy.

James of Soest gives a more detailed account of the finale of the dispute.

William of St. Amour's book was condemned and burned by Pope Alexander IV in the Cathedral Church of Anagni, both for the heresy it contained, and for its seditious and malicious attacks on religious. For he taught therein that religious who did not apply themselves to manual labors but subsisted on alms, could not be saved. When the author had been cited to appear before the Pope, Brother Albert the Teuton of the Order of Preachers came to the Curia to reply to the contents of the book. When Albert arrived at Anagni where the Curia was at that time, he with much sagacity made enquiries to discover if any one possessed the book and, quickly finding a transcriber, he paid the sum necessary for a copy to be made. Albert, therefore had the book for a whole day and a night preceding the consistory, which sat on the question on 6th October. The book was first read, and such was the eloquence of Albert's reply and his words so telling that all present were filled with amazement and glorified God who had chosen such a man to defend his Order from evil tongues. Albert's reply was faithfully reported and has been published in an abbreviated form by St. Thomas Aquinas in that valuable book which is entitled *Thomas versus William*. [\(2\)](#)

Albert's victory secured for the future the recognition of certain principles which had indeed been accepted since the time of Our Lord, but which the adversaries of the mendicant orders had denied, and which would be denied again, but never seriously questioned by those in authority. It established the right of religious to take literally Christ's precepts regarding evangelical poverty and to depend entirely on the alms of the faithful for their livelihood. It also removed the confusion between religious friars and monks, of which those who denied the former all right to pastoral activity were guilty. William of St. Amour, like the Jansenists later, wished to confine the religious within the cloister and to keep the monopoly of preaching and teaching to the secular clergy. This, says Chantimpré, was the real object of the campaign: to exclude the friars from all intellectual and pastoral activity. The memory of Bernard, Peter Damian, and Hildebrand was, however, still fresh and Albert secured for future generations of religious the right of the pope to make use of these most powerful instruments for the salvation of souls.

If modern religious orders owe to St. Dominic a debt of gratitude as to the originator of the mode of life which they practice with such beneficial results, they are equally indebted to St. Albert, St. Thomas, and the Franciscans St. Bonaventure and Thomas of York.⁽³⁾ by whose efforts that mode of life was officially and permanently approved by the Church when the attempts of its critics to secure its condemnation seemed very near to success. We are not surprised to find that this triumph was attributed to the intercession of our blessed Lady. Seeing that the friars of those days had a very special devotion to the blessed Virgin through whose patronage they were delivered from their tribulations, it was fitting that it was she, our Mistress and especial patron who, when the enemy was seeking to bring about the ruin of her sons, caused his defeat through the medium of Albert, her votary and bedesman.

The masters of Paris and the bishops who had supported them writhed under their defeat, which Alexander IV rendered finally effective by issuing twenty-seven Bulls between October 1256 and October 1257 which exacted obedience in every detail. On 23rd October 1257, by the express order of the Holy See, Thomas and Bonaventure received the recognition of their doctorates at Paris. (Bonaventure had become a master in 1252, Thomas in 1256.) By its defeat, the university was forced to bestow her highest honor on two of her noblest sons and greatest glories. And at last the friars could rest from their famous Litanies!

Albert seems to have remained about a year in Italy, for his presence in Cologne is not mentioned until March 1258. During this sojourn the pontifical court profited by his presence to obtain from him the exposition of St. John's Gospel and the Epistles mentioned above and also a public disputation against the errors of Averroes. Many historians declare that he was invested as Master of the Sacred Palace, but modern critics are inclined to deny this detail. Before his return to Germany he was relieved of the charge of provincial by the General Chapter of Florence, 1257. The reasons for this change, though not specified, may probably be accurately divined. Apart from his own humility, which would seek to escape from such an office, his great intellectual talents and the necessity for the development of the *studium generale* at Cologne were doubtless the reasons which moved the capitulars to make possible for him again a life of study and writing. The wisdom of this measure became apparent in the following year, 1259, when at the Chapter of Valenciennes, which discussed at length the question of the studies in the order, Blessed Humbert appointed a commission to draw up an exhaustive and uniform plan of studies.

The members of the commission -- all of them masters of Paris, three raised to the altars of the Church while one became pope -- were Brothers Buonhomo of Florence, Albert, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter of Tarantasia, later Pope and Blessed Innocent V. All combined depths of learning with practical experience of teaching and a perfect knowledge of the needs of the order and of the Church. Their findings, embodied in a code which was promulgated throughout the whole order, may be classified under the following heads:

1. *Those relating to the provisions of facilities for study in each province.* Every convent was to have, if possible, its own lectors in theology, but if this were impossible the young religious were to be sent to other convents so equipped to complete their studies. Each province was to have a *Studium* of Arts.
2. *Those relating to the students and professors.* The priors were to keep an eye open for young men who would profit by the studies; and any voyaging on other activities of a disturbing nature was forbidden to them. The lectors were not to occupy themselves with any ministrations, even of a religious nature, which would keep them from their duties, and no religious functions were to be held during the time allotted to study. All the brethren, even the prior so far as he could manage it, were to attend the lectures; each lector delivering an official course was to have a bachelor under him; and

revision classes were to be held every week if possible. Provision was also made for the necessary books and for the furnishing of the students' expenses.

3. *The priors and provincials were solemnly ordered to secure conformity* with all these injunctions and if necessary to punish severely those students or lectors who neglected their studies. Visitators were ordered to inquire diligently into the observance of every article of the code.

This was the first rule of studies of so comprehensive and concrete a nature which the Church had ever seen, and it proves the seriousness and conscientiousness with which the order regarded its doctrinal mission. True, there was also a contrary current of thought within the order, represented by Gerard de Frachet, which looked with deep suspicion upon any learning other than theological, above all upon the "witch," philosophy. Yet such was not the opinion of these builders of the order's life of study; it was not the opinion of Albert, who said in words which seem harsh coming from one so gentle, "Mere are those ignorant people who wish to combat by every means possible the use of philosophy, and especially among the preachers, where no one opposes them; senseless animals who blaspheme that of which they know nothing."

To St. Albert every form of knowledge was good, as also to St. Thomas who declared that it is good even to have a knowledge of evil. Every sphere of learning which could possibly contribute to the strengthening and defense of the Church and the conquest of ignorance and error was to be cultivated with assiduity. Thus he supported with all his might the measures which were being taken to forge the order into a worthy instrument for the propagation of that mighty legacy of learning which he and his pupil Thomas were between them to bestow upon the Church and the world. (4)

NOTES

1. The punishment was a discipline to be received before all and a meal of bread and water to be eaten in the middle of the refectory, for each day's journey by any conveyance. The Chapter of Worms defined the cases of necessity which were exceptions to the law: when the journey was through uninhabited places where food and lodging were unobtainable; when a sick person was obliged to travel and delay would be dangerous, or when a brother had to be carried to the monastery; or again, if a superior sent an urgent summons, which had to be answered as speedily as possible.

2. This statement is, however, incorrect. St. Thomas's *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem* is an independent work.

3. All save St. Albert wrote their apologies for the mendicant orders, or, if he did so too, it has not come down to us. Different historians assign the lion's share of the credit to different protagonists, according to their affiliations, but in view of St. Albert's outstanding position, it seems most probable that he was the leader of the group.

4. Rudolph of Nymegen assigns to this period the saint's mission, in the capacity of papal legate, to Poland and Saxony, which were still largely pagan. Albert refers in his *Politicorum* to two of the abuses which were there prevalent, the exposure of unwanted children and the murder of the aged and the infirm, which he managed to abolish either by the authority of his word or the force of his touching exhortations. Rudolph remarks that he was particularly distressed by the fact that such abominable customs were regarded as acts of filial piety so that a son would himself point out the grave of a parent whom he had killed.

Bishop of Regensburg



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

Autumn 1987 Vol. 39 Supplement

WHEN the superiors of the order relieved Albert of the office of provincial it was for the purpose of allowing him the leisure in which to devote himself to the furthering of his own and the order's studies, and we may be sure that the prospect of resuming the quiet academic life of a simple friar was most pleasing to the saint himself. But the peace of the cloister was not to be his lot for long; in 1260 his appointment as Bishop of Regensburg deprived him of it entirely.

The church and diocese of Regensburg had been reduced to a deplorable state by the misrule of its unworthy bishop, Albert I, Count of Pietengau. He had been deposed and condemned to a period of penance, and the appointment of a successor had been left to the Holy See. During Albert's sojourn at the papal court, Alexander IV had had ample opportunity of noting his outstanding gifts of both mind and heart, while stories of his successes as diplomat and peacemaker must surely have reached Rome. In addition the saint's intimate friend, the gifted and pious Hugh of St. Cher, was at that time at the papal court and almost certainly put Albert forward as admirably suited for the difficult post of bishop. On 5th January 1260, therefore, the pope addressed to the saint a Bull nominating him Bishop of Regensburg, in which after speaking of the state of the diocese and its dire need he continues:

It seems to us that we shall satisfactorily supply this need in your person, acceptable to us and to our brethren by the merit of your probity. For as you have drunk the waters of saving doctrine at the fount of the divine law, in such wise that you carry its fullness within your breast, while you are possessed of a true and quick judgment in what pertains to the things of God, we entertain the firm hope that by your diligence you will be able to heal the wounds and repair the ruin of the aforesaid diocese which is sadly deficient in things both spiritual and temporal....

He proceeds to command Albert to undertake the government of the diocese, "using the prudence which God has given you." The laudatory tone of this Bull might perhaps be ascribed to the pope's desire to overcome Albert's hesitancy to accept a very delicate task, but this can be no explanation of the terms used by Blessed Humbert in what must be the most remarkable letter ever addressed by one saintly and therefore humble man to another.

The Master begins by declaring that he has been "profoundly moved by the news which has reached me from the Roman Curia, news which would have caused in me an immense sadness were I not comforted by the holy and unswerving confidence I have in you where any good cause is concerned." The news in question is that Albert is to be promoted to a bishopric, such a thing might be believed on the part of the Curia, but "could I be expected to believe that you would ever be persuaded to consent to such a step? Could I ever believe that you of all people, at the end of your life, would thus tarnish your own glory and that of the order which you have rendered so glorious?" The most dear and most beloved son is thereupon reminded of the terrible scandal he would give by abandoning his vow of poverty to accept such a dignity; he is exhorted not to take heed of the solicitations of prelates nor of a command of the pope which is merely verbal, which is not meant to express any wish or intention and could easily be overridden. The difficulties of the task are presented -- the difficulty of avoiding offence to God and man and the impossibility of pursuing a life of contemplation and study amid the

cares of such an office. Finally Humbert appeals to him as to one who has the salvation of souls deeply at heart not to undo all the good which his fame, his example, and his writings have effected; to consider the well-being of the order "which is now delivered from grievous tribulations" and enjoys a great peace, but which he threatens to plunge into even greater distress. "I would sooner see this the most beloved child of my predilection in prison than seated on a bishop's throne!... I conjure you by the humility of the Immaculate Virgin and of her Son, not to abandon your lowly state.... Send us a reply which will console us and our and your beloved brothers, and will calm our fears."

This document bears witness to the esteem in which Humbert, himself a saint, if not canonized, held the virtue of Albert, whose humility he considered deep enough to remain unaffected by such laudatory language while it also testifies to the services that Albert had rendered to the order. The reason for such violent opposition to the acceptance of the bishopric on the part of the Master must be sought in the ordinations of the superiors of the order, dating from that of Blessed Jordan in 1233 which forbade under heavy penalties the acceptance of episcopal dignities without the consent of the provincial or master, except in cases where a direct precept had been given by the Holy See.

To those who were averse to religious discipline, a bishopric offered an easy escape from the rigors of the rule, above all, perhaps, those of the vow of poverty. And there were those who did their best to obtain such alleviation, often with the unfortunate results prophesied by Humbert. Yet the examples of bishops who remained true to their vows were many -- Hugh of St. Cher, Innocent V, Benedict XI, Blessed Walter, and St. Antoninus, to mention only a few -- while thirty Dominican bishops attended the Council of Lyons, "doing honor to the Order in their persons and to themselves in the order under the habit of the Order." Humbert must have known that his worst fears were hardly likely to be realized in Albert's case. And while Albert was obviously acting against his will and only under pressure from the Holy See to whom, after all, he owed obedience even before the master, one can only say that saint's vision was wider than that of his superior, who appeared to be putting what he thought the interests of the order before those of the Church. Albert was able to combine the two, and on the 29th of March 1260, he entered his episcopal city. But he was to leave it again in two years, and in a very different state from that of his entry.

Temporalities presented if not the most important, certainly the most pressing problem. "He found not a penny in the exchequer, not a drop of wine in the cellar, not a grain of wheat in the granary, and heavy debts to boot." In a short time, however, accounts were balanced and large sums remained which were given to the poor and to needy religious institutions. Once this reform was achieved, Albert confided the temporal affairs to trustworthy administrators while he busied himself with the much more important and congenial occupation of saving souls. This task was all the more difficult since the feuds and wars which had shaken the diocese for many years had left the district in a state of unrest and discord, and although the saint managed to keep the peace during his pastoral charge, the rival factions were not reconciled and not at all pleased to be kept apart. It is said that their dissatisfaction with such a peaceful bishop had not a little to do with Albert's resignation.

Believing that the laity would never be converted while their spiritual superiors gave an unworthy example, Albert set about reforming the clergy and religious of the diocese. In 1261 he carried out a general visitation of Benedictine monasteries and was ever at pains to assist any religious, both spiritually and at times materially also. His zeal toward the clergy was perhaps even more marked and was enkindled by a letter addressed by the Holy See to several German bishops, including Albert, exhorting them to do all in their power to reform their clergy, especially in the matter of chastity.

The reformation of the clergy was at once the crying need of the day and the bishop's greatest preoccupation. His sentiments on the subject are enshrined in his commentary on St. Luke's Gospel,

which if not written at this time, as some critics imagine it to have been, was at least completed during the short period of the saint's episcopal rule. In it he denounces the vices which were rampant; simony, usurpation of Church goods, luxurious and immoral living, and neglect of the care of souls. These denunciations were couched in language so uncompromising that Albert's biographer asserts that many believed that he would never be canonized because of the opposition of the unworthy people who feared that any honor done to him would be tantamount to an approbation by the Church of his condemnation of their sinful lives. Yet the strongest condemnation of such vices came not from the saint's words but from the example of his own life.

Although more fully alive than most people to the dignity and responsibility of the episcopal state whose privileges he fully upheld and exercised when it was fitting that he should do so, he remained all the while the simple humble friar, quite unaffected by all the pomp and distractions with which he was surrounded. (1) He wore the coarse woollen habit of the religious and the wooden clogs which had always been his footwear, his retinue was as small as possible, and although a beast of burden accompanied him on his journeys it was not to carry him but his books and episcopal insignia. He himself visited his whole diocese on foot, pilgrimwise, preaching, hearing confessions, instructing, giving alms, and where necessary correcting abuses. During solemn functions he had the appearance of an angel from heaven, completely absorbed in God. He wore a white rochet without lace but marked with five red stripes in memory of the Five Wounds of our Redeemer; his cope had a gold-edged cross in front and behind, his crosier was very plain, made of wood with an ivory crook on which was carved the Archangel Gabriel inclining before our Blessed Lady; while his miter was small and very sparingly adorned.

So distasteful to him were the honors which were everywhere paid to him in virtue of his office that he avoided public appearances as much as possible while always being most punctilious in the performance of his episcopal duties. His ideal of the bishop was that of the early Church -- the shepherd and the teacher of the flock; not that of the Middle Ages, when every bishop was a temporal prince and had oftentimes to be a soldier also so as to maintain the integrity of his diocese against those who cast covetous eyes on the church property and so as to preserve internal order in spite of the various warring factions who composed it. This second ideal was so much of the age that while Albert's sanctity and example inspired many and earned him the gratitude of those who had the reform of the Church at heart, it also made him unpopular in many circles, because he seemed to lack the exterior power and dignity of a bishop, and it may be queried whether he would have been able to rule his diocese for any long period without the support of an army. (2)

It is quite certain, however, that he had no intention of ruling it for any considerable period. Even if there had been no explicit arrangement with the pope, he had from the outset been fully determined to lay aside so uncongenial an office so soon as the crisis with which he had been called upon to deal had been safely passed. By rigid economy and wise management, as well as by intervening with great severity against those who were injuring the Church in her temporal possessions, he settled the greater part of the debts and put a stop to the worst of the distress. By word and example he kindled the clergy to a life of purity and piety and to fidelity to the care of the souls entrusted to them. His example would remain as an inspiration even when a less otherworldly successor took his place.

While carrying out this task for which he had been specially chosen by the pope, he regarded himself and acted as the true father of his people, even while intending his paternity to be but a temporary one. Priests and religious, the chosen portion of the flock, received material as well as spiritual assistance. He assigned to his cathedral chapter the revenues of the church of Cham, so that the canons might enjoy a suitable income (16th July 1260); and he granted indulgences to the faithful who should offer alms to various religious houses, thereby indirectly assisting the communities in question. The Hospital

of St. Catherine benefitted by similar and other measures; while one of the processions held annually at the Benedictine church of Profening was transferred to the Sunday after Ascension when the faithful would be able to assist in greater numbers. During his short pontificate Albert also introduced into his diocese the feast of the Holy Patriarch St. Dominic, while he is said to have composed an office in honor of St. James and so perhaps to have given the first impetus to a devotion which the friars were to propagate throughout Europe.

All this was done in a very short space of time. He had taken possession of his cathedral on 30th March 1260, and by 25th May 1261 he was in Italy begging the pope to accept his resignation. (3) He had finished the work given him to do and almost certainly felt that this was not his life's work but was rather keeping him from it. He doubtless realized that he was not a bishop according to the hearts of many of his flock: most certainly unpopular with those whose vices he castigated so severely, and falling short of the requirements of even his worthier children, who looked for a prince as well as a bishop. For his part, Albert's distaste for the distractions and pomp of his state, and his longing for the silence and solitude of the cloister, became ever more acute. Whatever may have been his reasons and the pope's motives, his resignation was accepted. On 11th May 1262 the chapter's choice of their dean, Leo, as his successor was confirmed by the pope.

Albert retained the episcopal dignity and also some of the revenues of the see -- an act which may at first sight appear strange in one vowed to poverty. It was the custom, however, for prelates who were religious to be dispensed from this vow; and in his will Albert speaks of such a dispensation in his case being a well-known fact. He may have retained this income in order to purchase the books which were necessary in the studies to which he hoped to devote the remainder of his days, or he may have feared or been told that his desire to return to religious life was not yet to be granted, and that some private means of support would be required for some years. One thing is certain: the saint did not retain these revenues out of any wish to escape from the common life to which he returned as soon as he was allowed, or to mitigate a life of poverty, which he had followed even in his episcopal palace. It is equally certain that this action was not a source of scandal to his contemporaries, unusual as it may appear to us. (4)

The saint had arrived in Italy about 25th May 1261, the day on which Alexander IV died at Viterbo, and his successor as bishop was not confirmed until a year later. During this interval he may have remained at the papal curia where there was a university at which he had already lectured in 1256 or 1257 and in which St. Thomas also had taught, having been called there by Urban IV during the year 1261. If Albert was there at this time, the two saints must have met after several years of separation, and the question of their forthcoming writings and teaching must have been the subject for discussion and comparison. However, Albert's hopes of a speedy return to conventual life and his studies were not to be realized. He was kept with the curia until 1263, and when at last the pope sanctioned his departure, it was not to a life of study that he returned but to fill the arduous office of papal nuncio -- to preach the crusade to all the German-speaking peoples.

NOTES

1. "Like another Martin of Tours," wrote Rudolph of Nymegen, "he preserved in all their pristine vigor both his humility and his inviolable love for the Lily of Virginity."
2. Ptolemy of Lucca wrote that "In Germany the episcopate was encumbered with many military obligations, and its rights could only be defended by the sword."
3. Bernard Gui says that "he threw down the episcopate like a burning coat which he held in his hand."

4. Perhaps the explanation is supplied by St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 185, a. 8 ad 3: "If, however, by the pope's permission, he make a will, he is not to be understood to be bequeathing property of his own, but we are to understand that by apostolic authority the power of his administration has been prolonged so as to remain in force after his death."

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Busy About Many Things



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

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TO the modern mind Albert's appointment as legate to preach the crusade in German-speaking countries may seem something of an anticlimax, and as defeating the whole purpose of his withdrawal from the episcopal office. But to Pope Urban IV, who appointed him, this probably appeared the most vital and responsible task which could have been given to him. In the year 1230 Jerusalem had fallen to the Saracens, Ascalon followed the same year, Gaza and Tiberias in 1244; and to the Christians of the Middle Ages the possession of the Holy Land by the infidel was one of the greatest conceivable calamities.

Kings thought it worth while to leave their realms and oftentimes to risk the loss of none-too-secure thrones in an effort to win back the Sepulchre of Our Lord. Religious orders were founded for the explicit purpose of waging war in the Holy Land, and soldiers innumerable of both high and low station flocked to Palestine, considering that death in so holy a cause would be equivalent to martyrdom and a sure pledge of salvation. But the custodianship of the Holy Places was not the only aspect of the war against the infidel. The followers of the Prophet were avowedly bent on the total destruction of Christian Europe, and at the time of which we write their objective seemed to be within sight of attainment. Spain, all North Africa, and Palestine were in their hands, the Christian Empire at Constantinople had fallen, and from Prussia to the Carpathians they menaced the eastern frontier of Europe.

Urban IV, formerly Patriarch of Jerusalem and papal legate in the Holy Land, appreciated more vividly than anyone the magnitude of the danger which threatened Europe, Christianity, and the whole of Western civilization. The raising of a new crusade was the focal point of all the activities of his pontificate. Men and money were needed; the crusade must be preached before it could be fought. The pope's choice fell on the two mendicant orders still in the full flower of their early popularity and success to undertake this mission -- the Friars Minor and Friars Preachers. On 13th February 1263, Albert received his commission from the pope to reach the crusade in all German-speaking countries with full powers as papal legate, Berthold of Regensburg of the Friars Minor being given him as companion.

Their task was to obtain men to fight and the money to finance the campaign. The latter was obtained partly in the form of alms, to the giving of which indulgences were attached. This was possibly the origin of the practice of selling indulgences. But funds were also raised by the commutation of the vows of those who in a moment of fervor or danger had promised to take the Cross and go to the Holy Land, but who in calmer moments found themselves unable or unwilling to undertake the journey. The Preachers had power to dispense them from their vows, but a certain sum of money, proportionate to their means, was to be given towards the crusade fund. For over a year Albert journeyed throughout Germany in the exercise of this office at the same time acting as papal legate in matters not concerned with the crusade, giving proof of his ever watchful solicitude for religious orders, especially those of women. The 25th August 1264 is the last time we find him signing himself as Praedicator Crucis, for on 2nd October Urban IV died, and the saint's mission automatically came to an end.

The new Pontiff, Clement IV, elected on 5th February 1265, had not the same interest in the crusade as his predecessor. But had his ardor been equally great, the divisions among the European princes made any combination against even a common enemy manifestly out of the question. Albert was somewhere in the south of Germany when the news of the pope's death reached him, and he went at once to Würzburg where his brother Henry was probably prior and where Ulrich von Strassburg, his favorite pupil, was living. Here he was able to enjoy a well-earned rest to recuperate after the labors of the previous eighteen months.

When Albert was thus able to retire from his public labors he was already an elderly man. If the earlier date which is given for his birth is correct, he was 70, if the later one, he was nearly 60. In either case he must have hoped that his public life was ended and that he would be able to spend the remainder of his days in prayer and study in the quiet and retirement of his cloister. His wish was partly fulfilled. From 1260 to 1268 he lived in the priories of Würzburg and Strassburg; from 1269 to 1280 he passed his declining years in his beloved convent at Cologne. A good many of his writings probably date from this period. Yet his cloistral quiet was by no means undisturbed, and he seems to have fulfilled a programme of public appearances which might well have fully occupied a younger but less active man. As one of his biographers, Rudolph of Nymegen, writes,

When he was restored to his old and much loved mode of life, he began at once to write books and to instruct the ignorant, living in an observance of the Rule which was all the more perfect according as he had advanced higher in the ranks of the priesthood and the mastership. Yet he never ceased from wearisome visits to monasteries, but rather willingly undertook long journeys for the glory of God, whenever it seemed necessary that by his presence and his counsels he should reanimate new foundations which had by chance fallen into difficulty and danger through lack of fervor. Besides this devotion to the interests of the religious, his external activities during these last years may be classed under those of arbitrator, peacemaker, and bishop.

Albert's interest in religious women, especially those of his own order, probably dates back to the days when he was provincial of Germany. The first certain recorded date of his relations with them is 1255, when as provincial he professed the first sisters in Paradise Convent near Soest, founded in 1253. According to the chroniclers it was much earlier, however, in 1237, that he was commissioned to deal with the vocation of Iolanda, the daughter of the Count of Vianden, who had fled to the monastery of Marienthal only to be dragged away by her relatives. As has already been stated, the saint decided that she should be allowed to follow her vocation.

It was while he was bishop that Albert ordered Brother Ranieri to inquire into and write an account of the reputed extraordinary graces granted to the famous monastery of Unterlinden near Colmar. Presumably his contact with the monastery continued, for in 1269 we find him consecrating the church there and also in the same year the convent church at Katharinenthal near Diessenhofen. In 1263 he granted an indulgence in favor of the Dominican sisters of St. Catherine in Augsburg; and in 1264 he wrote to the sisters at Basle granting a similar favor. In 1265 we find it recorded that he witnessed a deed of mortgage between a certain Luitpold von Nortenberg and the Dominican nuns at Rathenburg. In 1268, he he granted an indulgence to the Dominican nuns of Strassburg. In 1277 he was again at Soest, and in his will he remembered two Dominican convents -- Schwäsbischgmünd where, according to tradition, his sister was a nun, and that of St. Catherine at Augsburg which, on the strength of the legacy, seems to have thought that it too might claim to have had one of his sisters as an inmate.

These dates, though definite, are comparatively few, for the chronology of the saint's life is for the most part uncertain. But they do point to a close connection with, and affection for, the enclosed Dominican nuns, one which endured throughout his long life. Sayings attributed to the saint are still

treasured in the archives of various convents; in one place one is inscribed over the doorway of the church together with a carving of Albert. Some of his sayings have been handed down to us -- or, perhaps more accurately, these traditional sayings have been attributed to him:

An egg given during life for the love of God is more profitable for eternity than a cathedral full of gold given after death.

To forgive those who have injured us in our body, our reputations, and our goods, is more advantageous to us than to cross the seas to venerate the sepulchre of Our Lord.

A man receives God spiritually in the soul, just as the priest receives him corporally at the altar, so often as for love of him he abstains from a fault, be it only a word or an idle glance.

It is not being too imaginative to picture him as one might do a priest of our own day, visiting a convent, interviewing the nuns individually and collectively, hearing confessions, preaching, presiding at professions and clothings, always a welcome guest and himself always only too happy to spend a few days with his sisters, realizing how much of the success of the preaching and teaching of the brethren depends on their prayers and on the sanctity of their lives. It was not only the religious of his own order who enjoyed his protection and friendship. His relations with more than one Cistercian convent are on record, likewise with the White Sisters of St. Mary Magdalen, with Augustinian Canonesses and with the convent of St. Ursula in Cologne. This last seems to have been on especially friendly terms with the saint, and some time during 1263, while he was preaching the crusade, he received from Elizabeth the Abbess the gift of the bodies of 300 martyrs, of which he sent two, the relics of Candida and Florina, to the Dominicans in Freiburg and the rest to the priory in Cologne.

The Office of St. Albert contains several references to his mission as peacemaker. Of the comparatively few details of his life which are known, many are concerned with his activities in this direction. It is a striking testimony to his character and virtue that he should have been accepted as mediator by the opposing parties in numerous disputes of various kinds, and should not only have effected an agreement where others had failed, but should have done so apparently without ever making an enemy of the losing party. In the Bull of canonization Pope Pius XI wrote,

... in his lifetime [Albert] labored strenuously for peace between princes and peoples and individual men. His power and authority as arbiter and peacemaker were derived from his holiness and learning, which men respected and esteemed; they revered, too, his innate dignity of person, which was further ennobled by his priestly character. He presented a living image of his Master, whom Scripture calls the Prince of Peace.

It would take too long to give in detail or even to mention the numerous feuds out of which the saint brought peace. The first on record is that between Conrad von Hochstaden, the Prince-Archbishop -- and much more Prince than Archbishop -- of Cologne and the citizens, which had led to war and murder and evils of every sort. Albert was called in and drew up a settlement on Holy Saturday 1252, and the agreement was confirmed by the Holy See. The peace was an uneasy one, however; neither side kept its promises and in 1258 Albert was a member, probably the president, of a commission which drew up a second settlement. Full peace was not even now restored, and Albert intervened again and apparently with success in 1260. A short time afterwards Conrad died. The new archbishop, Engleburt of Falkenburg, was as warlike as had been his predecessor, and very soon the war between bishop and flock, between ruler and citizens, was renewed and in 1267 the archbishop became the prisoner of a powerful noble, Wilhelm von Julich.

In 1270 or 1271 the saint returned to his beloved Cologne to spend there his declining years, "being received with honor and affection by all, religious and secular, young and old, lowly and mighty." (1) He returned not simply by choice, but as a result of a letter from the Master of the Order who told him that his return was sought and desired by the citizens, who were in dire straits since the city had been placed under an interdict in punishment for the archbishop's imprisonment. The Master spoke of the incomparable prestige enjoined by the saint and recalled the former occasion on which he had restored peace to the city. Thus Albert's return was in the nature of a solemn peace mission enjoined upon him by the highest authority in the order.

He first interviewed Englebert, talked him into a humbler frame of mind, and made him promise to indulge in no reprisals on his captor and the citizens. Then he negotiated with the citizens whom he induced to recognize the archbishop as their ruler and to promise to respect all his rights. The treaty was signed in April 1271, and four arbiters, Albert among them, were appointed to settle any future disputes which might arise. Englebert was released from his captivity, but the interdict was not raised until after his death in 1274. Yet peace had been firmly established and, as one writer expressed it, "arms were laid aside, souls grew calm in the serenity of peace, and the great city was able to enter upon the heyday of its prosperity in the field of studies, commerce, and civil institutions under the protecting shadow of the saint." One is reminded of the interventions of another Dominican saint, Catherine of Siena, in the political affairs of her day, although her measures did not often produce such lasting fruit as did Albert's.

"A model of prudence and justice to all," is how Pope Pius XI described Albert. The recognition of these qualities by those in authority is perhaps the reason for the saint's successful mediation in a matter of a different nature -- the election of Rudolph of Hapsburg as King of the Romans, i.e. Holy Roman Emperor. The reign of Frederick II had been the culmination of a century's strife between pope and emperor which had thrown the whole of Europe into turmoil. But on his death, succession to the dignity was disputed, and ultimately Rudolph of Hapsburg, of a different family, received the votes of the Electors. But when the Council of Lyons met in 1271 he had not been recognized by the Holy See. Albert pleaded his cause so successfully that the necessary recognition was accorded by Gregory X and a new era opened in the relation between pope and emperor.

Rupert was pious, devoted to the Dominican Order and an intimate friend of the saint, to whom he several times entrusted official missions. An example of his character had been given on the occasion of his election when, having no scepter to offer to those who came to do him homage, he seized a crucifix, kissed it himself, and then held it out to the princes saying, "This is the scepter under which I intend to rule." As the pope declared, "It may be confidently affirmed that Albert was acting for the good of both ecclesiastical and civil society" when he pleaded Rudolph's cause before the Council.

The pope also refers to his prudence in management and his skill in civil business, which may account for his being called upon in 1259 to settle a trade dispute between Cologne and Utrecht. And it speaks well for his strict sense of fair play that although he was known to be devoted to his "beloved Cologne," the citizens of Utrecht could none the less consider him an impartial judge. Of the numerous lesser disputes which he was called upon to adjudicate many concerned religious houses and questions of revenues, emoluments, patronage or the like which were challenged by seculars, On one or two occasions his judgment was resisted by the losing party, and Albert resorted to the weapon of excommunication, but in the main his decisions were accepted by all concerned. One cannot but believe that it was not only his "prudence, justice, strength of purpose, and sense of fair play," but also his own character and personality, which made him so successful a mediator and peacemaker. For "although his office and dignity entitled him to deep respect it was not his way to overawe, but to show, himself a father, always inspiring confidence, never fear."

The third class of external activities to which the indefatigable saint devoted the energies of his last years were those which fell to his lot as bishop. For even after resigning the see of Regensburg, he retained the episcopal dignity, and as Pope Pius XI said in his Bull, "In many dioceses, too, he was always ready to perform pontifical and episcopal functions, to undertake long and difficult journeys in the interests of religion." Thus we find frequent records of his consecrating churches and altars, granting indulgences in favor of convents and monasteries, granting dispensations, and at times imposing ecclesiastical penalties on wrongdoers. Cologne, Strassburg, Freiburg, Basle, Nymegen, Utrecht, Maestricht, Louvain, Mülhausen, Regensburg, and Unterlinden are only a few of the towns which he visited on these journeys, which embraced the whole of Germany even though they were performed on foot by a man who was nearing the close of a long life.

One of the most consoling of these episcopal functions must have been the ordination which, by invitation of Blessed John of Vercelli, the Master of the Order, he held in the Dominican church of Strassburg on, 7th April 1269, when he conferred holy orders on one hundred and fifty priests and four hundred other clerics. He was probably about seventy-six at this time; he was certainly over sixty.

Another ceremony which must have given great joy to the aging saint was his laying of the foundation stone, in 1271, of the new choir for the Dominican church in Cologne, which he erected at his own expense out of the revenues which he had been allowed to retain after his resignation from the see of Regensburg. The church, which he had probably designed as the architect, was not completed until after his death, and in his will he directed that whatever plate, precious metals, and jewels he possessed should be sold to provide funds for the building. But he had the joy of seeing it in use during his life, and he was buried there in the choir among his brethren whom he had always loved so tenderly.

In 1277 he consecrated an altar in Cologne Cathedral, and in 1279 he solemnly translated the relics of St. Cordula, one of the companions of St. Ursula, to the chapel of the Knights of St. John, as a result of a vision which had been received by one of the brethren of that order. His last recorded public function was the consecration of the choir of the church in Xanten on 8th September of the same year. He died on 15th November 1280. Two other outstanding events which occurred during these last years may suitably be mentioned here since they belong to his active life. The first is his attendance at the Council of Lyons in 1274. There, besides effecting the recognition of Rudolph of Hapsburg as Emperor, he did a good deal by his eloquence and the weight of his erudition and prudence to bring about the reconciliation with the Greeks. This, unfortunately, was not of long duration. His exposition of the theology of the Procession of the Holy Spirit in his written works is very full and profound, so that he was well equipped to speak as one having authority on the vexed question of the *Filioque*. The second event was his journey to Paris in 1277 to defend Thomas Aquinas against those who were endeavoring to procure the condemnation of his teaching. Nearly ten years earlier in 1268 he had refused the invitation of the Master to go to Paris to teach, but now, when certainly well over seventy, and probably over eighty, even his increased age was insufficient to deter him from going to the defense of his beloved pupil. The success which crowned his effort was full repayment for all his trouble.

Albert provides the spectacle, unequalled perhaps in any other saint, of one who combined in his person the fullness of both the active and contemplative lives. His external activities alone would have seemed sufficient occupation for one man and yet, as we shall see, beside these lay a prodigious output of books on every conceivable subject and behind them both an intense life of prayer and contemplation. Throughout a long apostolic life he was like Martha, "busy about many things," but about a year before his death his mighty frame succumbed at length to the inroads of senile decay. His physical strength left him and his enfeebled brain being no longer an adequate instrument of expression for his mighty intellect, he was -- to put it brutally -- in his dotage. His memory left him -- tradition has it that this occurred while he was teaching, and that such a sudden defection had been

foretold by our blessed Lady both as a portent of his approaching death and as a proof of the supernatural character of his learning. One of his biographers, Henry of Hereford, gives a touching picture of the saint at this "latter hour":

Every day Albert visited the place set apart for his grave reciting the suffrages as for one already deceased. Often retiring into the garden as into some distance place, as if to study, he would daily sing many times, with plenteous sighs and tears, a hymn in praise of our blessed Lady. He was worn out by his many labors and old age, and already subject to fits of absentmindedness and ramblings, when one day the Archbishop Siegfried called at the Convent and desired to speak with him. He knocked at the door of his cell but Albert replied from within, "This is not Albert, he is no longer here." At these words the Bishop burst into tears, and said "Indeed, it is no longer he."

Yet through all the days of his Martha-like activity, the saint had ever remained with Mary at the feet of the Lord, hearing his Word; he had ever been in possession of "the one thing necessary" which when his bodily strength failed was not taken away from him. His power to pray remained when the power to write and to teach failed him. In matters spiritual his mind retained its clarity, albeit a child-like simplicity. And a tender abandonment into the arms of God where he peacefully awaited the end showed what his soul had ever been despite the heights to which he had risen. "As one already separated from earth he lived only for God," writes another biographer, "turning all his thoughts and desires towards the heavenly homeland. He now broke off all relations with those who lived in the tumult of the world." Life was now a chain and earth a prison, and he escaped from them both on 15th November 1280, when, surrounded by his brethren, he died peacefully in an armchair in his cell. The good and faithful servant had entered into the joy of his Lord. His last words were those from Psalm 47: "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God."

NOTES

1. It was in his last year at the studium in Cologne, according to tradition, that Albert would have known and influenced Eckhart of Hockheim, the future "Meister" Eckhart, fountainhead of late medieval mysticism, who arrived there at that time to begin his theological studies. (Ed. note.)

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IN one of his books Ulrich von Strassburg who is usually described as Albert's favorite pupil, says of his master that "he was the wonder and miracle of his age," and Pius II in his dogmatic letter to the Turks of 1464, hails him as one "who was ignorant of nothing and knew all that was knowable." In his preface -- in verse after the fashion of the times -- to the first printed edition of the works of the saint, published in 1651, Peter Jammy, the editor, wrote the following lines:

*Cunctis luxisti
Scriptis praeclarus fuisti;
Mundo luxisti
Quia totum scibile scisti.*

("You enlightened all men, you were made illustrious by your writings: you illumined the whole world because you knew everything that could be known.") [\(1\)](#)

Similarly, Pope Pius XI declared,

Historians and those who have written about him have rightly singled out for special praise the extraordinary universality of his mind; for he was occupied not only with divine things and the truths of philosophy, but also with all other human sciences. Bartholomew of Lucca, a contemporary, declared that in his knowledge of all the sciences and in his method of teaching, he excelled all the learned doctors of his day.

It was the universality of Albert's genius which above all else gained him the admiration of his contemporaries. Others had been deeper thinkers; though no one could call his thought superficial. Others had been more original thinkers; though many of the theories which he enunciated or to which he pointed have been hailed by those who followed him as the great discoveries of their age. Others have been more polished, more finished in their style; but no one has shown such a combination of depth, originality, and versatility of thought as did Albert the Great.

He would seem to have gathered up in himself the very different temperaments of a metaphysician, a mystic, and a scientist.... It is [not easy] to find people who, to the study of a wide range of subjects, unite true depth, and severe scientific precision.... In the history of these great minds we have to jump from Aristotle to Albert the Great. [\(2\)](#)

Before examining more closely the extent of the saint's learning it is well to bear in mind that both his knowledge and his ignorance were conditioned by the circumstances of his age. In the intellectual sphere Western Europe had received two great legacies from antiquity, the Christian Faith and the treasures of the Graeco-Roman civilization embodied in its philosophical and scientific works. In the Dark Ages political and social conditions were such that only ecclesiastics had the leisure and opportunity for study and the pursuit of education. Therefore the curriculum was determined by their requirements -- theology, Holy Scripture, and canon and civil law. Theology dominated everything, and from the inheritance of antiquity only those things were taken which would best serve towards the

understanding and development of that science. "Science" in the modern sense was unknown, and natural objects were only used to illustrate the supernatural. (3)

What might be called the text-book of the natural science of the day was the *Physiologus* (ca. A.D. 300), a collection of fairy stories, fables, and myths about beasts and the things of nature and their influence for good or ill. From this book was drawn the rich symbolism which found expression in the architecture of the Middle Ages. The works of Isidore of Seville (ca. 600), though less popular, were regarded as the best authorities and St. Thomas Aquinas often quotes them.

By 1200 and therefore during Albert's early years the situation was rather different. A good deal of Greek learning, till then almost unknown to Western Europeans, had become available through translations from the Greek and Arabic, e.g., in the medical writings of the School of Salerno and the works of Adelard of Bath (ca. 1115). Some alchemical and astronomical as well as medical works had been translated. The court of Emperor Frederick II was the great center of European science, but it seems almost certain that all scientific scholars of the thirteenth century received their stimulus from Sicily, Southern Italy, and Spain, where Latin, Greek, Moslem, and Jewish cultures met on equal terms.

Even in theology, books were few and consisted principally of the Bible and commentaries thereon, and of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which was the nearest approach to a text-book of theology in the modern sense. Philosophy was more or less proscribed in the schools, but at the time of St. Albert it was insinuating itself through the writings of Arabian and Jewish philosophers who were disciples of Aristotle. Such in outline is the intellectual background against which St. Albert's achievement must be judged -- not according to the standards of our own day.

THE SCIENTIST

Albert was a student before he was a religious, for he was a student at the University of Padua when he entered the Order of Preachers. As noted earlier, Padua was then the center of the study of the liberal arts. From this one may assume that Albert's tastes naturally tended in the direction of what we now call science, but which in those days usually went under the name of philosophy (philosophy in the modern sense and theology were later developments). Yet from the outset there seems to have been present a tendency, springing from grace, for Albert to see all things from a theological point of view -- as coming from God, leading to God, and having God as their first cause and final end. Such an attitude of mind shows the workings of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge which, together with the gift of prudence -- "the executive of wisdom," are perhaps the most characteristic traits of the saint's spiritual physiognomy. He was a scientist by nature, but a saint by grace, and the natural was always seen, loved, and taught, in its relation to the supernatural.

Albert was a scientist from the start, and a scientist he always remained. He merited the title in a twofold sense; first, because he investigated and treated of the various branches of knowledge which can be classed under the general head of the natural sciences; and second, and with even more justice, because he possessed the true scientific temperament which bases all its researches on observation, takes over the results of others only when morally certain of their validity, and never seeks to prove from the data it possesses more than can be legitimately deduced therefrom. In all this he was the first scientist of our Western culture and the greatest biologist since Aristotle whom, however, he corrected on many points; and he was the forerunner of the modern researchers.

Albert was endowed with a singular gift for the investigation of nature, a keen eye well adapted to the observation and determination of the slightest variation, a calm judgment capable of excluding any but

sure results, and above all a sensitive heart which embraced in its love the whole of nature down to its smallest elements. As a boy he was not too carried away by the excitement of the chase to notice the behavior of the wild falcons which came to receive their reward and then flew off. We can picture him as a youth in Italy standing watching the workmen who were sawing up marble blocks and questioning them about the head of a bearded man, crowned with a royal crown, which he saw in one of them.

The countenance [he says] had no other defect, save that the forehead was too high and ascending towards the top of the head. All of us who examined were satisfied that it was the work of nature. And I [note that he was still a youth] being questioned as to the cause of the disproportion of the forehead, replied that this stone had been coagulated by the work of vapor, and that by means of a more powerful heat, the vapor had risen without order or measure. (*De Mineralibus*, lib. iii, tr. 3, c.1)

We see him again in Padua pushing his way to the front of a crowd which was watching the opening of a well and waiting anxiously for the recovery of the man who lay unconscious for two hours, asphyxiated by the fumes which had killed his two companions. Such interests persisted throughout his life, for we know from the observations he recorded in his writings which refer to what he had seen in different parts of Europe that, unlike St. Dominic, who kept his eyes cast down while traveling, Albert kept his very wide open and missed nothing that was worth seeing. Fish in the Danube, squirrels in the forest, cattle, deer, birds, insects,⁽⁴⁾ and plants all came under Albert's scrutiny so that he was able to give descriptions such as have not been improved upon even by modern scientists with all the instruments they have at their disposal. His description of the spider must have been the result of hours of patient watching. The accounts of the habits of ants and bees must have required long periods of observation out of doors, perhaps in the garden where the saint used to retire to sing hymns when wearied by prayer and study. Once he found three handfuls of honey in a nest of wild bees, but he remarks: "It was unfinished, inferior honey."

His description of the ant-lion may be quoted not only for its interest but because it illustrates Albert's carefulness to distinguish between what he had seen and what he had been told -- a rare trait in those days.

The formicaleon (the *lish* of Job 4:11) is called the ant-lion, which is also called murmicaleon. To begin with, this animal is not an ant as some say. For I have a great deal of experiences of it and have shown my colleagues that this animal has very much the shape of the tick, and it hides itself in the sand, digging in it a hemispherical cup, at the bottom of which is the ant-lion's mouth; and when the ants, bent on gain, cross the pit, it seizes and devours them. This we have very often watched. In the winter also it is said to rob the ants of their food, for it gathers nothing for itself in the summer. (*De Animalibus*, xxvi, 20, quoted by F. Sherwood Taylor in *Science Past and Present*, p. 49.)

History tells us how Albert's friend and pupil Thomas Aquinas was so abstracted at table that he even forgot that he was dining with the King of France, so that one may reasonably assume that he did not take much interest in the food set before him; while we are told that St. Dominic partook only of one dish and that sparingly, and then went to sleep while the brethren finished their meal. This does not appear to have been the case with Albert. As early as 1245 he had come to be known as an authority on fish, and when he was then in Paris the son of the King of Castile presented him with a curious mussel shell, on which were engraved numerous tiny serpents. ⁽⁵⁾ His biographer concludes that it would be during dinner, at which fish would usually be served, that the saint had leisure to examine in detail the different specimens which were set before him. A similar explanation is given for the perfection of his description of an apple from the rind to the core, which has never been surpassed. Albert also remarks that once when eating oysters he found ten pearls at one meal, which leads one to think that his appetite must have been such as is usually associated with men of his nation.

These details, which incidentally afford a charming insight into the human side of the saint, show that his scientific instinct was always on the alert. Always and in all places he was observing the objects which lay around him, not as a mere onlooker but with the eye of a true scientist, and one who was versed first of all in the science of the saints -- "investigating natural causes which are the instruments through which the divine will is manifested" (St. Albert).

Albert also showed his true scientific spirit in the manner in which he used the works of Aristotle, who alone had so far produced any really comprehensive treatises on the natural sciences. However, these writings of the Greek philosopher were available only in very imperfect and defective texts. They were also obscure in many places and often inaccurate, so that the saint's task was, to paraphrase his own words, to provide a natural history which would make Aristotle intelligible.

This he did by following the arrangement of the Greek's book, in places giving a commentary or a paraphrase, elsewhere simply reproducing the original text, but frequently making additions, corrections, supplying deficiencies and missing portions, and whenever possible substituting examples from his own observations. As they related to the northern countries which were familiar to his readers, these would be more helpful than those in the original.

Very often Albert disposed of the myths concerning flora and fauna which had been prevalent in the ancient world and persisted in his own day. But because he did not free himself from all of them, he has long been regarded by scientists as a romancer and the slavish and uncritical follower of Aristotle. (Only since the end of the nineteenth century has his true position as a scientist been recognised.) But "whosoever believes that Aristotle was a god, must also believe that he never erred. But if one believes that he was a man, then doubtless he was liable to error just as we are." So Albert wrote in his *Physicorum*, tr. 1,xiv. And again in *Meteororum*, lib. iii, tr. 4, cap. 11: "And therefore I think that Aristotle must have spoken from the opinions of his predecessors and not from the truth of demonstration or experiment." In his *Summa Theologiae* (p. 1, tr. 1, q. 4), there is a whole section entitled "The Errors of Aristotle." This could hardly have come from a "slavish follower"!

Albert's reputation for being a romancer was probably partly due to the books falsely attributed to him, and partly to the ignorance of critics who did not understand the background of his knowledge. It is very remarkable how often he rejects marvelous tales, and how he distinguishes what he has read or been told from what he has seen. His nomination by Pope Pius XII as Patron of all the Natural Sciences shows that the Church has now realized his greatness in this sphere of knowledge. He has yet to come into his own among scientific circles in general. That he will do so eventually, when the critical edition of his writings are completed, is almost certain. Albert treated of astronomy, meteorology, climatology, mineralogy, alchemy, chemistry, physics, mechanics, anthropology, zoology, psychology, weaving, navigation, architecture, and botany, among other things. In almost every subject he anticipated by several centuries some of the major discoveries of modern times. Speaking of Albert's botanical writings a nineteenth-century investigator said, "To the man who was complete master of all learning of his day and definitely advanced it, who for three centuries was never equalled let alone surpassed, the finest laurels are rightly due." The *De Vegetabilibus*, a masterpiece of its kind, owes its perfection to four main considerations; the independence with which the subject is treated; the acuteness and range of the observations, many of which were quite new; the clarity and precision of the description of original plants; and the attempt at a systematic classification to separate the essential from the non-essential, and to group together all plants with essential characteristics in common. In this section he made the celebrated division of flowers into the bird or wing-shaped, the bell-shaped, and the star-shaped. In many cases the natural science of today has completed the work which Albert began but never had time to pursue seriously. A famous botanist has declared, "The defects in his book are the fault of his age; its merits belong to him alone."

He was the first to mention spinach in western literature, the first to point out the difference between tree buds enveloped by scaly coverings and the buds of plants which are without them, the first to notice the influence of light and temperature on the growth of trees as affecting their height and spread, the first to establish that the sap in the root is tasteless, becoming more flavored as it ascends -- a phenomenon noted again by the English naturalist Knight at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Similarly, in his zoological treatise *De Animalibus*, which is based on Aristotle and Avicenna, Albert made many new observations and gave detailed descriptions of all the fish, birds, animals, and insects which he had encountered on his journeyings on foot through Germany, France and Italy. He is said to have been the first to describe the weasel, the rat, the dormouse, the martens, and also the spook-fish. He rejected many popular medieval myths, such as that of the pelican opening its breast to feed its young, or that the cock in its old age lays an egg from which a serpent is hatched. But, again, because he included fabulous creatures in his list of animals, his zoological knowledge has been underestimated and his contributions to this science insufficiently appreciated.

The dog seems to have interested him especially, likewise the whale and the bee, but one of his most charming and characteristic descriptions is that of the squirrel (*De Animalibus*, 1421):

The pirolus is an extremely lively little animal; it nests in the tops of trees, has a long bushy tail, and swings itself from tree to tree, in doing so using its tail as a rudder. When on the move it drags its tail behind it, but when sitting it carries it erect up its back. When taking food it holds it as do the other rodents in its hands, so to speak, and places it in its mouth. Its food consists of nuts and fruit and such-like things. Its flesh is sweet and palatable. In Germany its color is black when young, and later reddish, in old age it is even partly grey. In Poland it is reddish grey and in parts of Russia quite grey. Among the characteristics of the cat he includes modesty -- not the true human modesty, but something remotely resembling it, love of beauty, and a habit of biting. Of the nightingale he remarks, "...I have observed how it flew up to good singers, to whose song it quietly listened, and then, as if to challenge them, started up its own song. In this way two nightingales mutually provoke one another to song" (*De Animalibus*, 1509).

The description of the capture of a small lizard by a spider is very graphic.

When the little creature had got itself entangled, the spider at once came down and spun a web round its mouth so that she might not be injured in that way. Then she settled down to the creature and bit and stabbed it until it was dead or quite helpless. Then she went to the net where she stored her provisions and drew her prey after her by a web. This I saw myself with my own eyes and marvelled at the ingenuity of the spider. (*De Animalibus*, 630, n. 138)

To his acute observation Albert seems to have united great dexterity in the use of the scalpel, as is shown by his dissections of plants and insects. Thus it should be noted that although *De Animalibus* is not quite so free from the myths of the age as is the *De Vegetabilibus*, the recent appearance of the critical edition has proved that it is invaluable to the zoologist. Critical editions of his other works in the category of the natural sciences have not yet been published, but sufficient research has been undertaken to make it evident that here too Albert occupies a leading rank among scientific thinkers and investigators.

In an age when all save the learned believed the earth to be flat and inhabited only in the north, Albert asserted that it was a sphere, proving his thesis as Aristotle had done before him by arguments from the force of gravity (in which some critics have seen a foreshadowing of Laplace's theory), which, he said, would also enable the southern zone to be inhabited. He even believed that the greater part of the earth was not only habitable but actually inhabited, except at the poles where he imagines the cold to be

excessive. If there are any animals there, he says, "they must have very thick skins to defend them from the rigor of the climate, and they are probably of a white color." Did he here anticipate the theory of protective coloration? His treatise on climate and the various branches of geography foreshadowed many modern theories. The formation of the earth's crust is due to a slow cooling of a central fire; mountain ranges are the result of upheaval. He correctly traces the chief mountain chains of Europe, with rivers that take their source in each, mentioning sections of the coast which have been submerged by the sea's action in later times, and islands which have been formed by volcanic action. He treats too of the effect of latitude and longitude and other factors in influencing local climate. His description of Germany surpasses, and in several places corrects, that of Tacitus whose *Germania* has always been considered a classic on the subject. The explorations of the fifteenth century are said to have been inspired, at least indirectly, by the saint's geographical writings. In his description of the British Isles he speaks of the island of Tile or Thule, not yet visited by explorers, and probably uninhabitable by reason of its frightful climate. He several times refers to his own maps, none of which have come down to us.

In physics, some of his explanations could well have been taken from a modern text-book. Sound, he says, is caused by the impact of two hard bodies, and this vibration is propagated in the form of a sphere whose center is the point of percussion. Light is converted into heat, he declares, on being absorbed by a body. He speaks of the refraction of the solar ray, of the laws of the refraction of light, and remarks that none of the ancients and few of the moderns were acquainted with the properties of mirrors. He was familiar with the properties of magnets.

He seems to have undertaken experiments in alchemy, and is sometimes said to have been the first to isolate the element arsenic. He compiled a list of over one hundred minerals, giving a description of each, and in the course of this book he remarks, "At one time when I was away from home I wandered far and wide to places where metals were to be found that I might discover their nature and properties" (*De Mineralibus*, lib. iii, tr. 1, cap. 1). Again: "I saw and studied how they worked in copper in our parts, namely Paris and Cologne and other places where I was" (*ibid.*, lib. iv, tr. 1, cap. 6).

Although he had no telescope he decided that the Milky Way must be composed of myriads of stars, and he says that the dark spots on the moon are not due to the earth's shadow, as the ancients believed, but to configurations on her own surface. He corrects Aristotle's assertion that a lunar rainbow occurs only twice in fifty years. "I myself have observed two in a single year," he says.

In anatomy he takes the vertebral column as the basis of the structure, whereas in his day and for long afterwards most anatomists began with the skull. In this sphere again he takes Aristotle to task. The Greek had held that man had eight ribs on either side. Albert declares, "Man has seven true ribs and five false ribs on either side."

Mathematics, anthropology, biology -- every branch of science provides examples of Albert's anticipation of modern theories and discoveries, and it has been said that if his principles had been followed science might have been spared a detour of three centuries.

But he did not confine himself to theories. his researches must have involved many experiments, and one wonders how he managed to find time for them amid all his other activities. He is known to have invented some sort of hydraulic machine; he possessed apparatus for registering the phenomena of an earthquake; he is said to have invented the first greenhouse. He made figures move by means of mercury, and in the nineteenth century a cup was still preserved in the museum of Cologne with which he was supposed to have cured every disease. Such was his interest in architecture that he produced plans for the Dominican churches of Cologne and Louvain. (St. Dominic's Priory in London is

modelled upon the latter.) His influence on the growth of gothic architecture in Germany was so great that in ancient manuals the original style is called "the Albertine science." He was evidently something of a musician and a poet too, but all his songs are lost and most of his verses. Rudolph of Nymegen says that he composed many proses and sequences in honor of our Blessed Lady -- no doubt those which he used to sing in the garden, offices of St. Joseph and the Crown of Thorns, and the sequences in honor of the Blessed Trinity beginning "Profitentes Unitatem," which was in the old Dominican *Graduale*. (6)

On this basis of fact many legends grew up. Albert was thought to have a cure for every disease -- he had written on medicine, Rudolph says -- and so the goblet he had made was regarded as miraculous. He invented so many things that the common people believed he could produce something to satisfy every need. Despite his own condemnation of magic and astrology the legend grew up that he was something of a magician. So there is the story of the talking automaton which St. Thomas is supposed to have found behind a curtain and to have smashed up, crying out, "Get thee behind me Satan," thinking he was faced by a diabolical illusion. Whereupon Albert is said to have entered the room and asked, "What have you done? You have destroyed the labors of thirty years!" This story does not ring true to what we know of the character of either saint, and legend has credited Roger Bacon also with the invention of a talking head. But it does give some idea of what people could believe about Albert. The reputed production of a summer's day in the priory garden in honor of the visit of the Emperor William of Holland may also be a magical illusion, but it may refer to his hothouse if the tradition that he invented it is true.

In the order of the miraculous, Albert is said to have had a vision of our Blessed Lady and the Four Crowned Martyrs, the patrons of architects, while the plans for Cologne Cathedral were under discussion. At a word from the Mother of God and under her direction the saints drew the plans for a most wonderful edifice. Then the dream faded, but Albert remembered and reproduced the design, which was the one chosen.

Legends such as these have earned for the saint the reputation of magician as well as the contempt of scientists -- at least until the process of his rehabilitation began in the past century. But enough has been said to show that Albert has every right to be regarded as one of the greatest scientists Europe has produced, and he has still a third claim to such a title, one which, if it is recognized before it is too late may yet be able to save both science and the world from the destruction towards which they seem to be heading.

For science, as we understand it today, seeks to know what can be quantitatively observed about externals -- the shapes, sizes, movements, and changes of things -- and then endeavors so to manipulate and arrange these things and circumstances so that the human will shall be done. But its sphere is very limited, its conclusions can only be provisional, its laws are only probabilities. It can describe what a thing is, how it works in terms of matter and energy. But it cannot, nor is it meant to, explain the ultimate reason of things. That is the task of the philosopher, who can and should make use of the data provided by science. But that is what the science of today tries to do. Although it cannot see things as a whole, nor even for that matter see even the minutest thing as a whole, it limits reality to what it can observe in its test-tube and admits only one explanation of reality -- the materialistic one from which the spiritual and God *a priori* excluded. Thus it sets itself up as a "philosophy" in which neither natural philosophy nor theology can even make an appearance. Rather than acknowledge its subordinate position in the hierarchy of knowledge, it refuses to recognize any form of wisdom other than its own, though in truth mere *scientia* is not wisdom at all.

Albert was a true scientist, remarkably free from that confusion between science and philosophy, as we know them, which was so general in his day.

There are some people who attribute all these things to divine order [he says], and say that we must not consider in them any other cause save the will of God. This in part we can agree to..yet.. we are not seeking a reason or explanation of the divine will but rather investigating natural causes which are as instruments through which God's will is manifested. It is not sufficient to know these things in a general sort of way; what we are looking for is the cause of each individual thing according to the nature of belonging to it. (*De causis propriatatum elementorum*, lib. 1, tr. 1, cap. 9)

But he was an equally great philosopher and he pursued his scientific studies from a teleological standpoint, realizing with St. Paul that "from the creation of the world the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom 1:20). He knew that the ultimate answer to the problem of the origin and purpose of the universe which science itself can never solve is, in the words of St. Thomas, that God "has produced things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures and be represented by them" (*Summa Theologiae* I, Q.47, a. 1). The whole universe is the work of God's hands, which guide it and direct it to its end. It came forth from God and to God it must return, and each thing is what it is because God so wills it, and because it thus best serves the purpose of the whole. God preserves it not from afar but from within, and the true natural philosopher, such as Albert was, is conscious "not only that the beauty (of things) is a reflection of [God's] infinite beauty, but that the invisible beauty is within them and about them, hallowing them." (7)

And when, like Albert, the natural philosopher is above all a theologian and a saint, he or she will recognize, in the things that are made, traces of that Triune Life of knowledge and love which is the being of the God of revelation. The One who is present everywhere in creation is Father, Son, and Spirit of Love, and that love of God's own goodness is the ultimate explanation of everything.

Science has suffered considerably for having disregarded Albert's principles of experience for nearly three centuries: it will suffer still more if it does not accept his teleological conception of science before it is too late -- if it does not recognize that science of itself can never provide a philosophy of life, but at best can only supply the material on which others may build one. That is why Pope Pius XI declared that

The present moment would seem to be the time when the glorification of Albert the Great was most calculated to win souls to be the sweet yoke of Christ. Albert is exactly the Saint whose example should inspire this modern age -- so full of hope for its scientific discoveries.... In him the rays of divine and human science meet to form a shining splendor.... His life is a standing proof that there is no opposition, but rather the closest fellowship between science and faith.... Like St. Jerome, Albert, as it were with powerful voice, declares and proves in his wonderful writings that science worthy of the name, and faith, and a life lived according to the principles of faith, can, and indeed should, all flourish together... because supernatural faith is the crown and perfection of science.

Albert was then first of all a scientist, endowed with the true scientific temperament and retaining all his life a deep interest in things scientific. His writings on scientific subjects embraced every branch of that form of learning and occupy a high place among such writings of any age. Because of them, because of his scientific spirit, and because of the discoveries which he made and the principles which he laid down, he is rightly considered one of the first true scientists of our Western culture. After Aristotle in order of time, he is given a place among the greatest scientists of all ages, and is undeniably the greatest Catholic scientist of any age. And yet in a life filled with teaching, preaching, writing, and apostolic work of every kind, his scientific interest took the place almost of a hobby.

Even so, natural science was an important part of the curriculum for the Faculty of Arts in which Aristotle's writings were read in the order in which they are commented on by Albert, who may well have taught them in the schools of Arts in the order. He certainly wrote his commentaries at the earnest request of the brethren, even though he also had a wider end in view. As he says himself in his commentary on Aristotle's Physics:

Our object in these treatises on natural science is to meet as far as lies in our power, the wishes of the brethren of our Order, who now for several years have been begging us to compile such a book on the things of Nature, as would give them a complete natural history, by means of which they could arrive at a sufficient understanding of Aristotle's writings. Though we do not consider ourselves to be equal to such a work, we could not resist the wishes of the brethren.

But although the Arts, in which natural science occupied an increasingly large place, were important as preliminary studies, theology still remained the friars' chief preoccupation and to that Albert must have devoted the lion's share of his teaching and study. Yet his academic life itself was only one aspect of an existence which was crammed with activities of every sort, in the midst of which he found time to collect the material for writing those treatises which give him a place among the leaders of science.

A biographer, Thomas of Chantimpré, reports this story which he declares he had often heard from the lips of the saint himself, to prove the supernatural nature of his vocation to cultivate the natural sciences:

One day when Albert was seated at the table in his tiny cell ardently seeking the solution of some scientific problem, the evil spirit made his appearance under the guise of a Dominican friar. Feigning modesty and compassion, he first spoke of [Albert's] too great application to study, representing to him that he was overburdening both soul and body, taking no care of his health and wasting his energy on things which were foreign to his profession. Albert, supernaturally enlightened as to the designs of the evil one, was content to reply by making the sign of the Cross and the apparition disappeared. One wonders what Albert the Great would have achieved had he devoted the whole of his time, energy, and mighty intellect to this one congenial subject. Perhaps it is as a reward for the self-abnegation involved in this sacrifice that he is now honored in the Church as Patron of all the Natural Sciences.

NOTES

1. This is, no doubt, a quotation from Rudolph of Nymegen who says: "...in omnibus scientiis tunc singularis excellentiae habebatur, ut non immerito illud quod vulgariter ab eo dicitur sibi applicari posset:

Cunctis luxisti
scriptis lux clara fuisti.
Mundo luxisti
quia totum scibile scisti!"

Legenda Beati Alberti Magni, prima pars, cap.v.

2. Pope Pius XI at the close of the "Albert Week" held at Rome in 1930.

3. Perhaps in the works of Isidore and the Venerable Bede there is some interest in things for their own sake. John Scottus Eriugena (*ca.* 850), in his *De Divisione Naturae*, gives a very wide and well informed account of the world and its contents. Anywhere where Greek was known, as it was then in Ireland, the level was higher than elsewhere.

4. Observations on insects were very remarkable. There do not seem to have been any more until the seventeenth century.
5. This was probably the work of some small worm-like creature that builds calcareous tubes on such cells.
6. This sequence is now generally ascribed to Adam of St. Victor. Cf. *The Life of the Spirit*, vol. I. No. 3 (September 1946), p. 73.
7. Fr. Gerald Vann, OP, *The Divine Pity*, p. 23

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Philosopher and Theologian



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

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THE catalogue of St. Albert's scientific writings might almost of itself justify the title of Universal Doctor, and yet they form only a part of the total output of his works. The exact number of these is still unknown for many are unedited, many lost or hidden in libraries, and while some unauthentic works are attributed to him, others probably genuine may still go under the name of other authors. One thing is certain: great as was Albert's reputation as a scientist, his fame as a philosopher was even greater. It is in this sphere that he made his greatest contribution to learning, as even a brief outline of his philosophic writings indicates.

He was described by Henry of Hereford as "the most resplendent son of the philosophers of Christendom," and he was called by his contemporaries *maximus in philosophia* even before he received the general title of "the great." As in natural science, his writings embrace every aspect of the subject -- logic, metaphysics, and moral philosophy, while he has separate treatises against the outstanding philosophical errors of the day. It is true that he did not create a perfectly finished philosophical system as did Thomas; but Thomas could never have produced his system without the preliminary labors of Albert, and without Albert, Thomas might never even have been a philosopher. Roger Bacon, an Englishman who had no love for Dominicans, least of all for Albertus Magnus, tried to belittle and ridicule him when he wrote -- "He had never studied philosophy, nor did he attend lectures on the subject in the schools, he was also never in a *Studium Solemne* before he became a theologian; he could not have received any instruction in his Order, for he was the first Master of Philosophy in it."

Actually this gibe only serves to show the greatness of Albert as a philosopher. He found the philosophical works of Aristotle proscribed from the schools, accessible only in defective translations, and in the commentaries of Arabs and Jews to whom they had come through African translations and writings which were greatly influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy, so that their Aristotelianism was to a great extent mixed with Neoplatonism. Apparently without any previous training, he set out as he himself said, "to make all the parts [of Aristotle's writings] intelligible to Latins." He succeeded so well that he produced commentaries which are still of value today, collected an immense range of material, secured for Aristotle an entrance into the schools, and prepared the way for the dedication of philosophy to the services of theology, a task which theologians had been attempting since the time of Augustine, and which Thomas was to bring to a happy conclusion.

In his commentaries Albert set out not to give his own views so much as to reproduce those of Aristotle, elucidating them by means of those Arabian and Jewish writers who he thought had understood him most clearly. For he like Thomas -- or perhaps it would be more correct to say that Thomas like Albert -- believed in making use of truth no matter where it was found. He does, however, make it clear that in presenting the thought of Aristotle he does not necessarily make it his own. While agreeing with his system and method as a whole he disagrees very decidedly with some sections of it. And, while following Aristotle in general he does from time to time in his own works adopt the theories and arguments of Plato.

Albert wrote in his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*,

It is not I who have said anything in this book; I have only set out what has been said and stated principles and causes. Similarly in all the physical books I have never put forward my own opinions, but have rather expounded as faithfully as I could the views of the Peripatetics. This I only say on account of some lazy people who, seeking an excuse for their laziness, scrutinize the book for something they can find fault with.

Yet in the course of his expositions he did, in fact, set down some of his own views, if only in the way he pronounced for or against the views of others which he was reporting. But he never produced the coherent, finished synthesis of St. Thomas, and in different writings he seems to sponsor now one view now another. This is one of the defects of his work, but a defect which springs from and is almost conditioned by its merits. He set out to render Aristotle intelligible to the West, and he certainly succeeded in that self-appointed task. William of Moerbeke's Latin translation from the original Greek, done at the request of Thomas Aquinas, had made available a reliable text, but the need for equally reliable commentaries was urgent. [\(1\)](#)

These commentaries were Albert's own contribution. To write them he made himself master of all the philosophical knowledge of his time, taking especial pains to assimilate the whole body of Arabian and Jewish knowledge with which he became more familiar than did any other Christian scholar of the day. The amount of information which he thereby collected was enormous. He had to sift, criticize, and correct it before setting it out in his commentaries. Small wonder then that he did not attempt to give a decisive vote on every theory which he mentioned. That he left to minds less burdened with detail than his own. For a like reason, he did not produce a complete philosophical system, although he did conceive the idea of linking together all the truths found in the various philosophical systems, and he worked at this in his various monographs, thus founding a self-sufficient Christian philosophy of which the superstructure, the general fundamentals, and many details were taken direct from Aristotle.

The importance of this work, and its completion by St. Thomas, will be the subject of the next chapter. Sufficient has been said hereto show that the universality of Albert's genius embraced the whole philosophical knowledge of his day. Here, by initiating and making possible the formation of a Christian philosophy, the *philosophia perennis*, his originality and genius found their most perfect expression.

THE THEOLOGIAN

Albert was by natural inclination a naturalist, by conscious effort a philosopher, and with his whole devout soul would from the bottom of a heart which glowed with charity, a theologian.

So writes a biographer. Pius XI, in the Bull from which we have quoted so often, declared:

To him belongs this great honor, that (excepting St. Thomas) there is scarcely another doctor of equal authority, whether in philosophy, theology, or the interpretation of Scripture. Indeed it was to theology that the whole trend of his mind was inevitably directed. It would be an endless task to relate all that Albert has done for the increase of theological science.... He used philosophy and the scholastic method as a kind of implement for the explanation of theology. In fact he is regarded as the author of that method of theology which has come down in the Church to our own time as the safe and sound norm for clerical studies.

Yet while Albert takes a first rank among theologians, the defects in his philosophical writings are reproduced here, and he has always to take second place to St Thomas except perhaps in one or two sections. Yet here too Albert prepared the way for Thomas. Neither can be properly appreciated save in relation to the other.

When Albert began to write and teach, theology still meant primarily the study of Holy Scripture, so that it is not surprising to find that, according to his earliest biographer, he commented on the whole of the Bible.⁽²⁾ The only treatises extant today are the commentaries on the Psalms, the Prophets, the four Gospels, the Book of Job, the Canticle of Canticles, and one on the *Mulier Fortis*, whom he takes as a type of the Church and of the individual soul.

The style of these different works varies. The commentary on the Psalms was written for the faithful with a view to bringing to memory the moral precepts and truths of the Faith, and so he follows the allegorical method which had traditionally been adopted by the Western Fathers. The commentary on the Prophets, on the other hand, was written to refute the Jews, and here Albert was at pains to establish the literal sense, showing the Prophets as the signposts to Christ, and only referring briefly to the allegorical meaning. The Gospel commentaries are of a different nature again, the allegorical character being almost entirely disregarded, so that the literal sense is thrown into the foreground and the significance of the books as the historical source of Christianity is brought out. These treatises show that Albert had a gift for historical writings, although we do not possess any such works from his pen. Among these commentaries, that on St. Luke's Gospel stands out so conspicuously that Peter of Prussia remarks that in the opinion of many the saint must have been very specially illuminated by the Holy Spirit in writing it. According to tradition this work was written or at least completed while Albert was bishop, which may account for the more than usually severe denunciations of the failings and disorders of the times which it contains. One critic has said of this treatise:

Here the current of Albert's own thought and his mystically inclined disposition find their freest expression, and at times in passages of great nobility and sublime genius, passages which must surely rank with the greatest and most profound in the religious literature of all times. Albert's contribution to scriptural exegesis was three-fold. He strongly insisted on the literal meaning, he led the way in introducing a systematic analysis of the text, and he traced the progressive development of revelation, a thought which was novel in his day. In all these things he pointed the way towards modern exegetical methods, so that although he does not occupy any position of special importance in biblical science -- since the auxiliary sciences at the disposal of the modern scholar were unknown to him -- his position among medieval exegetes is one of outstanding importance, as is witnessed by the epithet applied to him in a 1473 Preface to his *Mariale* -- "the most renowned interpreter of the Sacred Books."

In the sphere of moral philosophy, Albert's position is the same as that in philosophy and in theology as a whole; he prepared the way for St. Thomas, to whose works his own are inferior. It is interesting to note, however, that while the second part of the *Summa*, wherein the whole of moral theory is worked out in relation to the good, has long been considered the masterpiece of Thomas's method and exposition, a manuscript has been discovered containing the third part of Albert's *Summa de Creaturis* wherein he treats of ethics in relation to the good, thoroughly discussing the four cardinal virtues. This was composed a good twenty years before Thomas' *Summa*. Here as everywhere Aristotle is the basis, but St. Augustine's ethical theories are also given prominence. In an age which was essentially objective in its theological expositions Albert also anticipates later times in giving consideration to the personal element:

The great discerner of souls does not belie himself here. More than once his vast experience of life, his charity in judgment, his just and wise weighing of all the circumstances, manifest themselves. This is especially the case when Albert, as for instance in his teaching on anger, or on the spiritual works of mercy, descends to the particular and gives advice on the proper ordering of life, for then he reveals a unique greatness, a rare combination of high scientific training and a practical wisdom born of his own

experience of life.... We can then catch a glimpse of his own soul, as in moving speech his loving heart sings the canticle of God.

This introduction of the personal element, in which Albert differs so much from Thomas, will be referred to again in another chapter. Here it may be noted that it follows from his whole conception of theology, which was not to him a dry impersonal abstract science, a theoretical knowledge of God, but a knowledge breathing forth love, intensely practical, in fact 'Mystical Theology' in Pseudo-Dionysius' sense -- the knowledge of God flowing from the Gift of Wisdom. To quote once more from the Bull of canonization:

Albert's numerous theological works, and above all, his commentaries on the sacred Scriptures, bear the marks not only of an enlightened mind and a deep knowledge of Catholic training, but they are stamped with the spirit of piety and arouse in souls the desire to cleave to Christ. We readily discern therein the holy man discoursing of holy things.... His mystical writings show that he was favored by the Holy Spirit with the gift of infused contemplation.

In dogmatic theology Albert produced the usual commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which belongs to his early teaching days, and a *Summa* which was unfinished at the time of his death. Neither approaches the sublimity of Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, for which, however, all Albert's theological studies prepared the way. As in philosophy, he was usually content to set down the different opinions on a point, leaving it to others to decide which was the true one, so he gives the impression at times of himself wavering between different points of view. On some subjects -- the nature of original sin, and the creation of Adam in a state of sanctifying grace -- he adopted doctrines which were contrary to those usually held and which only became generally accepted when they had been further sponsored by Thomas. His favorite subjects were Our Lady and the Holy Eucharist. He wrote more on Our Lady than did any other scholastic doctor -- the *Mariale*, a treatise on her virginity, a commentary on the *Ave Maria*, and lengthy sections in the scriptural commentaries -- and in them he displays a burning love and devotion towards the Queen of Heaven. Peter of Prussia points out that the saint never mentioned her name without adding some epithet in her praise. His most important contribution to Mariology is his teaching on Mary's universal mediation which he developed from her position as Mother of God and co-helper of Jesus.

The doctrine of the Holy Eucharist receives even more attention. Albert's sermons on the eucharist for a long time circulated under the name of Thomas and were extremely popular. *De Eucharistico Sacramento* is a veritable *summa* on the subject, while *De Sacrificio Missae* is an exposition of the prayer and ceremonies of the mass which broke away from the arbitrary and artificial method then common and took a road which is followed even today. In these treatises as in those on our Blessed Lady the saint is obviously dealing with a subject dear to his heart, and the fervor of his devotion cannot be concealed. This is also the case when he deals with the theology of the procession of the Holy Spirit to which he had obviously devoted much thought and study.

It is in the sphere of mystical theology, however, that Albert is at his best, nor was he surpassed even by Thomas. The popular *De adhaerendo Deo (On Cleaving to God)*, so long regarded as his masterpiece, is now considered to be either wholly or in part the work of another. But his other mystical works, especially the commentaries on Dionysius the Areopagite, are quite sufficient to give him a leading place among masters of the spiritual life. He alone of all the scholastics commented on all these books, and his commentaries are a masterpiece of interpretation. Moreover he showed how every word and every phrase can be given an interpretation comfortable to sacred Scripture, although the author was actually tinged with Neoplatonic and unorthodox ideas. He also pointed out many errors into which mystics are liable to fall, especially the dangers of quietism. Rudolph of Nymegen records the following story apropos of the Dionysian commentaries:

A religious renowned for his learning and virtue [whom most people believe to have been Thomas] one day picked up a sheet of paper on which the following was written in Albert's hand. "When I had with much difficulty completed the book on the 'Celestial Hierarchy' I began the exposition of the 'Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.' With incredible difficulty I had got through the first chapter on Baptism, but when I started on the second my strength failed me. I despaired of being able to go any further when after Matins, this vision was vouchsafed to me. I found myself in a church where St. Paul was saying Mass. Consoled beyond measure I felt sure that he himself would enlighten me on the meaning of Dionysius. When the Apostle had said the Agnus Dei, an enormous crowd entered the church, and the celebrant asked what they wanted. "We have brought you a demoniac," replied someone; "please deliver him." When Satan had been driven out, Paul gave Holy Communion to the happy Christian. I offered myself as server, and said with a certain fear, "For a long time I have desired to be instructed on the profound mysteries contained in the pages of the Areopagite, and especially on the nature of true holiness." Paul replied kindly; "After Mass come with me to the house of Aaron the High Priest, situated on the other bank of the river."

Accordingly when Mass was over I followed the Apostle. When we arrived at the water's edge the Doctor of the Nations crossed without difficulty. It was not so with me; for hardly had I touched the waves than they began to rise so as to make my crossing impossible. St. Paul entered the house which he had pointed out to me; and I asked myself anxiously how I could possibly follow him, and then suddenly I awoke. After some reflection I believed I had found the explanation of the dream. The first chapter of Dionysius treats, in effect, of the expulsion of Satan from the human soul by Baptism. Then the new Christian participates in the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. The following chapter leads him who would receive the holy chrism to the house of Aaron, because here it is a question of the chrism with which bishops are anointed. The deep waters which so suddenly heaped up had terrified me, but by the grace of God the great Apostle had made my passage easy. I therefore betook myself once more to my writing, and I have completed, with help from on high, what my own feebleness had shown me was an impossibility.

As a mystical writer Albert had tremendous influence over the German School which followed him, and, as in the case of the natural sciences, if his example and teaching had been followed, a detour of several centuries would have been avoided. "In the field of mysticism Albert not only achieved great things in individual problems, but also laid new foundations, and set up signposts for the further development of the subject."

This inadequate survey of Albert's writings may perhaps convey some idea of the universality of his genius. It may be added that he was always a "doctor" in the most literal sense of the word, i.e. a teacher. He studied and wrote not for love of so doing and perhaps not even principally out of a love of truth, but out of a love of God and of souls in God, which made him anxious to impart to others the knowledge which he had himself amassed, and to employ for the good of souls the talents which had been entrusted to him. That one of those was the gift of teaching, of imparting knowledge, is evident. No saint has taught for so long nor been so determined to return to the office of teaching when other works could be laid aside. That he was chosen as the first regent of studies of the studium *generale* at Cologne shows the esteem in which he was held by the authorities of his order. The crowds who flocked to his lectures proved that the students of Europe had a like opinion of his ability.

A prolific writer is not necessarily a good writer, and to be endowed with an encyclopedic brain is not necessarily a sign of greatness. But in Albert these were manifestations of the essential greatness of his intellect, while his teaching ability depended perhaps most of all on the greatness of his soul. As Pius XI wrote, "All the works of Albert are of monumental value and of imperishable authority. With our predecessor Leo XIII we venture to say, 'Although time will bring its increase to every kind of science,

still Albert's teachings which served to form Thomas Aquinas and were regarded in his time as miraculous can never really grow old.' "

NOTES

- 1 . William had been sent to Greece by the general chapter of the order about 1242. There he worked indefatigably for the reunion of the Greek and Latin Church. He died in 1281.
2. Holy Scripture was the text-book of the masters in theology, and their commentaries represent their lectures in the schools. Unfortunately it is only of late years that their importance has been realized.

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*The Mission of
St. Albert and St. Thomas*



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

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IT is no unusual thing in these days to find saints who even in life have a very clear consciousness of their "mission," the particular part they are called upon to play in the life of the Church, either before or after their death. They are aware of sanctity and they are also aware that the gifts of grace which God has bestowed upon them are meant not just for themselves, but for the Church as a whole. In this they are but following in the footsteps of the divine Exemplar of all sanctity who said of his mission, "I have come that they may have life," and "For this I have come into the world, to give testimony to the truth," and of his holiness, "For them do I consecrate myself, that they may be consecrated in truth" (John 10:10, 18:37, 17:19).

We find little of this in the life of St. Albert or St. Thomas. If they were conscious of their sanctity they did not say so; and although the work which they together accomplished was of immense moment in the history of the Church and of civilization in general, they do not seem to have had any conception of the magnitude of their mission. It is true that Thomas declares in the *Contra Gentiles* (lib. i, ch. 1, 2) that "taking heart from God's loving kindness" he assumes the office of the wise man, which is "to meditate and publish the divine truth... and to refute the error contrary to truth," doing this "although it surpasses our own powers, for, in the words of Hilary (*De Trin.*, i, 37): 'I acknowledge that I owe my life's chief occupation to God, so that every word and every thought of mine may speak of him.'" Yet, in the Preface to his *Summa Theologiae*, which is surely the most perfect product of the human mind, he says that he wishes to write an introduction to theology for the use of novices! So too Albert declared that his aim was simply to make Aristotle intelligible to the West, which is by no means the same thing as to initiate the formulation of a system of philosophy which the Church would adopt as the basis of her official teaching.

In his commentary on the Creed, St. Thomas remarks that while the Eternal Word, abiding in the bosom of the Father, was known to God alone, having been clothed with flesh as the word is clothed with sound, he became intelligible to human beings. Perhaps it will not be irreverent to see in the life work of Albert and Thomas some parallel to the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. Just as the Word had to become flesh to assume a human form in order to be intelligible to and known by the human race, so too the word which he spoke, the truth to which he gave testimony, although consisting in the mysteries of the divine life and love which are ineffable and unutterable, yet had to be expressed in human language in order to be understood, so far as could be, by human minds. And just as the Eternal Word assumed the most perfect human body, so too is it fitting that the word which he spoke, the truth which he revealed, should be expressed in the most perfect and most spiritual form of human language and thought, the language of philosophy.

It is true that Our Lord himself framed his teaching in the simplest of language and that theology can add nothing to the deposit of the faith which he revealed. But it can and does reveal the whole signification of his words, and express his doctrine in clear scientific language so that all ambiguities may be removed. The Church also realizes that divine truth is one, a coherent whole, since it is ultimately a Person who reveals himself, and that therefore, although the weakness of the human

intellect required that divine truth be presented as a series of separate truths, yet the essential harmony and unity between these truths should be evident when they are expressed. Theology must present a coherent whole, a unity, a synthesis.

From the very first the Church was aware of this double need. The earliest Fathers commenced the search for a system of thought which would at once provide the unity and the elevated form of expression which would make it a fit vehicle for conveying the truths of faith. Long before Christianity had made its appearance, purely human speculation had already reached its highest peak in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Plato was the Master, and although he developed a comprehensive philosophic system, Aristotle, the pupil, broke away and developed his own theories on different principles. "No one has thought more clearly and more correctly, more profoundly and at the same time more simply, on the problem of essence, existence, and act, than did Aristotle; never were great truths stated more calmly and objectively than by him." Unfortunately his countrymen failed to understand his teaching, while his immediate pupils altered the principles in such a manner that the magnificent comprehensiveness of his system was lost. By the time the Gospel was preached, Aristotle was almost forgotten, and his teaching, even in its distorted form, no longer had any influence.

Platonism, too, had been developed and sometimes changed. But with its mystical atmosphere, its extremely spiritual conception of man, and its teaching on the other world, it had already been adopted by some of the pagan religious philosophers and seemed to be well adapted for a scientific exposition of the truths of faith. The Fathers of the Church, many of whom had been Stoics or Neoplatonists before their conversion, made the attempt, and one of them, St. Augustine, devoted his whole genius to bring about the desired result. Many Platonic ideas could be used as they stood, others could be adapted, but a compact and unified system could not be achieved. None the less, succeeding theologians persisted in the attempt, partly because of the obvious attractiveness of Platonism, partly because of the immense prestige enjoyed by St. Augustine, whose writings were regarded even by a Thomas Aquinas with almost the same reverence as were the Holy Scriptures themselves, partly because there did not appear to be any alternative philosophy which could be utilized. Moreover the social and political upheavals of the Dark Ages did not encourage scientific research. There was one exception to the general trend -- Boethius (ca. 475-525), who realized the value of the works of Aristotle and set about commenting on them and making them accessible to the West. But he died before completing his task, and his example was never followed by other philosophers. Augustinian Platonism held sway throughout the Church, and the popularity of Platonic doctrines was further enhanced when the works of Dionysius, or more accurately the Pseudo-Dionysius, were disseminated throughout the West. This Christian mystic was a Neoplatonist even to the extent of expounding in his writings some of their unorthodox doctrines, but his works became the inspiration of almost all the Western mystical writers, so that it must have appeared most improbable that anything so unspiritual as the works of Aristotle were believed to be could ever be utilized in mystical theology.

While Plato thus held undisputed sway in the schools of Europe, Aristotle had been rediscovered by the Arabs and Jews. Avicenna (980-1037), the Arabian physician and philosopher, led the way, followed by Avicbron, the Jewish poet, moralist and philosopher (1020-70), who tried to combine Aristotle with Old Testament religion, while Averroes, the latest (1126-98), was the most influential of all. Unfortunately they knew only corrupt texts -- Averroes made his translation from an imperfect Arabic translation of a Syriac version of a Greek text -- while they used African commentaries which were deeply influenced by Neoplatonist philosophy whose errors they incorporated into their own commentaries. Thus the Aristotelianism of the Arabs, and to a less extent that of Averroes, was largely mixed with Neoplatonism.

Averroes, whom St. Thomas called (*Opusc. de Unit. Intell.*) "not so much a Peripatetic as a corrupter of the Peripatetic philosophy," was a rationalist who scoffed at all religions indiscriminately in that spirit of irreverence which Abelard too had shown, and which had caused apprehension as to the dangerous influence of even the logic and metaphysics of Aristotle. His two most pernicious doctrines were that a thing could at the same time be true theologically and false philosophically, and the assertion of the commonality of one intellectual soul among all human beings.

When these heterodox doctrines reached the West through Spain and through the court of Frederick II, who, attracted by Aristotle's scientific writings, supported two of the sons of Averroes, the authorities were alarmed. Nor is this surprising for even the conservative elements in the Faculties of Arts and Theology, who rejected the new systems in themselves, still strove to combine Aristotelian terminology with their own traditional doctrines, the result being eclecticism and confusion.

Therefore condemnation was resorted to. The Council of Sens, convened at Paris in 1210, forbade under pain of excommunication any commenting on the books of Aristotle, though they could be cited. In 1215 the Papal legate, Robert de Courçon, confirmed this condemnation. The Dominican constitutions of 1228 echoed this policy when they ordained: "Let not the brethren study the books of the gentiles and the philosophers...." Gerard de Frachet later produced some terrifying stories of the fate which met those who were seduced by the "witch philosophy." In 1231 Gregory IX mitigated the condemnation to a provisional prohibition until the books should have been corrected, for which purpose a committee of three masters of the University of Paris was appointed, but apparently they found the task beyond them.

Such was the situation which faced the Order of Preachers as it came to occupy a foremost position in the intellectual life of Europe, and although certain elements were either definitely hostile, like Gerard de Frachet, or cautiously conservative, like Humbert de Romans, the majority were ready to follow the lead of an Albert the Great, who with unusual vehemence stigmatized the opposition as "senseless animals who blaspheme that of which they know nothing." He seems to have realized either by natural intuition or by supernatural illumination that the christianizing of Aristotle would at once solve the problem of the moment and effect a reconciliation between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith, by providing that scientific system which theology had been seeking since the early ages of the Church. To do this it was necessary to get back to the primitive text, then to purge the authentic thought of Aristotle of its pagan errors, and expound it in a manner compatible with Christian truth. In this last task the Arab commentators could be utilized. Indeed Thomas -- acting upon advice of St. Augustine which he quotes with approval (ST, I. Q.84, a5), "If those who are called philosophers said by chance anything that was and consistent with our faith, we must claim it from them as unjust possessors" -- molded his own commentary upon that of Averroes, whom he frequently cites with respect despite the hard words already mentioned. In this he was only following the example of his master, for it was Albert who first set about wresting the truth from these "unjust possessors," and who undertook the prodigious task of familiarizing himself with all the works of the Arabs and Jews. St. Thomas seems to have taken the initiative in asking William of Moerbeke to make a Latin translation of Aristotle direct from the Greek, but Albert's own commentaries, which were part translation, part paraphrase admixed with a good deal of original matter, had already done much to make the Stagirite's genuine thought "available to the West" even before this translation was ready.

This struggle to christianize Aristotle was a stormy one, and it must be admitted that Thomas bore the brunt of the battle, for he seems to have aroused personal enmity in a way that Albert never did. Nor can it be denied that it was also Thomas who brought the undertaking to its successful conclusion, refuting the errors of the perverters of Aristotle, and formulating in his *Summa contra Gentiles* the Christian Aristotelianism, that *philosophia perennis* which the Church was to adopt as the basis of her

official teaching. He then reconciled it with, or better, wedded it to, theology in his incomparable and immortal *Summa Theologiae*, thereby producing the synthesis which the Church had been seeking for over a thousand years. But it must never be forgotten that Albert wrote first, collecting and utilizing material that had never before been used in the service of Christian truth, and almost certainly conceived, at least in outline, the nature of the synthesis which was ultimately achieved. As a biographer has written: "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Thomas presupposes Albert his teacher and master in everything. Without a due appreciation of Albert's preliminary labors, Thomas can never be rightly estimated." (1)

It is true that Albert lacked the keenness and clarity of intellect which have earned for Thomas the title of the Angelic Doctor, so that although he had the wider knowledge of the sources he was inferior in his critical use of them. Nor is his profundity of thought or finesse of interpretation equal to that of his erstwhile pupil. Therefore, although Albert stands unrivalled in science, a field Thomas never cultivated, he yields him the palm both as philosopher and theologian. But it must be insisted that their two minds are complementary, their labors inseparably interconnected. Without Thomas, Albert's work could never have reached its logical consummation; without Albert, Thomas would not have been what he was, nor could he have undertaken what he did. But when the one had been given a helpmate like unto himself, Thomistic philosophy and theology was the offspring of their united efforts and genius.

In actual fact some writers seem to dispute any such interdependence between Albert and Thomas, although it is difficult to see on what grounds they do so. It is undeniable that Albert collected the material and commented on Aristotle; he did not produce the finished synthesis, for even had he had the mind to do so, he would never have had the time. Thomas had the mind, but without Albert's previous labors which provided the necessary material, he would never have been able to formulate his system. For he would himself first have had to undertake all the research which his master had already done.

Albert did not produce the finished synthesis. Did he conceive it? Assuredly, since he attempted it. In the unpublished parts of the *Summa de Creaturis*, which was probably written between 1242 and 1245, Albert in treating of the moral virtues follows the exact method which Thomas was to adopt in the second part of the *Summa*, written probably between 1271-2; a method which was a complete departure from the treatment of the subject in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Similarly, in his own *Summa Theologiae*, Albert adopted a plan similar to that of Thomas, and again quite different from the method previously in vogue. Thomas' treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is simply the extended application of the principles which Albert had utilized in dealing with the gift of wisdom; and the same applies to other dogmatic questions. To quote once more:

We must never forget that Albert wrote first. Thomas was the pupil who sat at Albert's feet, and to whom the Master imparted all his ideas, ambitions and plans.

It was by Albert that Thomas's work was inspired, furthered, watched over and defended, and through Albert his work found recognition, at any rate in the Order. Without Albert, Thomas would not have been what he became. (2)

It is true that such a statement cannot be proved by letters, quotations, embryo schemes, etc., but a glance at the relations between the two saints and doctors, so far as they are known, will show that it is the most probable explanation of their interdependence. Albert entered the order about the year 1223, when Thomas was four or five years old. By 1233 he had gained his lectorate, and spent the next ten

years teaching in different German convents. By about 1240 he had attained to such eminence that he was chosen to go to Paris, to receive the crown of an academic career, the doctorate in theology.

He was admitted to this coveted honor in 1245 or 1246, so the previous two years must have been spent in teaching the *Commentaries* of Peter Lombard, and his written commentary belongs to the period 1242-6 though the fourth book was not completed until 1249. As noted, his signature as Master of Theology appears on a report on the Talmud undertaken as member of a commission appointed by the Papal legate in 1248, and this is the first date in his life which is known with absolute certainty. Meanwhile, Thomas Aquinas had entered the Order in Italy, in 1244, and came to Paris probably in 1245. Even if his theological studies did not begin immediately -- and they may well have done so -- he must have come to the knowledge of Albert, as they would have been living in the same convent of St. Jacques. Indeed some biographers declare that it was for the purpose of placing Thomas under Albert that the Master, John the Teuton, took him to Paris. In 1248, after the general chapter which had decided upon the foundation of a new *studium generale* and *solemne* in the provinces of England, Lombardy, Provence, and Germany, Albert was sent to establish and become the first Regent of Studies of the one at Cologne, and Thomas accompanied him. There the two saints remained until the return of Thomas to Paris in 1252 to gain in his turn the prized doctorate in theology.

Thomas's biographer tells us that Albert gave his young pupil a cell next to his own, imparted to him all his cherished ideas and plans, and made him his substitute if he were called away from his teaching duties. The story of the Dumb Ox belongs to this period. Albert was commenting on a difficult passage in Dionysius the Areopagite, and one of the more forward pupils offered to explain things to the supposedly dull Thomas, only to become involved himself, and to be extricated from his difficulties by his "pupil." A few days later someone picked up outside Thomas's cell some notes which were found to deal with some of the most difficult and lofty passages in the mystic's writings. These were taken to Albert, who thereupon uttered his famous prophecy: "You call him a dumb ox, but the day will come when the whole world will be filled with his bellowings." (3) Neither history nor legend tells us very much more, but from the little which has been given, much can be deduced without undue exercise of the imagination.

Albert, already recognized as one of the greatest if not yet *the* greatest of Europe's teachers,(4) perceived the extraordinary genius of the young pupil entrusted to him, and received him into his closest friendship. Thomas, although only twenty-seven when he left for Paris, was yet considered sufficiently mature to embark upon the course necessary for obtaining the doctorate. It is hardly unreasonable therefore to expect that Albert would treat him more as an equal than as a pupil, would confide to him his hopes and plans, discuss the needs of the Church and the order, and the measures which were required as well as the steps he had already undertaken to meet these needs. He must have seen in Thomas the one who could carry his work to a stage of completion which he himself could never have attained, and he handed over to his young co-operator, as it were, the full weight of his researches and learning. Thomas too would have had his ideas and suggestions, which he would surely have disclosed to and debated with his master and friend. It may be noted here again, however, that although there is ample and undisputed evidence of the influence of Albert over Thomas, Albert's writings do not show that Thomas influenced him.

It seems almost as if the older man, recognizing in the young one his *alter ego*, the one whose work would be the development and completion of his own, continued his own researches but did not try to produce a synthesis which would compete with that of Thomas. This theory seems to be borne out by Albert's conduct in later life, when he so much praised and recommended the works of his pupil that they completely overshadowed his own, and eventually almost cast his name into oblivion. He would

not have done this had he believed that his writings contained contributions to the intellectual life of the Church which were not found in those of Thomas.

It was also at Albert's instigation, moreover, that Thomas was sent to Paris at this juncture. Albert must have realized that the "novelties" which he himself had introduced needed to be constantly propagated and defended. But his superiors, probably not realizing the significance of the revolution which he had initiated, had given him an important task in the foundation of the *studium solemne* at Cologne. Besides, Germany as well as Paris had to be introduced to the real Aristotle, and a German was the best suited to act as sponsor.

And so, we are told, Albert suggested to John the Teuton that his brilliant young pupil should be sent to St. Jacques to study for the doctorate. He met with a flat refusal. Nothing daunted, he repeated the proposal to Hugh of St. Cher, the Dominican cardinal legate and his close friend, and before long Thomas received his assignation to Paris. Hither he went, fully conscious, we may be sure, of the magnitude of the work which was being entrusted to him, and of the opposition he was likely to encounter, but conscious too that he had behind him the whole weight of Albert's learning and prestige and with him the powerful support of his prayers. Thus the partnership entered on a new phase. Each, in every way possible, propagated the doctrines of Aristotle and attacked the enemies of such propagation, while the enemies in turn -- Averroists, traditionalists, and the secular masters who were jealous of the extraordinary success of the Dominican Order -- endeavored to destroy the doctrine, its leading exponent, and the whole order to which he belonged. All these elements were behind the attack on the mendicant orders which William of St. Amour led and directed. Thus it was only natural for the Master to appoint as the Dominican protagonists the two men who were most deeply involved in the struggle. When the case was called to Rome, Albert repaired there to defend the cause with the success already described. Thomas returned to Paris, to enjoy the added prestige and authority that the doctorate, conferred at the express command of the pope on a candidate who had not yet reached the prescribed age, would give to his teaching.

Albert remained at the Curia for some time longer, lecturing on St. John's Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul, and, at the request of the Pope, Alexander IV, writing his treatise *De Uniate Intellect us contra Averroes*. The next meeting between the two Dominicans was at the general chapter held at Valenciennes in 1259, when both were appointed to the commission which was established to draw up a revised curriculum of studies for the whole order. We cannot but believe that the ensuing discussions would have provided, and even demanded, an opportunity for further comparisons of their own work and plans. Books were needed for studies, and if the curriculum were a new one new books would have to be written, and none were better qualified for this task than Albert and Thomas.[\(5\)](#)

After the general chapter Thomas was summoned to the Curia, where he remained almost uninterruptedly until 1268. Albert returned to Cologne, only to be made Bishop of Regensburg, a dignity which he succeeded in laying aside after two years, as we have seen. His resignation involved a journey to the Curia, however, where he remained until 1263, so that he and Thomas would have had continual access to each other during this period. Here again, we have no records of what they said and did and arranged. We can only surmise and suggest that their own experiences and writings, the working of the new curriculum in the order, and the problems which still faced Europe in the intellectual sphere, must have occupied them.

So far as we know, this was the last meeting of these two "masters in Israel." Albert returned to Germany as legate to preach the crusade, and when the death of the Pope in 1264 terminated this appointment he placed himself at the disposal of the Master, and returned to Würzburg and then to Strassburg, where he combined a life of teaching with external activity of every kind.

In 1268 an incident occurred which is not easy to understand on the evidence at our disposal today. The Averroists in Paris, under Siger de Brabant, had renewed their attacks on Christian Aristotelianism and on the Dominican Order in particular. The Master invited Albert as the chief protagonist in the struggle and the order's greatest teacher to go to Paris and reassume the chair of philosophy. He refused, and Thomas went in his stead.

Some biographers believe that Albert refused because no lector could be assigned to him, and he felt too old to undertake the task unaided. But in view of the comparatively recent offer of his services to the Master, and of the journey to Paris to defend Thomas's doctrine which he insisted on making against the advice of his friends nearly ten years later, this interpretation appears unlikely. Albert was too good a religious to go against a superior's wishes without very good reason for doing so -- a reason such as the direct papal command which had caused him to accept a bishopric in spite of the exhortation of Blessed Humbert. Another and more probable explanation is that Albert said he would not accept the invitation *unless* no other lector were available -- knowing all the while that Thomas was available, and perhaps himself proposing him. In this case Albert's action might well have been deliberate self-effacement so as to give Thomas the chance of showing his metal and at the same time of bringing his teaching into greater prominence before a wider public. By so acting he would have given still further proof of his conviction that the teaching of Thomas was the teaching of Albert, and that he could do nothing to defend the Church's cause which his former pupil could not do equally well or even better.

So Thomas betook himself to stormy Paris, and Albert, at the request of the Master, returned to Cologne in 1271 to deal with storms of a different nature. (Apparently Albert's refusal to go to Paris had not made his superiors feel any less free to employ him as they wished.)

In 1274 both Albert and Thomas set out for the Council at Lyons, but, whereas the old man arrived there and played a leading part in the proceedings, Thomas died on the journey at Fossa Nuova on 7th March. According to the legend, Albert was one day at dinner when he suddenly burst into tears. When the Prior inquired the reason for his distress he replied, "I must break the sad news to you. Brother Thomas of Aquin, my child in Christ and the light of the Church, is dead. God has revealed it to me." And from that time forward the mere mention of the name of Thomas made his loving master and father dissolve into tears.

Thomas was dead, but his works and doctrine lived on, and there were not wanting men who would gladly have consigned them to the grave with their author. Even during life and within his own order he had enemies whose activities continued after his death. Three years to the day after his death, at the instigation of some members of the faculty of theology at Paris, Bishop Etienne Tempier condemned two hundred and nineteen propositions, including some drawn from Thomas' works. Three weeks later Robert Kilwardby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, condemned these same theses at Oxford.

Thomas could no longer defend himself, but he was not without a champion. Albert, who was certainly well over seventy and perhaps over eighty, announced his intention of going to Paris; and to Paris he went despite the fears and remonstrances of his friends and brethren. Assembling the brethren of the *studium generale*, he mounted the master's chair, and taking as his text the words of Holy Scripture, "What glory would it bring to the living to be praised by the dead?" he, recognized by friends and enemies alike as Europe's leading scholar, delivered a glowing eulogy of the works of Thomas. He asserted with prophetic insight that when all other doctors would have fallen into oblivion, Thomas alone would survive in the Church. He declared himself ready to defend all Thomas' writings, and did not cease to magnify his exalted merits.

We are not told that anyone dared to speak a work in contradiction. On his return to Cologne Albert betook himself with almost youthful ardor to read through all the works of Thomas. Having done so, he repeated his praises publicly and solemnly, and declared that Thomas had by his writings written "*finis*" to all labors even to the end of time, and that henceforward any others would labor in vain, no doubt meaning thereby that Thomas had carried his speculations to such limits that no human intellect could ever penetrate further nor add to his discoveries. This was high praise indeed from one who had himself so many claims to be honored for his own original and mighty intellect. (6)

Albert's defense of Thomas had a decided influence within the order. Hitherto there had been some difference of opinion; henceforward the order itself undertook Thomas' defense and made his doctrine its own. The Chapter of Milan, 1278, severely reprimanded those English brethren who had disparaged his writings. At the Chapter of Paris, 1279, penalties were threatened against any religious who should attack him. And in 1286 the Paris Chapter made the study of his doctrine obligatory throughout the whole order.

On this point, as in the matter of scientific and philosophical studies, it can be said that Albert the Great was destined by Providence to perform the double task of precursor and promoter, pointing out with a sure hand the path which the whole Church should follow, and which in fact it did follow, with the authentic exposition and supreme sanction of the Holy See.

Did Albert realize that it was his own work he was defending and propagating? He must have recognized that Thomas had set the seal on all that he himself had initiated and dreamed of. Otherwise he would still have looked for another to bring about the realization of his plans and hopes. But knowing this, he nonetheless sought to efface himself completely behind his younger pupil and collaborator, and so well did he succeed that Albert, who even in his lifetime had been called the Great and had been the outstanding figure in a century of outstanding men, was soon almost forgotten, save among his native Germans, while Thomas, as he had prophesied, became the light of the Church. But as Albert was once the precursor and promoter of Thomas, so in these days when Thomas has once more come into his own, he would seem to be securing for Albert the very large share of honor which is due to him.

The vision of St. Mechtilde, from which the Church has taken the responsory at Vespers for the Feast of St. Albert, may serve as a fitting closing and commentary on this chapter:

She saw the souls of Albert and Thomas entering heaven like two princes of the highest degree. Each was preceded by two angels who bore two enormous candlesticks. One angel belonged to the choir of the Seraphim, the other to the Cherubim. The former denoted how the two saints were intellectually illuminated so as to know God while the latter indicated the special love towards God with which they were aflame by which they loved as a great gift of God their divinely bestowed knowledge and understanding. As they drew near to the throne of God the words which the two saints had written seemed to be inscribed on their garments in letters of gold, and as the rays of the Divinity caught them, as a blazing sun is reflected on gold, each word reflected a wonderful glory on the Divinity itself. This produced a delicious sweetness in their members, and filled their souls with an overwhelming joy.

All the words which they had written on the Divinity and the sacred humanity of Christ, filled their souls with a singular glory, so that they appeared to perceive in themselves a certain image of the Divinity. All that they had together written on the glory and happiness of the angels, on the deeds of the Prophets and the Apostles, all the honor that by their writings or their words they had paid to the merits of the other Saints, now resounded to their own glory; i.e. the brightness of the Angels, the merits of the Prophets, the dignity and excellence of the Apostles, the triumphant glory of the Martyrs, the teaching and sanctity of the Confessors, in a word, the entire glory of all the saints.

NOTES

1. H. Wilms, O.P., *Albert the Great* (London, 1933), p. 84.
2. Wilms. op. cit., p. 84.
3. Thomas also made a copy of Albert's commentaries on the *Ethics* of Aristotle, and the autograph MS. is still extant.
4. He enjoyed such a high repute that even in his lifetime he was cited in the schools as an authority. Cf. Roger Bacon and other contemporary writers.
5. The following extract from *Raymundiana*, i, 12, quoted by Fr. Schwertner in *St. Raymund of Pennafort*, p. 117, is of interest here:

"Very desirous of the salvation of the pagan, Brother Raymund asked that great doctor of sacred Scripture, Brother Thomas of Aquin, of the same Order, master in theology, who *next to Brother Albert the Philosopher was the greatest clerk of the world* [italics ours), to compose a work against the error of the pagans, in order to dissipate their darkness and discover to the eyes of the unbeliever the doctrine of the True Sun. This master acceded to the request which so illustrious a Father had made to him, with great humility composing the *Summa contra Gentiles*. None other can compete with it in the same matter."

This sounds quite probable, for St. Raymund, a Spaniard, was very much alive to the danger from the Arabs and Jews, and had established schools for the study of Arabic and Hebrew when he was Master. But as he had resigned that office in 1230, before St. Thomas had entered the order, it seems strange that he should still be referred to as "father" at a date when Thomas was "master" -- unless it is his venerable age which the writer has in mind. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the *Contra Gentiles* was written at a period when Albert and Thomas were in personal contact, and as it is the consummation and *vade mecum* of the christianizing of Aristotle which the former had initiated, it is inconceivable that Thomas would have written it without taking the fullest advantage of all that his master's presence could afford.

6. Of this incident Touron writes (*Historie des hommes illustres de l'Ordre de S. Dominique*, Paris 1743, t. 2. p. 580): "I do not know what is more to be admired, the zeal of Albert the Great, or his modesty. Bishop and renowned doctor as he was, when the defense of truth was in question, he was not afraid to make himself in a sense the disciple of him whose master he had the honor of being."



9

The Character of the Man

THE accusation of negligence in collecting and preserving records of its illustrious sons, which was more than once leveled against the Order of Preachers, applies very forcibly in the case of St. Albert, as in that of St. Dominic himself. One would have expected and hoped for detailed accounts of the life, work, miracles, and sayings of one who for so long was a dominating figure in the order in Germany and in Europe as a whole. Instead, even the earliest biographers had for the most part to fall back upon legend.

This is perhaps accounted for by Albert's very greatness. Just because he was so venerated by the people in general he very quickly became a legendary figure, beside which the historic one faded into insignificance. To a large extent that is true even today. While the legendary Albert is a very real person to the people of Cologne in particular and Germany in general, Albert the scientist, the philosopher, and the theologian, is only just being rediscovered by his fellow countrymen, who are still inclined to mistrust one who occupied such a place in stories and legends.

Happily Albert himself provided a means of counteracting both the neglect and the excessive admiration of his life. Almost all our knowledge of his character and personality can be gathered from his own writings. The same applies to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, but for different reasons. Augustine provided a full account of his exterior and interior life in his own *Confessions*. Thomas effaced himself so completely from his works that the first person is hardly ever used. Yet the *Summa* is the mirror of his soul and it is regarded as the complete objective and theological (as opposed to subjective and psychological) exposition of his own interior life, which is at the same time the ideal Dominican spirituality.

Albert's writings occupy a place between these two extremes. As opposed to those of Augustine they are definitely objective and not subjective, yet the personal element is not studiously avoided as it would appear to be in St. Thomas. Personal experiences and reminiscences are quoted when they seem appropriate and, even when they are not directly appealed to, it is often quite evident that the saint is speaking not merely theoretically but of what he has proved in practice. Consequently the man and the saint are writ large on almost every page of his works, especially those of a more mystical character. Thus it is from Albert himself that we learn most about the inexhaustible richness of that great heart and soul. This chapter, which is an attempt to bring to life the man whose deeds and works, so far as we know them, have already been described in outline, will therefore be illustrated very largely by quotations from the saint's own writings.

A little has already been said of Albert's natural temperament. He came of noble stock, but he does not appear to have possessed the haughtiness such as in the beginning so beset an Aloysius Gonzaga for example. Humility was ever an outstanding virtue: he was always all things to all people, but with a special predilection for the poor. This supernatural virtue would appear to have been the flowering of a natural one. Humility is closely related to truth, and it may be that a love of truth was so instinctive to him that pride and arrogance never had any place in his character.

A love of outdoor life, of sport and nature in all her aspects, a keen observation and an interest in everything around him (amounting at times perhaps even to curiosity), are other traits which date back to childhood and persisted through life, for grace ever built on nature. A love of study, too, was an integral part of Albert's temperament: and since he chose a student's life in preference to a military one, we may conclude that the military profession, though followed by members of his family, had no attractions for him. He was ever a man of peace. Later in life when he was bishop, his lack of the more warlike virtues prominent in many members of the episcopate was one of the causes of his unpopularity in his diocese.

Yet if there was nothing of the soldier in Albert, there was a good deal of the knight (the very name signifies "knightly"). His devotion towards our Blessed Lady, "the Lady of his heart," has all the character of romance. This essentially chivalrous attitude is found in his relations with women -- kind to all but particularly to religious. He was father, champion, and protector of numerous convents of women both of his order and others. His relations with the nuns of Unterlinden were so close and constant that these famous and saintly Dominicans may be justly regarded as his spiritual daughters, the products of his direction and teaching.

The incident already related of the young Iolanda, whose vocation Albert was deputed by the Master to decide, also exemplifies the saint's relations with women. The girl cast herself at his feet, so we are told, begging to be allowed to follow her vocation. But Albert refused. She wept and pleaded for a time, yet he remained adamant. At last he was overcome by her grief and convinced by her constancy, and her cause was won. It is also characteristic that Albert should have written a whole commentary on the single chapter of Ecclesiastes which describes the Valiant Woman, in whom he saw the type of our Blessed Lady, of the Church, and of the individual soul. There is something of the spirit of chivalry, too, in his relations with St. Thomas, in the way that the older man placed all the riches of his genius at the disposal of his young pupil, effacing himself almost like another John the Baptist, then emerging forth from the retirement of his old age to act as a tongue, as one chronicler puts it, for the Thomas who could no longer speak for himself. This is the spirit of knighthood at its best, where self was forgotten in the interest of the cause and personal aggrandizement and self-exaltation were unknown. We do not know whether Albert looked anything of the knight, since no detailed portrait of him has come down to us -- he was not so fortunate as St. Dominic who had a Blessed Cecilia among his daughters. However we do know that he was of medium height and very well built. Blessed Humbert speaks of his gigantic shoulders on which he had carried the order. This may have been meant metaphorically, but it tallies with what we know from other sources, such as the examination of the relics when the body was found incorrupt in 1482. Rudolph of Nymegen, who published his *Legenda* about 1490, probably had this event in mind -- he was almost certainly present at the ceremony -- when he declared that Albert had a pleasing appearance and was strongly built, and that his physique was such as would enable him to undertake great labors in the service of God.

He must have been very athletic and possessed of tremendous vitality, for all his journeys were on foot, even the final one to Paris when he was probably about eighty years of age. Only a person of abnormal stamina could have combined such widespread and intensive activity, both physical and mental, as Albert crowded into his life. Clothed in full pontifical regalia he made a most impressive figure, and his deep recollection gave him the appearance of an angel from heaven. His skill in dissecting tiny insects and plants suggests that he must have had slender, delicate fingers, while his fondness for singing implies that he probably had a good voice.

Another natural characteristic which it is pleasing to find in Albert is a sense of humor, though we have no such choice samples as with his fellow countryman, Blessed Jordan. But now and then it betrays itself even in quite serious works. When speaking of the commentators on Aristotle, Albert

goes on to say: "They are all agreed that Aristotle spoke the truth; but they cannot agree as to what he actually said, and they all have different explanations of what they think he said." There is also tart humor in the remark quoted earlier, that if you believe that Aristotle was a god, then you can think that he was infallible, but that if you believe that he was a man, you must admit that he was liable to error like every other man. When speaking of the value of adversity, the saint remarks that one of God's purposes in allowing tribulations is to make people pray, for, he says, there are some people who don't even know how to pray when all goes well with them, but who become very eloquent when things begin to go wrong.

Although Albert had all the contemplative's love of silence and solitude, he was none the less a very sociable character, and Blessed Jordan's description of St. Dominic, *Nemo communior, nemo jucundior*, might well have been written of him. His love for the brethren is unmistakable. Rudolph says that when the material preoccupations of the episcopate became more than usually distracting, Albert would think "with sweet longing" of life with the brethren in earlier days. For their benefit he published many of his sermons, his *Summa Theologiae*, and his instructions on preaching, and it was at their request that he wrote his treatises on natural science:

For several years they have been begging us to compile such a book on the things of nature.... Though we do not consider ourselves equal to such a work, we could not resist the wishes of the brethren. We are told that St. Thomas never left the priory unless forced to do so and that his only recreation was to walk alone round the cloister, with rapid step and head erect. When occasionally the students would persuade him to join them in the garden for a little relaxation, he would soon find some excuse to return to choir or to his beloved cell. Albert, on the other hand, was obviously an outdoor person. When reading his works on natural science we can almost see him, surrounded by the brethren, perhaps his travelling companions, or just some of the students whom he had taken out for an afternoon ramble, pointing out items of interest, examining specimens, listening to the stories of the country people, who knew the sort of information which appealed to Master Albert, or even pursuing a single bee to see what flowers it visited, and whether it was collecting nectar or pollen. "I and my companions were witnesses" is a phrase which occurs frequently in his writings.

He had to see and do everything for himself -- he certainly did not stand on ceremony.

It is said of this bird [the ostrich] that it swallows and digests iron; but I have not found this myself, because several ostriches refused to eat the iron which I threw them. However they eagerly devoured large bones cut into small pieces, as well as gravel.

Did the saint go about armed with food for the animals he might encounter? He says that he had taken the skin of a kingfisher and stretched it on a wall to see if the feathers changed every year, which they did not. Some of his descriptions of fishes conjure up a picture of the venerable friar, and even the bishop, paddling about on the seashore when he could spare a few hours from his visitations, or in the Danube, when he could escape from his episcopal labors:

I have observed diligently, and have made investigations in the case of the oldest fishes in the sea and in rivers.

I have seen how the eel eats frogs, worms, and bits of fish, and how with bait such as this it is caught with a rod.

I myself have observed on my property on the Danube, that after the autumnal equinox, the barbel (the bearded carp) collect there in such masses, in the holes which are to be found in rocks and walls, that one can catch them with the hand.

With all his travelling and his lively interest in everything he saw, the saint must have had a fine collection of anecdotes, which would make him a most entertaining companion when conversation was required. The *Lives of the Brethren* confirms this expectation. Albert is mentioned only twice, that is, in the edition which appeared during his lifetime, but each time it is as the reporter of the story which is being related. They are edifying stories and not particularly entertaining but Gerard de Frachet's phrase, "Brother Albert of Germany relates," suggests that Brother Albert had told this story more than once, and that the role of raconteur was quite a congenial one.

These few glimpses of Albert's natural temperament, though very precious to those who love him, fade into significance beside the full-length portrait of his soul which, all unconsciously, he himself draws for us in his writings. "Doctrine," it has been said, "is the very history of souls," and Albert's doctrine is the history of his own soul. It might have been only a detached and speculative account, quite impersonal, coming only from the mind and not from the heart, but in Albert's case it certainly was not this. St. Thomas declares, and most theologians agree with him, that theology is in itself a speculative science, but to Albert it was an affective one. To him the knowledge of God was, or should always be, not merely a thing of the mind, a word, *verbum*, but a thing of the heart too -- *verbum spirans amorem*, a word breathing forth love. For him it was the affective knowledge which some writers have called Mystical Theology, which is that knowledge born of charity and the gifts of wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

This point of view provides the keynote to much in Albert's spiritual make-up. It points to the dominating influence of the gift of wisdom, while it helps to explain how he was "a contemplative by genius as well as by heart." He is perhaps the most outstanding example of the Dominican ideal - *Contemplare, contemplata aliis tradere*, "to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation" -- for it is doubtful whether any other saint of the order has combined so diverse an apostolate with so intense an interior life. His interior life is the secret of his exterior activity. He realized full well that the "one thing necessary" is "to know God and to love him in time and in eternity. For him, "piety, virtue, study, and meditation were all directed to contemplation and were the price to be paid for the knowledge of God which is gained therein."

Mention has already been made of the amount of time which the saint contrived to devote to prayer even in the midst of his heaviest teaching duties. Like his divine Master, says one biographer, he devoted the days to active works and the nights to prayer; while another writer has noted that while he regarded prayer and study as the great means of obtaining knowledge, yet, if one had to be sacrificed, study had to give way before prayer. Speaking of this life of prayer Rudolph of Nymegen asks:

Should we be surprised that Albert was endowed with superhuman knowledge, and that his words inflamed hearts more than did those of other doctors? We know from what source these outpourings of love proceeded, which we see burst forth so often from his numerous writings.

Contemplation was thus the beginning and the base of Albert's spiritual life, as it was also the end. But he was not just a contemplative, but a contemplative religious, "the most simple, the most humble, the most exact religious." The virtues of his state which he possessed in so high a degree were at once the preparation for, and the fruit of a life of prayer and contemplation.

The bedrock foundation of all sanctity is humility, of which the saint wrote: "This virtue requires that one should abase oneself to the point of considering oneself unworthy of every grace and that one should scarcely even dare to ask for any." Humility may manifest itself in different forms but in its essence it is truth -- a true realization of the Being of God and the nothingness of human creatures. In some saints the nothingness of self will be the most vivid aspect, and they will be led to annihilate themselves, to deny to themselves any worth or goodness. There is something of this attitude in Albert,

when in several of his works he speaks of his own unworthiness, of the humble nature of his writings, and of the little use they are likely to be to anyone. Thus in the preface to his *Sermones de Sanctis*, which were intended for popular edification, he wrote:

I beseech those who are deeply versed in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and who draw from their hearts great and magnificent gifts to place in the treasury of the Church, not to expect them from a poor man who only places therein the widows mite. Let those who hunger for a purer bread have recourse to the works of the great masters, leaving to simple and ignorant men the inferior flour of this book.

Albert's treatises on the Holy Eucharist are among the finest which have ever been written on the subject and from every point of view rank among his most sublime and profound works, yet the saint concludes the introduction to one of them with these words, "These are in short the thoughts which have come to my mind on the subject of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, leaving it to others more gifted than I to write more original and profound things." The conclusion to this work is couched in similar terms:

This is what I felt I ought to write on the most Holy Eucharist, to the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ; but how much more beautiful things are to be found elsewhere! If the reader finds herein anything which sounds amiss let him ascribe it to my ignorance, but if what I have written has not the merit of profundity of thought the reader may at least find in it some useful teaching.

Such phrases as these, which could be multiplied, indicate a true humility of mind and heart, and are not in the least mere pious conventional formulas of self-depreciation. They spring from a mighty intellect which has penetrated sufficiently into the truth to be aware of the inadequacy of all human knowledge, and which realizes its own ignorance all the more keenly as it becomes in men's eyes the more learned. Such intellectual humility is only too rare, but it was one of Albert's outstanding characteristics. It lies at the root of all his relations with St. Thomas, for it enabled him to see in others a greatness of intellect equal to if not exceeding his own, to place all his knowledge and experience at their disposal, and see them equal and even eclipse his own popularity and reputation -- indeed not only to see, but even to be the chief agent in bringing about his own eclipse -- and to do all this without the slightest trace of envy, jealousy, or rancor. Such humility and unselfishness is truly heroic and it is not surprising to find it reproduced in every sphere of Albert's life. As teacher, provincial, and bishop, he always remained "the most humble religious," not hiding his light under a bushel or refusing to use his great talents, but simply *allowing* his light to shine before men. He utilized his gifts as the occasion demanded, never seeking or accepting privileges and honors because of what he was and did, and always returning to the position of simple religious so soon as circumstances permitted. He regarded himself always as an instrument to be used as God chose. Therefore he did not deny the gifts he possessed or the good he achieved, but simply regarded them as God's work, and the inevitable limitations as due to his own weakness and imperfections.

Albert's humility seems to have been the fruit of the gift of fear, the workings of which are evident throughout his life, but perhaps most especially towards its close. We have quoted earlier one of the saint's prayers in which he spoke of having "stood all the day idle, not only in the market-place of the world, but also in the vineyard of religion," and wondered what payment could be given at the end of the day to so unprofitable a worker. A like sense of fear of the judgment of God is apparent in some of his sermons for our Blessed Lady, in one of which he says:

It is a good thing my brethren for us, who are sinners, to send to our Judge by means of this faithful Barque [our Blessed Lady] our tiny presents: our prayers, our tears, our fasts, our alms. When we arrive at our journey's end, this Sovereign Judge will show himself merciful, because the Virgin Mother of God will have managed our affairs very skillfully.

However, the spirit of fear was combined with an even stronger spirit of filial love, the outcome of the gift of piety, which led the saint to abandon himself completely into the hands of his heavenly Father. During the last year of his life, when the breakdown of his mental powers obscured the action of the intellectual gifts which had been so conspicuous during, life, this filial fear and love gave to his spirituality a childlike simplicity which was most touching to behold. No doubt this had always been there, but it had been hidden from view, overshadowed by more obvious and more spectacular gifts. Now he lay like a child in his Father's arms, awaiting the end with a childlike confidence and abandonment which reminds one forcibly of a St. Thérèse of Lisieux. In one of his later works he had written:

Let us console ourselves with the words of the Apostle, "The Lord knows his own," and it is impossible that one of them should be lost in the midst of the assaults, tempests, errors, tribulations, schisms, persecutions, discords, heresies, and of the attack and temptations of the evil one! For the number of the elect as well as their merits are foreknown and predestined from all eternity, in such wise that both good and evil,... fortune and adversity, everything works for their salvation. Nay, even more, for suffering makes them more glorious. Let us therefore abandon ourselves with full and complete confidence to the merciful Providence of God.

Such passages could be multiplied. When it is remembered that during Albert's last months, after the public failure of his memory, he spoke, cried, laughed, and acted generally as a child, save that his facility for prayer and, we are told, his understanding of the Holy Scriptures remained as before, it becomes evident that only an intense spirituality could have turned what would normally have seemed a tremendous humiliation into the edifying and touching object lesson which the saint seems to have been to his friends. He was never greater and never appeared greater than when having become as a little child he peacefully awaited his admission into the Kingdom of his heavenly Father.

Humility is the basis of the religious life, but its distinguishing marks are the vows and virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Of Albert's poverty something has already been said. In St. Catherine's *Dialogue*, the eternal Father points out how the virtue of poverty was every bit as dear to St. Dominic as to St. Francis, who is popularly regarded as the Knight of Lady Poverty. Albert was a firm upholder of the holy patriarch's ideal at a period when it was already being disregarded in practice. Here as always he taught first by example then by word, and only asked from others what he exacted from himself in a more heroic degree.

As a religious he walked the roads of Europe carrying on his back his own pack containing the Bible, the Breviary, and the *Book of Sentences*; as bishop, having also the episcopal regalia to take with him, he allowed his luggage to be carried on an ass, while he himself walked. His boots, like those of a famous fellow Dominican of a generation ago, were notorious, being apparently the clogs worn by the common people or else a form of footwear peculiar to Cistercians and Dominicans. His episcopal regalia was of the simplest and his life even while bishop was like that of the poorest friar. So scrupulous was he on the subject of poverty that his books were written on odd scraps of parchment of varying sizes which he bound together, and these sheets were covered with tiny, close-written script. When he moved from one house to another, he never took away the manuscripts he had written there unless with explicit leave from his superiors. To this scruple many convents owed their possession of autograph copies of his works.

This virtue of poverty, which Albert esteemed so highly and practiced so assiduously, he sought to cultivate throughout the order by the regulations, quoted earlier, which he made when provincial and by the summary example which he made by exhuming and burying in unconsecrated ground the body of a lay brother who had died possessed of some goods. Such conduct may seem unnecessarily harsh, but it must be remembered that relaxations in the matter of poverty and common life were even then

only too prevalent, and the saint must have foreseen that if left unchecked they would inevitably lead to a general relaxation of the whole order, as has always happened.

Obedience, the only explicit vow taken by Dominicans then as now, sums up and contains within itself the whole life of a religious. As a virtue, it is all-embracing, extending both to external deeds and internal desires. Therefore Albert speaks of it as "the door outside of which there is no merit," and elsewhere he remarks that "he who is truly obedient, does not dispose of a single one of his acts; he wishes nothing and refuses nothing."

Several times during his life the saint was removed from the jurisdiction of the order; or rather, having been so removed by his elevation to the episcopate, he might quite legitimately have continued to remain independent even after his resignation. Instead, so soon as the death of the pope freed him from the labors of Legate of the Cross, he wrote to the Master, placing himself under obedience and for the rest of his life he went wherever his superiors called him.

The vow and virtue dearest to his heart, however, would seem to have been that of chastity, in praise of which some of his loveliest lines were written. Like another St. John, for whom he had a special predilection, he was conspicuous for his purity -- a purity which was not that of ice but of a burning shining fire -- and which merited for him the reward of the clean heart which is to see God, and to be endowed with special light and wisdom regarding the things of God. He wrote, The virgin thinks of the things of God, so that she may be pure in soul and body. Thus she become the dwelling-place of eternal wisdom. Wisdom, it is written, does not dwell in a perverse soul."

In another place he wrote, "the sight is obscured by three things: mud, smoke, and darkness. By purity the soul is preserved from the mud of sin; the will from the smoke of concupiscence; and the reason from the darkness which created things produce." And again on the same theme: "A soul which has never yielded to carnal delights possesses for that very reason an intellect which is purer and better disposed to receive lights from on high."

It is also interesting to note, in view of the teaching of many modern spiritual writers on the fruitfulness of chastity, that this idea was familiar and dear to St. Albert to whom "the preaching of the Gospel is the word of chastity," and who regarded purity of soul and body as the basis of the active apostolate as well of the contemplation of divine Truth.

Two other virtues which are essential to the religious and Dominican life were also prominent in that of the saint: penance and silence. That his own life was one of severe penance is certain, even though few details have come down to us. Rudolph says that from the time he entered the Order of Preachers he strove to overcome the assaults of the evil one by a long martyrdom, walking the narrow path of justice through observance of the regular life and mortifying the flesh in an ever increasing degree. We know that after his days of study and labor, he spent much of the night in prayer; that he journeyed always on foot, begging his bread from door to door even when provincial, and that the austerity which he demanded from others was always considerably less than that which he practiced himself.

"A love of corporal penance is very useful," he wrote, "for by it the soul becomes strong for spiritual things." And elsewhere: "knowledge of divine things is one of the fruits of mortification." Yet on this point the virtue of discretion and the gift of counsel which were so characteristic of him are shown very forcibly. "Penance must, however, be pursued with discretion," he continues. One must at one and the same time curb sensuality, take account of the weakness of the flesh, and distinguish between the just demands of nature and her pretentious exactions. In the first case we must conquer, in the second

be patient, and in the third keep a just balance so as to avoid killing the body while keeping it subject to the spirit. "To arrive at such a degree of discernment is the height of astuteness and penetration."

He arrived himself at such heights of discretion. One can imagine that at times he would have had to use it to temper the excessive zeal of his spiritual daughters and sisters of whose heroic virtues and mortifications we read in the *Chronicles* of Unterlinden.

Of silence he wrote: "Without silence and solitude there can be no true spirit of mortification." And again: "Silence recollects the heart, revives consciences, and disposes us for visits of divine grace. He who does not know how to deep silence is easily vanquished by the enemy."

Allied to this interior and exterior mortification are the virtue of patience and the gift of fortitude which enable the souls to conduct itself in a fitting manner in the midst of the tribulations and trials which God sends or allows. We are not told that Albert endured any very great personal trials and contradictions, although many of these must have come his way during his long life. But his tender and compassionate heart must have suffered much from the sufferings of others: the persecutions endured by St. Thomas, for example, and the terrible laxity and immorality which was rampant among many of the faithful, especially the clergy. Blessed Humbert also speaks as though it were Albert who bore the brunt of the attack and sustained the order during the struggle with the University of Paris. If this were the case, it must inevitably entailed much suffering for him.

We can be certain, therefore, that the saint had ample opportunity to practice the virtue of patience, which he calls "a lily in the midst of thorns," because the thorns, like trials, far from injuring its beauty, only bring forth the fragrance of its perfume. He was only expressing the conviction of his own soul, proved by personal experience, when he wrote, "By tribulation the just man is made to enter into himself; he recognizes without difficulty that the fullness of his strength lies in the divine Will...."

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The Quality of the Saint



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

Autumn 1987 Vol. 39 Supplement

DOMINICANS are not only religious and contemplatives, they are apostles. just as in one sense contemplation is the end and purpose of their whole life, so in another sense the apostolate provides this goal and motive, since Dominicans contemplate so as to give to others the fruits of their contemplation. Thus love of souls is an outstanding virtue in every true Dominican, who must, as St. Albert says "consecrate oneself to the salvation of souls by holy meditation, fervent desires, tears, prayers, watchings, fasting, teaching, and finally by preaching." All these he did. He lived, prayed, worked for souls, and was ever at their disposal in the confessional as if he were the humblest curate. They came to him with all their troubles, and he helped and consoled them with his advice and sympathy. The souls of priests and religious, those who had the care of souls and of those on whose prayers the shepherds of souls depend, were his special concern, realizing as he did that if the chosen portion of the Lord's flock fell short of what it ought to be, little could be expected from the faithful in general. But while no branch of the apostolate was outside his scope, teaching and preaching were his special sphere.

All his life he remained a teacher wedded to the master's chair. (A chair said to be his, though probably of a later date, is still shown at Regensburg.) So many pupils flocked to his side that the legend grew up that in Paris no room was large enough to hold his class. His "chair" was then transferred to the open air in what was henceforward Place Maître Albert, which became corrupted into Place Maubert.

As bishop, provincial, and papal legate, he had to cease teaching for a while, but always he returned to his chair at the first opportunity, and it was there that the intimation of his approaching death was given to him. It is interesting to note too that he died not in his bed, but sitting in a chair. He taught by word and by the pen. Many of his books were for the use of or against the errors of the most learned scholars of his age; some were written at the request of his brethren in religion. And at least one, unfortunately now lost, a book in which the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the theological text-book of the schools, was condensed into a series of prayers, was compiled for the use of the ordinary, almost unlettered lay-folk, to whom he wished to make accessible the riches of the Church's dogmatic teaching. We do not hear that he ever wrote a children's book, but it would have been quite in keeping with what we know of his character to have done so!

If obedience sometimes called Albert away from his teacher's chair, it never separated him from the preacher's pulpit. In Paris, Cologne, at the Papal Court, as provincial, bishop, in season and out of season he preached the Word of God with such success that one biographer called him the greatest orator of his century. This was not the case, for others excelled him. But here as always his greatness was outstanding; it can be appreciated even today because some of his sermons have come down to us just as they were delivered. Père Danzas has said that they are perfect specimens of the homiletic art, and could very well be imitated by preachers of today. At the request of his brethren Albert wrote a treatise on the art of preaching, but this, too, has unfortunately been lost. Also by request he issued a volume of sermons in which the whole treasure of his experience and learning was made available to his fellow preachers, although in such a manner that the very learning seemed to be concealed, lest its

display should overwhelm the humble hearer for whom the sermons were intended. These sermons are all based on and filled with quotations from Holy Scripture, and it may be remarked that they assume in the uneducated laity a familiarity with the Bible which is seldom found today even in the most educated religious.

In his introduction St. Albert remarks that

From this source [i.e. his book of sermons, which are intended as specimens and a sort of compendium of subjects), ordered and based on Holy Scripture, a whole harvest of sermons could be produced, God willing. There could be found, now in one place, now in another, material for strengthening faith, directing souls in the Christian life, and nourishing their devotion.

However, having perhaps had experience of the temptation to which nervous and not too successful preachers often succumb, he adds a warning: "Me preachers must take what matter suits him (on each subject). He should limit himself to developing one or two points and leave the rest to another time."

He himself always divided such sermons into three parts. In the first he described clearly and concisely the incident which formed the subject of his sermon, emphasizing the aspects with which he intended to deal. This was the literal explanation of the passage chosen from sacred Scripture. In a sermon on "Dives, and Lazarus" which is regarded as a veritable gem, this consisted of a vivid description first of the rich man at his table and then of the beggar lying at his gate. In the second part he explained the allegorical and mystical interpretation of the passage. In the case quoted, this was a contrast between the misery of Lazarus in the present world and the reward of his virtue in the next, and the pleasure and luxury of Dives during life and its terrible punishment after death. The passage ended with a short yet forceful remark to the effect that if such was the punishment of a simple sin of gluttony and selfishness, what sort of fate awaited murderers, adulterers, blasphemers, thieves, and the like. The final section almost invariably consisted in a prayer that God would bestow on the soul the fruits which should result from these considerations.

It will be noted how great is the simplicity of such a type of sermon. Albert was the mortal enemy of the empty rhetorical displays which were so popular in some circles in his age (as in many others before and since). For him, as we have said, the preaching of the Word of God was allied to the virtue of chastity, and his sermons have in them something of the restraint, the austerity, and the limpid simplicity of that virtue. Moreover, he saw in the spoken word an image of the Incarnate Word, and so he wrote, "The Blessed Virgin Mary wrapped the Word of the Father in humble bands to teach us that the divine Word should be clothed by preachers in simple language rather than in rhetorical finery."

Above all, Albert realized that the word of the preacher was the Word of God, deriving its efficacy not from his merits or ability, but from the grace of God. And so he condemned the preacher who relied on his own power instead of regarding himself as God's instrument and mouthpiece, and who sought his own glory instead of the salvation of souls by making his sermons impressive and ostentatious instead of simple and direct. The Word of salvation, the divine seed," he wrote, "participates in the nature of its origin. It contains within itself a fruitfulness, a divine energy; its effect is to bring forth, when sown in souls, something that is divine." And again:

The seed is not destined to reproduce its own image, still less that of the sower, but the image of the plant that bore it. To preach in a human fashion is to wish an abominable thing, that it should reproduce itself, or else that the sower should as it were multiply himself in the esteem of men, which is what St. Paul calls to preach oneself.

But the *Sermones de Tempore* and *de Sanctis*, in which the saint brings himself down to the level of the littlest of the flock and as it were places a veil over the glory of his learning are not the only examples

which have come down to us. The thirty-two sermons on the Holy Eucharist, which enjoyed a very wide circulation and were for a long time attributed to St. Thomas, show at his best the doctor, the exegete, the apostle, and the mystic. The subject was very dear to his heart in this volume, meant like the others for the use of preachers, he has set down a treasure of dogmatic and mystical expression which has never been surpassed.

He regards the purpose of the Holy Eucharist as threefold: to recall the divine benefits and so counteract the forgetfulness of God which is one of the effects of original sin; to establish the sacrifice of the New law, and so offer to God a worship which counteracts the attack on his Kingdom made by sin; and to act as a healing food and so counteract the death which sin brought into the world. Each sermon is based on these three aspects, applied in different ways to the different material which God has designed to reveal to me."

In a different way, the commentary on St. John's Gospel attains to as great or even greater heights. This was written from the conferences delivered before the Papal Court at Agnani during and after the defense of the order against its Parisian enemies. It is more than likely that these conferences, which were delivered, to quote a biographer, "in wonder and hushed silence by all," did much to convince the pope of the justice of the Dominican cause. Albert had a special attraction towards the Beloved Disciple whom he resembled in so many ways, and it is in this commentary that the beauty and greatness of his soul shine forth in all their splendor in a way that they never do elsewhere. He had no need to bring himself down to the level of his audience. He was free to speak without restraint and so, valuable as is this book because of the light it throws on Albert the Preacher, it is even more precious because it brings so clearly before our eyes Albert the Saint.

The preceding pages may have given at least some impression of the greatness of Albert's intellect, but they could have done little more than suggest the even more striking greatness of his heart. God is all heart a modern writer has said, for "God is Love," and a saint is one who shares in and reflects something of that infinite abyss of divine charity. Knowledge precedes love, and knowledge should always breathe forth love as it does within the Trinity. But ever since pride wrecked the mighty intellect of Lucifer, the greatest human minds have not always been the greater lovers.

St. John, who learned the divine secrets on the breast of the Incarnate Word, learned how to combine the greatest heights of knowledge and love, the flight of the eagle with the gentle affection of the dove, contemplation with a burning charity. It is in his commentary on St. John's Gospel that Albert demonstrates most clearly that he too had learned this lesson of divine love. His most sublime passages are those in which he treats of love -- God's love towards the world, and the union of love between human beings and God, with its repercussions on the relation among human beings. He also shows how deeply he had entered into the human heart of God Incarnate, and incidentally lets it be seen to what extent his own heart was an image of that divine one. When commenting on the raising of Lazarus he remarks, "It is a true effect of friendship for one to make the evils suffered by a friend one's own." This brings to mind the way in which the saint made his own the attacks which were directed against his beloved friend, Thomas Aquinas. "As he called him by the name of friend," Albert continues, "he showed his willingness to come to his aid, because it pertains to a friend to assist him whom he loves, since they have but one common desire."

Once again, Thomas and Albert's defense of him come to mind, and also the touching story of how Albert, when probably nearly eighty, nursed back to health another beloved pupil, Ulrich von Strassburg, then prior provincial, who had come to Cologne to visit his old master. This was in 1273, and it happened when Rudolph of Hapsburg, lately elected Emperor, and whose cause Albert was soon

to plead at the Council of Lyons, was also in the city. He must have had much business to discuss with his advocate, yet Albert found time to act as infirmarian!

When speaking of our Lord's tears over the grave of Lazarus, the saint remarks: "He allowed this sadness so as to consecrate in his person the sentiment of affection which we bear towards our friends." We have seen how Albert's affection towards Thomas caused him to burst into tears whenever the name of his dead pupil was mentioned.

Devotion towards the human person of the Incarnate Word naturally included a tender piety toward him present under the eucharistic species. This devotion, present in Albert from his earliest years, seems to have burned ever more fiercely as his life drew towards its close. This is not surprising, since St. Dominic has handed down devotion to the mass as one of his greatest legacies to his children. We are not told that St. Albert was rapt in ecstasy during the Holy Sacrifice, as St. Thomas was so often, but we do know that his fervor and recollection moved all who saw him. Rudolph of Nymegen says that at night, by prayer and contemplation, he offered himself in sacrifice on the altar of his heart, while by day, with the greatest fervor, he offered the sacred mysteries on the visible altar.

This devotion was expressed, as we have already said, in his writings and sermons, which are among the most sublime both of his own works and of any written on the subject. But it was an affair not of the mind alone but also of the heart. As the fourteenth century Dominican chronicler Bernard Gui says, "Towards the end of his life he wrote a book on the Sacrifice of the Altar in which he clearly reveals the purity of his faith in God, the fervor of his devotion towards the most sacred mystery of the divine Incarnation, and his excellent knowledge of the divine Scriptures." Elsewhere he writes, "He reveals the purity of his faith, the liveliness of his hope, and the fire of his charity."

Albert wrote an office for Corpus Christi, never much used, as well as many prayers to the Eucharistic Redeemer, of which the best-known runs as follows:

Hail, Savior of the world, the Father's Word -- true victim, living flesh, wholly God, truly man. Ingrafted in you, may we be worthily offered in your Majesty's divine temple. Brought near to the Body at the Father's right hand, may we one day share your eternity, have fellowship in your bliss, and be incarnate in your Incarnation, for yours is all honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen! [\(1\)](#)

This is typical of that form of prayer which Albert practiced, based on the contemplation of revealed truth. It was with prayers such as this that he concluded his sermons, enabling the people to exercise their devotion while acquiring a knowledge of the dogmas of their faith.

Albert, the *Praedicator Crucis*, had also a great devotion not only to the Passion of our Savior but also to all relics and reminders of the Passion. When his body was exhumed, a cross was found strung on a ribbon around his neck, and of his devotion in life Peter of Prussia wrote:

We have shown that he was a lover of the Cross of Christ: and out of special devotion towards the veneration of the Cross he suspended a large crucifix high up between the choir and the church in the church of the brethren at Cologne, so that it could be adored by all; in which, so as to increase devotion to that particular image, he himself placed relics of the saints and consecrated them when he was bishop.

King St. Louis IX, the great Crusader, was Albert's intimate friend and gave to him, perhaps during the general chapter held at Paris in 1256, a particle of the true Cross and a thorn from the Crown of Thorns, which in 1271 Albert presented to the Dominican convent in Cologne. Peter of Prussia relates

that at the saint's prayer the authenticity of this relic was proved when he threw it into the fire and it immediately came out unharmed.

Albert appears to have been a pioneer of devotion to St. Joseph, in whose honor he wrote an office, while he showed his filial affection for his spiritual father, St. Dominic, by introducing his feast into the diocese of Regensburg when he was bishop.

Something of Albert's devotion to the Blessed Virgin has already been noted. She was the continued object of his contemplation and his most tender love. So well known was this that he was called "her votary and bedesman," and she "the Lady of his heart." He called her affectionately *Maria Auxiliaris Nostra*, and to her he attributed all his learning and the success of his work.

According to tradition he was granted at least two visions of Mary -- the first when she called him to "her order," the second when she appeared to encourage him when he was assailed with doubts about his vocation. She prophesied to him the nature and success of his work and also his final collapse which would be a portent of his approaching death. He wrote more about her than did any other scholastic doctor, and all his treatises combine solid doctrine with the most tender piety. Apparently in her honor he also composed many hymns, which unfortunately have not come down to us. Rudolph of Nymegen writes:

So great was his love for Mary that he could never cease from praising her. Nay even more; he added to each one of his books something about the Lady of his heart, or ended his studies with a hymn in her honor. He composed many Marian sequences, which are distinguished for their mystical sense and their harmony, and he himself used to sing them with devotion and enthusiasm in the convent garden or in other places. Sometimes his sighs and tears choked his voice, showing the ardor of his love, and the depth of his piety.

Peter of Prussia adds the detail that whenever he mentioned Mary's name he always added some honorable title, as "the beautiful," "the pure," "the most blessed," or "the incomparable Mother of the Creator." The same biographer also remarks that, because the saint received his knowledge from Mary, he seemed to consider that he owed her a special debt of gratitude. This he repaid not only by praising her on every possible occasion, but also by striving to imitate her humility, her Purity, her kindness, and her charity; to honor them with the tribute Of his Salutations and worship, and to lead and exhort others to do likewise. The book *De Laudibus Mariae*, for long attributed to St. Albert, is not his work, but her praises are found in almost every one of his writings. Of his devotion to her one person wrote, "No sacrifice counted beside the honor of entering her service."

In one of the many touching prayers which he addressed to Mary, Albert shows the confidence which he placed in the intercession of this heavenly Mother.

O holy Mary, light of heaven and earth as your name signifies, of this earth which you have enlightened with the Mysteries of your Son, the divine Word; you who have illumined the splendor of the angels themselves, obtain for me an enlightened intelligence, true ideas, certain knowledge, a firm faith, with a speech which corresponds to it and brings grace to my hearers, a speech which will conduce to the strengthening of the faith, to the edification of Holy Church, and to the honor of the sacred name of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. May this speech prove, O divine Mary, that you never cease to overwhelm with the treasures of your mercy a sinner so unworthy as I, and to manifest by my mouth the prodigies of your all-powerful intercession.

Elsewhere he describes in the following terms the happy results of her maternal protection:

The shadow of her virginity [will act as a protection] against the seductions of the senses; the shadow of her humility against the breath of vainglory and the buffets of pride; the shadow of her prayer against the diabolical allurements of temptation.

Of all the "Friars of Mary," few if any have belonged more completely and wholly to her than did Albert of Cologne. And yet she was not the end, but only the way and the door, "the Grace of the way and of Truth"; not the life, but "the hope of Life"; not the Word, but the Mother of the Word; not the Wisdom which he sought and loved, but the Seat of Wisdom. This last title is perhaps that which best expresses all that Mary meant to Albert.

He addressed her in one of his hymns as "the Mother of Mercy and the noble resting-place of the whole Trinity," and this embraces both her relations with men and with God. To Albert the title of Mother of Mercy signified every aspect of what we now call her universal mediation. And of all the graces which she brings to human creatures, Wisdom is perhaps the greatest, and he may well have prayed with Solomon: "Give me Wisdom ... for she knows and understands all things, and shall lead me soberly in all my works, and shall preserve me by her power," thinking both of the gift of wisdom and of her who is the Seat of eternal Wisdom, Mother of the Word Incarnate. In words which the Church applies to our Blessed Lady, Wisdom declares: "They that eat me shall yet hunger and they that drink me shall yet thirst. He that hearkens to me shall not be confounded: and they that work by me shall not sin. They that explain me shall have life everlasting." It is not unreasonable to attribute to his devotion to and honor of the Seat of Wisdom that gift of wisdom which was the most outstanding feature of St. Albert's spirituality.

"The gift of wisdom," as St. Thomas declares (ST, I-II, Q.45, A.4), "enables us to judge aright of divine things, or of other things according to divine rules, by reason of a certain connaturality or union with divine things, which is the effect of charity." Charity is the foundation of wisdom, as of all the other gifts which grow in proportion to it, that charity whereby man loves God and becomes one spirit with him, which is the created participation of love whereby God loves himself and all creatures. For "God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16). Charity, says St. Albert, "has attached man and God to the same yoke." But love must give, for love is a gift, the fruit of the mutual self-giving of Father and Son and their Gift to each other in the person of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of themselves to the world. *Amor ex amore, te amorem misit, sibi membra sua junxit* -- so does an ancient sequence admirably express that gift of divine love to the world.

"Love must bestow itself as a gift," wrote Albert; "if it ceases to be a gift, it ceases to be love." This applies to created love as well as to its uncreated Source and Exemplar, which is the inner life of the adorable Trinity.

By love we give ourselves to God who has first loved us, i.e. given himself to us. When he was quite a young religious, Albert was described as *tutto dedito et assorto in Deo* ("completely surrendered to and lost in God") -- an apt summary of his whole spiritual life. He gave himself by prayer, by penance, by study, surrendering himself completely to the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (It is interesting to note that the theology of the Procession of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity is one of the finest chapters of Albert's dogmatics, while his explanation of the working of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was taken up and expanded by St. Thomas, thus becoming the classical teaching of the order and Thomistic School.) Being thus wholly given to God, he was a pliable instrument in God's hands and was ready to receive and to pass on to others light, truth, and love from above. By writing, teaching, preaching, in the confessional, in all his intercourse with men, he was to them like a sacrament of divine love bringing God to them - the perfect example of the Dominican ideal -- *Contemplare, contemplata aliis tradere*.

Contemplation, as we have said, was the beginning of all his activity, but it was also the end. God is not to be outdone in generosity. To the soul which generously gives itself wholly to him, God gives himself wholly in return in that union which is the fruit of the gift of wisdom, described by St. Albert as "the first truth relished as the Supreme Love."

Albert sought the truth out of love, and because, as St. Thomas says (ST, II-II, Q.45, A.6 *ad* 2), "Uncreated Wisdom first of all unites itself to us by the gift of charity, and consequently reveals to us the mysteries of knowledge which is infused wisdom," he found Wisdom who became the ruler of his life. Apropos of this gift he had written, "Certain men receive this gift in a more eminent degree, either in what concerns the contemplation of divine things and for the purpose of enabling such men to dispense their mysteries, or else in the direction of human affairs conformable to the divine law, so as to make them capable not only of conduction themselves according to these laws, but also of applying them to the conduct of others."

He possessed the gift in both its aspects, but pre-eminently in the first. By the gift of knowledge he saw the Creator in all the natural truths which he studied. By understanding he penetrated deeply into the revealed truths of faith. By wisdom he ascended on high, seeing all things as it were through the eyes of God in the light of truth and judging everything under the influence of that vision. "He excelled in purity of life, in wisdom and in science," wrote another saint, Peter Canisius.

Wisdom enables a person to find unity in the midst of multiplicity, to see and judge and do all in God. In the midst of the multifarious activities of his long life Albert always kept before his eyes "the one thing necessary," and never allowed accidental and transitory events to turn him from what he knew to be his true vocation. St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, ascribes to the gift of wisdom the seventh beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Since in Albert's life the office of peacemaker was frequently and successfully performed, it is but natural to attribute this to the wisdom which was his. We have already noted the sense of filial love which so dominated the saint's last years, and although this pertains to the gifts of piety and fear it is also connected with wisdom, for, as St. Thomas continues: "men are called children of God in so far as they participate in the likeness of the only begotten and natural Son of God; according to Romans 7:29, 'whom he foreknew to be made conformable to the image of his Son,' who is Wisdom Begotten. Hence by participating in the gift of wisdom, man attains to the sonship of God."

Finally, wisdom implies a certain union or connaturality with divine things and therefore with God their source, accompanied by a spiritual sweetness. This sweetness Albert most certainly enjoyed. His definitions of wisdom and theology already quoted are proof of this. So too is every page of his more mystical and spiritual writings, which possess an unction and a savor which can only come from one who has obeyed the injunction of the Psalmist "to taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

He defines contemplation as "an application of all the affective and intellectual faculties of man for the purpose of knowing divine things, with sweetness of the heart and ravishment of the mind." And when he says elsewhere that by contemplation man is at it were on the line of the horizon between time and eternity, we know that the sweetness of which he speaks belongs more to the next world than to this.

When Albert was dead men were so convinced of his sanctity that they could not bring themselves to sing a Requiem on his anniversary, but chose instead the Mass of eternal Wisdom. In drawing up the Office for his feast it would almost seem as if holy Mother Church has had this fact in mind: "Because you have asked for wisdom, behold I have done to you according to your works, and I have given you a wise and understanding heart, insomuch that there has been no one like you before, nor shall rise

after you." (St. Albert was hailed by some as even greater than Solomon.) So runs the "Little Chapter" for Vespers. The First Nocturn lessons well have been written to describe him:

He will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and he will pray in the sight of the Most High. He will open his mouth in prayer and will make supplication for his sins. For if it shall please the Lord he will fill him with the Spirit of Understanding, and he will pour forth the words of his Wisdom in showers, and in his prayer he will confess to the Lord, and he shall direct his counsel and his discipline, and in his secrets he shall meditate. He shall show forth the discipline he has learned and he shall glory in the Law of the Covenant of the Lord. Many shall praise his Wisdom and it shall never be forgotten: the memory of him shall not depart away, and his name shall be in request from generation unto generation. Nations shall declare his Wisdom, and the Church shall show forth his praise.

The antiphons for Lauds and Second Vespers may serve as a fitting conclusion to this study:

By the austerity of his life, the fervor of his prayer, his love of the brethren, and the brilliance of his doctrine Albert glorified the Lord....[\(SEE\)](#)

O Lord God of all knowledge, we praise and thank you with mouth and heart because you have raised up so great a doctor from among our fathers.

NOTES

1. In the *Ancren Riwle*, part 1, "Of Divine Service," occurs the following passage:

"In the Mass, when the Priest elevates God's Body, say these verses standing: 'Behold the Savior of the world; the Word of the Father; a true sacrifice; living flesh; entire Godhead; very Man.'"

Is this a proof of Dominican influence in the compiling of the *Riwle*? Or did St. Albert add to a well-known ejaculation? Or is the authorship of the prayer wrongly ascribed to him?

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Saint Albert the Great



**SPIRITUALITY
TODAY**

Autumn 1987 Vol. 39 Supplement

ALBERT died on 15th November 1280, and his "cultus" may be said to have begun immediately if it had not already done so even before his death. His funeral gave occasion for an imposing demonstration on the part of the crowds who attended the ceremony at which Siegfried von Westerburg, the Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Lower Rhine and the saint's intimate friend, officiated. The body, clothed in full pontificals, had lain in state in the church and was interred first of all before the high altar, close to the relic of the true Cross which he had presented to the church. Over the tomb was a simple stone slab bearing the words:

In the year of our Lord 1280, on the 15th day of November, died the Venerable Brother Albert, former Bishop of the Church of Ratisbon of the Order of Preachers and Master in Theology. May he rest in peace.

The tomb soon became the center of prayer and pilgrimage, and heavenly visions confirmed the instinct of the faithful who believed that Albert was already enjoying the happiness of the blessed. To Gottfried von Duisberg, his confessor, who was praying ardently for his happy repose, the saint appeared wearing his pontificals, his miter adorned with a wonderful brilliance which filled the whole church, while he was bathed in a dazzling light. In answer to an inquiry as to his state, he replied, I am very happy. The sense of man cannot conceive the splendor with which the mercy of the Lord has deigned to surround me. What you see here can only give you a very faint idea of it. The rays from the top of the miter which shine on my brow signify the ineffable glory which I possess. The precious stones which cover my garments represent the works which with the help of God I have published on Holy Scripture, to defend the Faith and to teach divine Wisdom. And because during life I saved many sinners from the darkness of ignorance and led them to the light of Truth, God has delivered many souls from Purgatory at my prayer.

Then he disappeared.

The writer of *Année Dominicaine* quotes the following story from the lives of the Brethren, and it is also reported by Rudolph of Nymegen (III, C. 5):

A Cistercian abbess who owed much to Albert prayed frequently for his soul. One morning, when she was feeling rather drowsy in choir, she saw the saint before the altar preparing to address the people. He was standing but his feet did not touch the ground. "Mercy me," she cried, "Brother Albert will fall. He has no foothold." Someone near her replied, "Brother Albert has nothing to fear: he can never fall now." Thus reassured she listened to the sermon. The saint began thus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..." And he continued teaching the Gospel until he came to the words, "We have seen him...full of grace and truth." Whereupon he added, "These are the marvels which I now contemplate with my own eyes." Then he disappeared. [\(1\)](#)

The vision of St. Mechtilde has already been recorded, and another was granted to Theodoric the Lector at Triers. The faithful soon began to report miracles due to the saint's intercession, and, when on the completion of the church the body was exhumed and removed to a more honorable resting-place, these increased in number. On this occasion the remains were found incorrupt and exhaling a sweet

odor, but the body had turned face downwards in the posture which Albert frequently assumed at prayer.

Sometime before 1297 the archbishop presented to the church a window in which the saint appeared clothed in full pontificals with the donor kneeling at his feet. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, and possibly before, the title of Saint was already accorded to him, and he frequently appears in the art of the time with the halo of the Saint instead of the rays of the Beatus. About 1352 Thomas of Modena painted the portraits of a number of famous and saintly Dominicans. Most impressive of all is Albert, who appears as saint and doctor, while the inscription celebrates him as blessed, a most famous writer, a professor, and wonder-worker. He also appears in several of Blessed Angelico's paintings -- that done for the predella of the high altar of San Domenico in Fiesole, which is now in London, the more famous fresco below the great Crucifixion in St. Mark's, Florence; and "The School of St. Albert," in which he appears surrounded by his pupils.

Luis of Valladolid declares that Albert's was one of the three names submitted to Pope John XXII when he expressed the wish to canonize one of the Order of Preachers, the other two being Thomas Aquinas and Raymund of Pennafort. Thomas was chosen and canonized in July 1323. Why did Albert have to wait another six centuries before the supreme honors were accorded to him too? The traditional reticence of the Order of Preachers seems to have been largely responsible, coupled with unfavorable political circumstances which seemed to prevail whenever the cause was progressing, so that one cannot but see as the ultimate reason the divine dispensation which reserved Albert's glorification for the age which would most need the inspiration of his example.

Sometime in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century the lower part of the house in which Albert was born was converted into a chapel in which a specially appointed priest regularly conducted the liturgical services. This chapel was there in 1414 and may have been erected during the pontificate of John XXII when there was question of the saint's canonization. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the premises above the chapel were being used by a corn-merchant. It was the city of Cologne, however, which not unnaturally was the center of the cult, which was especially propagated by the students at the Rhenish University.

In 1480 their devotion was rewarded by the remarkable cure of a Dominican, attributed to St. Albert's intercession. This event, together with the canonization of St. Bonaventure by Sixtus IV in 1482, gave fresh impetus to the cause, and on 11th January 1483 the saint's relics were transferred to a more magnificent tomb. The body was found clothed in full pontificals with miter and ring, and the right hand held the crosier. The ribbon to which was attached the relic of the true Cross and other relics was still around the neck. Scarcely any traces of corruption were visible in either the body or the clothing. The Master of the Order, who presided at the ceremony by direct authority of the pope, removed the right arm, which he took to the Holy Father, who gave it to the Dominicans of Bologna.

The following year, 1484, Innocent VIII gave permission to the Priors of Cologne and Regensburg to erect altars in Albert's honor, and to observe his feast with mass and office. Such authorization was a *Confirmatio Cultus* equivalent to beatification, and one wonders why the order and Albert's clients did not bring the cause to its conclusion, especially as many wonderful cures were wrought at the new tomb.

Soon political circumstances were unfavorable, for Lauingen was under Protestant rule from 1542 to 1616, while on two occasions Cologne was on the verge of giving up the faith, and the whole of Germany was in a state of religious and social turmoil in consequence of the Reformation. But in 1601

the general chapter resolved to follow up the cause, and in 1616 Albert IV, Bishop of Regensburg, petitioned the Holy See for leave to introduce his namesake's feast into his cathedral.

Apparently owing to the opposition of St. Robert Bellarmine and his influence over Paul V, the Sacred Congregation of Rites refused permission on technical grounds. But it was granted *viva voce* by Gregory XV in 1622, while Urban VIII in 1631 gave leave for the celebration of the feast in the city of Lauingen, and in 1635, at the insistence of the emperor, extended the same privilege to all the Dominicans of Germany.

In 1664 Alexander VII granted this leave to the Dominicans in the province of Constance, and in 1570 Clement X authorized the celebration of the feast in perpetuity throughout the whole Order of Preachers. A collected edition of the saint's works which was necessary before his cult could be formally approved by the Church had been printed in 1651 by Peter Jammy, and the canonization seemed to be within sight.

Once again, however, the order allowed the cause to lapse, and although Albert's feast was celebrated, no further steps were taken to obtain for him the Church's supreme honors. Then came the revolutionary wars and the invasion of Germany by the French. On 17th June 1799 the Dominicans of Cologne were given two hours in which to evacuate their convent. In 1804 all religious houses on the left bank of the Rhine were closed. The destruction of the old Dominican church in Cologne followed and with it the saint's magnificent tomb. Fortunately the prior and the brethren had time to rescue the relics, which were given shelter in the church of St. Andrew, where they were placed in a simple shrine beside the altar on the north side of the choir.

Little was done to propagate the cult in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century, but in 1837 Charles Albert of Sardinia built a church in Albert's honor in the Castle Park at Racconige and commissioned a life of the saint which appeared in 1847. Then Germany began to move again. From 1856 onwards the Archdiocese of Cologne celebrated the saint's feast annually. In 1857 Sighart's excellent Life appeared. In 1859 a new altar to the saint in the church of St. Andrew was dedicated, and on 15th November of the same year the relics were inspected and placed in a beautiful reliquary prepared for them above the altar. There they still rest, (2) being joined in 1860 by relics of Albert's spiritual father and spiritual son -- Saints Dominic and Thomas

Aquinas. Meanwhile scientists, many of them non-Catholics, were beginning to appreciate the saint's true place among their ranks, and in 1867 a critical edition of his work *De Vegetabilibus* appeared

At the First Vatican Council in 1870, the German bishops met and prepared a petition to lay before the Holy Father, praying that Albert might be declared a doctor of the Church. They were told that this could not be done until he had been canonized. Therefore at their Conference at Fulda in 1872 they signed a petition that his cause might be introduced. Much correspondence ensued, and it seems to have been considered that the Dominican Postulator General was the one who should pursue the matter. Political conditions in Italy and Germany once again caused delay, but the six hundredth anniversary of the saint's death in 1880 saw many demonstrations in his honor, societies placed under his protection, and a petition for him to be canonized and declared a doctor of the Church presented by the Germany colony in Rome. From 1890 to 1899 a new edition of Albert's works was published.

Then at last the Dominican Order began to take an interest in the cause of its illustrious son, not yet officially, but in the persons of individual Dominicans, such as Père von Lœe, whose researches will be the basis of every future biography; Cardinal Frühwirth, who had been Master from 1891 to 1904; and later Fr. Walz, Archivist of the Order. In 1927 the Council of the German Catholic Academic

Association and the bishops in conference at Fulda and Freising submitted a petition for canonization to the Pope. An Albert Society was formed in Germany, and the German provincial called for the prayers of the order for the success of the cause. In 1928 a new edition of Rudolph of Nymegen's *Legenda beati Albertis Magni* was brought out.

At last in 1930 the Postulator General of the order made his appearance in the cause. The Congregation of Rites began its inquiries, and on 22nd June 1931 declared in favor of the equipollent canonization of Albert to be coupled with his admission to the ranks of the Doctors of the Church. On 16 December 1931 Pope Pius XI issued the decretal . letter *In thesauris Sapientiae*, which brought the affair to a happy conclusion. Pope Pius XII, who as a tertiary of the order took St. Albert; for his Patron, added still further to his glory by declaring him Patron of all the Natural Sciences on 16 December 1941, as the first truly global war spread into the eastern hemisphere. It would end there four and a half years later with the explosion of the most destructive weapon ever devised by science and technology.

The world thinks of peace as the cessation of physical strife, so that it can talk of an "armed peace," although St. Augustine told it over a thousand years ago that "peace is the tranquillity of order." It is that repose -- an image and foretaste of the eternal repose which is ultimately God himself ("He is Very Rest," says Julian of Norwich) -- which results when a thing is duly ordered to, and has in some measure attained, the end for which it was made. Man and woman are made for God. "Fecisti nos *ad te Domine*, et irrequietum est cor nostrum donec requiescit in te -- You have made us *ordered, tending towards you*, and our heart knows no repose until it repose in you" (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. X). Peace between nations is only possible when individuals are at peace with each other, because they are first of all at peace within themselves and with their God. We have no room to condemn warmongers and war criminals, so long as we are guilty of ambition, greed, selfishness, cruelty, and uncharitableness of every kind in our own private lives. How can there be order between states when there is such disorder in the lives of the individuals who compose them and who direct their destinies?

Albert is a model to a peace-hungry world not so much because "in his lifetime he labored strenuously for peace between princes and peoples and individual men" (Pius XI), but because his whole life exhibits that order which must be the basis of any true peace. For he directed the numerous and varied activities of a long and crowded life to the "one thing necessary" -- the love and contemplation of divine truth, and proved by word and example, not only that every form of activity and knowledge can be pursued for the love of God, but that the most material things are only truly known and understood when seen in relation to divine things and as ordered to God.

Therefore St. Albert was given as particular patron to those who study the laws by which the universe is governed. He was great as a scientist, and as Pope Pius XII remarked, if his method and researches had been appreciated and followed by his successors, many of the glorious discoveries of our day might have been anticipated by several centuries. He was greater still because he saw so clearly that natural objects are only the lowest rung of the ladder that leads to God, and that their ultimate explanation is to be found not in science, but in theology. That is what modern science (popular science, at least) will not admit. Refusing to accept a position subordinate to theology and the supernatural, it turns against them, ignores or denies the existence of God, and "presuming upon its own all-sufficiency, leads to that deplorable state of materialism which is the cause of all those moral disorders and economic ills which have fallen as a bitter scourge on the people of the whole world" (Pius XI). Worse still, science has become the deciding factor in modern warfare, the greatest potential enemy of peace, for it is using its powers not for the glory of God and the welfare of the human race, but to bring all the horrors of war to civilian populations. Not only the future of peace, but the survival of our civilization depend on the use to which science will put the discoveries which still lie before it.

But although we can talk of "science" in the abstract, the ultimate responsibility rests with the men who study it. At times nothing short of heroism may be asked of them in refusing to prostitute their skill and learning to evil ends. In Albert, they have a heavenly intercessor who was probably no stranger to the temptations by which they are beset. (One of his prayers reads as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, hear the voice of our wretchedness in the desert of penitents who cry to you, lest we be led astray by deceptive words with which we are tempted about nobility of race, religiosity, and excessive searching after knowledge.")

Today more than ever scientists need courage and initiative in their efforts to fathom the secrets which nature still holds, and to adapt their discoveries to humane needs. That requires magnanimity, which was Albert's most characteristic quality. They also need the humility to enable them to see their studies in true perspective, and to admit the limitations of science -- and here again Albert is their model. Above all they need the spirit of religion, which leads them, as it led him, to see in all the things of nature the God who made and guides them, and to bow in humble adoration.

"May St. Albert, who in difficult times proved by his wonderful labors that science and faith can flourish in harmony, may he by his intercession with God inspire the minds and hearts of scientists to a peaceful and ordered use of the things of nature, whose divinely ordained laws they study and investigate!" (Pius XII). And may he help each one of us to seek and to find, as he sought and found, that wisdom which intimately links the soul with God and far excels every other good, and which a man attains in proportion as he imitates the life and deeds of our Savior, the Prince of Peace, "in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

NOTES

1. All this sounds quite probable. But unfortunately the lives of the Brethren were compiled between 1251 and 1259. Their editor, Gerard de Frachet, died in 1271, nine years before St. Albert. The anecdote simply speaks of Albert of Germany, whom the writer of *Année Dominicaine* has identified with the saint. Albert appears only twice in these legends, and as the narrator, not the subject, of stories. On each occasion he is referred to as "Albert Provincial of Germany."
2. At the outbreak of the late war they were removed to a place of safety, and so escaped destruction when the church was bombed. They have now been restored to their former position in the rebuilt church which in 1947 was handed over to the Dominican Order.

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