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Among his fifteen books are: Theology of Ministry; Thomas Aquinas, Theologian; an introduction to Karl Rahner, God in the World. And just published in 2012, Vast Universe. Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation.

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[November 1, 2012]

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Resources and Recent Publications

on

Albert the Great’s Theology

Thomas Franklin O’Meara, O.P.

[May 15, 2013]

Publications in recent years have suggested composing this survey of resources, books and articles, on the theology of Albert of Lauingen. Monographs, collections of essays, critical texts, and bibliographies have appeared and are continuing to appear. Jan Aertsen speaks of a strong interest in Albert beginning around 1980. “In this ‘Albert-Renaissance’ two motifs are at work. The first wants to present Albert’s own identity….One should not consider Albert only in relationship to Thomas or as someone standing in the shadow of his student….The second motif is to see him as Albertus teutonicus, the source of the German Dominican school.” ¹ The following essay

¹ Jan A. Aertsen “Albertus Magnus und die mittelalterliche Philosophie,” Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie 21 (1996): 111-
illustrates contemporary interest in Albert, even as it joins to this some past resources for his theology.

A. Albert of Lauingen

Albert was a Swabian scholar and a Dominican friar, a pioneer of the use of Aristotelian philosophy in Western Christian theology and a natural scientist. He was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, Ulrich of Strassburg, and perhaps of Meister Eckhart. Ulrich wrote of him: “My teacher…was an almost divine person in every science, so much so that he was seen as an astonishing wonder of our age.”

Centuries later, James Athanasius Weisheipl observed: “Not only was Albert the only man of the High Middle Ages to be called ‘the Great,’ but this title was used even before his death.”


Albert was born around 1200 in Lauingen near where the Danube has its source. In 1223, he entered the Dominicans at the University of Padua. In his thirties he was the director of studies in several priories of friars in German lands. Around the age of forty he was sent to Paris to attain a doctorate. In 1245 he became the first Master of German origin at one of the European universities (in 1258 he signed a document of the university at Paris as “frater Albertus Theutonicus“). In Paris where the texts of Aristotle and his Arab commentators were being studied enthusiastically, Albert became known for drawing students to their study. One of them was Thomas Aquinas. In 1248 Albert went to Cologne to start a school for the

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friars and others. “With Thomas Aquinas as his assistant, Albert formed a house of studies for his Order. It was the first school of higher studies in Germany and the precursor of the Cologne University. Ludger Honnefelder has edited a volume of essays on the emergence of universities in Europe and the role of Albert in their development. Toward the end of 1249 Albert began his enterprise

of paraphrasing and commenting on Aristotle’s works, “to make all the areas of philosophy intelligible to the Latins.” He was elected superior of the German province in 1254: its thirty-six priories reached from Strassburg on the Rhine to Rostock on the Baltic Sea. He subsequently attended general meetings of Dominicans in Milan, Paris, and Florence. In 1257 he resigned the provincialate and returned to Cologne to teach.

During those years he was engaged as a mediator – in Cologne and elsewhere -- in public disputes because not infrequently, bishop, mercantile class, and nobility found themselves at odds. The


7 Physica Liber I, tractatus 1, capitulum 1 Opera Omnia IV, 1 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1987) 48-49.

particularly intense social and political conflict involving Albert in 1271 has been described in detail. His prominence in resolving disputes attracted the attention of Pope Alexander IV who appointed him in 1260 bishop in Regensburg. After he had reformed the clergy and reorganized the finances, in less than two years, he resigned that ministry and returned to teaching in Würzburg and Cologne where he died in 1280.

Yves Congar wrote eight years ago: “Albert believed in the mind. He perceived a profound harmony between the loftiness of


divine life and the world of science and of finite human reasoning. This scholar, even as he argued for the autonomy of the sciences, had a special grasp of the reality of the unity of the universe. There exists one realm in which the facts of nature and the realities of grace are physically present.”

Albert’s research into the natural sciences should not distract one from appreciating the theological project


and goal of his thinking and of many of his writings. “Albert’s plan can be grasped as a monumental synthesis considering all things in light of the varied revelation of God, a revelation appearing through Scripture and incarnation but also through creation.” 12 Over the last fifteen years Henryk Anzulewicz has written articles on Albert to highlight the theological and unifying themes of Albert’s thought. He emphasizes the need to go beyond the past, limited view that Albert’s originality lies in philosophy and science, and to see anew how


theological principles and goals pervade his writings. “Insight into the thought-form of Albert the Great leads to the conclusion that his way of thinking characteristically treats the reality of being in a perspective both encompassing and unified. That perspective moves from its beginnings through a process of self-realization under the conditions of contingency to its ultimate goal. Basically it reflects his underlying idea of life.” 13 Human life, temporality, and all the causalities within

creation contribute to this kind of structure, one seeking to explain the varied dimensions of life and time. Plato is present as well as Aristotle. In Albert’s writings “encompassing principles fashion a theological structure” as “a unified and complete system offering a total explanation of all the reality of being.” Breadth marks Albert’s thought in various ways. “Perhaps the medieval conception of a universal complex of various sciences, a university, existing in a unity


inclusive of all, found its broadest expression in the structure of the teaching of that universal teacher.”  

B. Albert’s Writings

Mention should be made first of editions of Albert’s works. A collection of Albert’s writings was edited and published in thirty-eight volumes by Auguste Borgnet in the nineteenth century. That Latin text was based somewhat on an earlier edition in twenty-one volumes by Pierre Jammy, *B. Alberti Magnis, Ratisb. Ep., O.P., Opera*. The Albertus-Magnus-Institut, founded in 1931 by the Archdiocese of Cologne with its present location in Bonn, has been editing for some years a critical text of Albert’s writings: Alberti Magni, *Opera Omnia* (Editio Coloniensis). For that series twenty-eight volumes out of a planned forty-one are listed as having already appeared, while six are


17 (Paris: Vivès, 1890-1897). Bruno Tremblay (Department of Philosophy, St. Jerome’s University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada) has place on line the entire Borgnet Edition; see the website,”Alberti Magni e-corpus.” The Borgnet edition sometimes corrects Albert’s citations.

18 (Lyons: Prost, 1651).
in proximate preparation. The institute’s website describes its library, lectures, publications, and projects.¹⁹

C. Four Recent Publications

Four publications have stimulated this survey: Irven M. Resnick & Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr., *Albert the Great: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography (1900 – 2000)*; ²⁰ Walter Senner, ed., *Albertus Magnus. Zu Gedenken nach 800 Jahre: Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven*; ²¹ from the Albertus-Magnus-Institut in Bonn there are


²⁰ (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

two series -- *Lectio Albertina*\(^22\) and *Subsidia Albertina*; finally there is a special issue of *Wort und Antwort*.\(^23\)

*Albert the Great: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography (1900 – 2000)* by Resnick and Kitchell is a volume of over four hundred pages. The editors point out that bibliographical resources on Albert are few and often inaccessible in North America. This bibliography includes 2576 entries, and there is an index of names and subjects occupying thirty pages. “The print version of this bibliography should appeal to scholars who enjoy the leisure necessary to examine carefully the extensive literature on Albert.”\(^24\) Books and articles are gathered into nineteen sections, ranging from “Albert’s Life and Works” and “Iconography and Albert in Art” to “Theology – General” and “Albertism.” Some individual articles and books are summarized.

Recalling bibliographies from the past, there have been partial bibliographies like the one assembled in 1931 by Yves Congar for the

\(^{22}\) (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999 - 2006).


\(^{24}\) Resnick, Kitchell, “Introduction,” xii.
issue of the *Revue Thomiste* celebrating the canonization of Albert\textsuperscript{25} or like those in volumes celebrating in 1980 the seven hundredth anniversary of his death like Gerbert Meyer and Albert Zimmerman, eds. *Albertus Magnus, Doctor Universalis*, 1280/1980,\textsuperscript{26} and an issue of *The Thomist*.\textsuperscript{27} Those bibliographies were followed by G. Krieger’s survey of literature from 1973 to 1988.\textsuperscript{28} There is also an

\textsuperscript{25}Congar, “Essai de Bibliographie Albertinienne,” *Revue Thomiste* 31 (1931): 422-68.


Walter Senner’s volume holds seven hundred pages of essays. Philosophical studies treat old and new topics like the world of nature or the relationship of Albert to Arab philosophy, while in the last two sections there are essays on the Trinity, biblical hermeneutics, papal primacy, predestination, prayer and mysticism, and women’s religious movements. This volume is a contemporary witness to Albert’s breadth of interests and to the breadth of contemporary research.  


Irven M. Resnick has expanded his research further through the volume of essays: *A Companion to Albert the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

The series *Lectio Albertina* from the Albertus-Magnus-Institut in Bonn is a series of scholarly monographs, now numbering twelve. One of them by Rudolf Schieffer on “Mendicancy and Theology in Conflict with Episcopacy” explores the papal appointment of Albert to the bishopric of Regensburg, his activities there, and his decision to resign after less than two years. The choice by the pope of Albert as bishop was caused by financial and ecclesiastical problems in the diocese of Regensburg (his appointment is an early example of papal

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*Mittelalter* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005) where studies on Aristotle’s philosophy and its entrance into the West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries lead to essays on Albert himself. Ingrid Craemer-Ruegenberg’s *Albertus Magnus* has been issued in a revised edition by Henryk Anzulewicz (Leipzig: St. Benno, 2005); it has sections on Albert’s influence and bibliographies.

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appointment of bishops in Germany). In less than two years Albert saw that the diocese would be capable of selecting a moral and competent successor, and he returned to his work as teacher and writer, remaining, of course, a bishop. Schieffer's documentary study of Albert's time as bishop critiques legends about Albert written down after the end of the fourteenth century. The Bonn Institut has begun a second series has begun a second series, Subsidia Albertina, from which a volume of essays presenting the progress in research on Albert in the past two decades has appeared: Via Alberti. Texte-Quellen-Interpretationen.  

A fourth resource is the special issue of Wort und Antwort with essays on Albert ranging from eschatology to art. Related to this is an issue of Listening on St. Albert the Great and Dominican Teaching. There are essays by M. Mulchahey on the Studium at

Cologne and early Dominican education; W. Senner on Albert and Meister Eckhart and T. J. White on Albert and modern views of Wisdom.  

D. Earlier Writings on Albert

For the English-speaking world an early source from the 1930s was Hieronymous Wilms, *Albert the Great. Saint and Doctor of the Church*, 34 and around the same time the journal *Blackfriars* published M.-D. Chenu, “The Revolutionary Intellectualism of St. Albert the Great.” 35 Volumes celebrated the canonization of Albert in 1931 (he had been beatified in 1622). For that event the *Revue Thomiste* issued a special number with historical essays by Angelus Walz and Pierre Mandonnet and theological essays like those on the gifts of the Holy Spirit by Benoit Lavaud and on predestination by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange. 36 Also *Divus Thomas* published a “St. Albertus-

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33 *Listening* 43: 3 (2008).

34 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1933).


Magnus-Festschrift” opening with a letter by Pius XI and a forward by Andreas Cardinal Frühwirth, O.P. That volume held studies on Albert and modern philosophy, political science, geology, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist. Earlier in 1928 Martin Grabmann had published a lengthy article of a hundred pages on Albert and his age.

E. Albert and Some Theological Topics.

The volumes by Senner and by Manfred Entrich hold studies on the theological and exegetical methods of Albert where Karl Cardinal Lehmann’s essay treats the synthesis of faith and knowing in Albert, and Mikolaj Olszewski’s looks at his theory of biblical

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37 Divus Thomas 9 (1931); 10 (1932).


39 Manfred Entrich, ed., Albertus Magnus. Sein Leben und seine Bedeutung (Graz: Styria, 1982) 111-130; the volume holds essays by Karl Meyer, Isnard Frank, and others.
interpretation.” 40 Lehmann also published in the Lectio Albertina a monograph treating Albert’s idea of theology, and Walter Senner offers there a lengthy survey of Albert’s major works in terms of the relationship of theology and philosophy and in terms of the affective and speculative directions in theology. 41 Albert distinguished science


Albert’s contribution to a post-modern age, for he spoke of sciences that would be discovered in the future and noted how questions on the boundaries of diverse disciplines were difficult.  

To peruse the bibliography of writings on Albert by Resnick and Kitchell is to notice that philosophical themes have been studied more frequently than religious ones, although recent years witness a marked increase in theological essays. Gilles Emery has written on Albert’s theology of the Trinity, while there is no lack of studies for a philosophy of God.  

In the area of Christology there were studies


Emery, La Trinité Créatrice. Trinité et la création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure (Paris: Vrin, 1995); Alain

Conforti on the grace of union. Two early works on grace are Herbert Doms, *Die Gnadenlehre des seligen Alberti Magni* and Josef Goergen, *Des hl. Albertus Magnus Lehre von der göttlichen Vorsehung und dem Fatum*.  


47 (Breslau: Müller und Seiffert, 1929); (Vechta: Albertus-Magnus-Verlag, 1932).
To continue surveying theological areas, sacrament is also a theme for studies on Albert. A monograph from the Bonn series treats transubstantiation in the Eucharist in light of Albert’s views. The essay concerns itself with the arrival of Aristotelian conceptuality and with metaphysical problems posed by the perdurance of the appearances in the sacrament. 48 Thomas McGonigle wrote on the medieval context of Albert’s sacramental theology where the Dominican seeks to reconcile theologies of the sacrament from Augustine, Peter Lombard, and Hugh of St. Victor, while David Wright presented Albert’s interpretation of the rites of the Mass according to historical, moral, and mystical meanings of the words and actions in contrast to allegorical interpretations like that of Lothar of Segni. 49


49 The articles by McGonigle and Wright are found in The Thomist 44 (1980): 560-83 and 584-96; see too Ludwig Hödl, “Der dogmatische
Franz-Josef Nocke’s book, after treating the idea of sacrament in general, turns to the two sacraments of penance and marriage. They are of particular interest because in the view of some medieval writers laypersons can administer them, a position that interests Albert. At the beginning of the twentieth century Georg Gromer composed a survey of medieval theologies on laypersons hearing a sacramental confession, and he placed the thinking of Albert as climactic among those affirming this activity, for he sketched a number of ways in which sins can be absolved through faith and love among the baptized and concluded that laypeople hearing confessions is a true sacrament. “With Albert the theory of lay


confession stands at its highest level of expression. Essentially the effect is the same as confession to a priest."  

For Albert's ecclesiology one can find an orientation in Yves Congar, *L'Église de Saint Augustin à l'époque moderne*. Aspiring to unite Plato and Aristotle, hierarchy and people, Albert wrote of the Body of Christ as both church and Eucharist. Each Christian is personally joined to Christ through the Body of the church. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate principle of church unity as well as of activity and office. There is a distinction between the members of the church and the members of the Body of Christ which is a congregation of love.

Albert gives papal office and authority sparse consideration. Already in 1872 Franz Xaver Leitner had touched on Albert's views of

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the papacy in a study on Aquinas and infallibility. 53 Ulrich Horst's analysis of papal office stresses that Albert understood the office of the bishop of Rome mainly in terms of administration and jurisdiction; the pope held in a limited way aspects of universal jurisdiction and leadership but enjoyed only to a modest extent the role of teacher. 54 Anzulewicz has written on the role of the fathers of the church in Albert's ecclesiology and on his understanding of the church as a

53 Der hl. Thomas von Aquin über das unfehlbare Lehramt des Papstes (Freiburg: Herder, 1872) 177-81.
society. “From its origins and through its salvific work in unity with Christ the head of the ‘corpus mysticum,’ the church transcends the limitations of time, space, and matter. Within the conditions of being a viator and living through faith (and not through immediate vision) the church participates in the glory of God. It is the house of God and of the Spirit; it is a created work like the human being. Consequently it has a double reality, transcendent and contingent dimensions: on the one hand, the mystical Body vitalized by the Holy Spirit…and on the other hand, a unified community of faith with a leader who is the successor of Peter and who leads all the members.” 55

To turn to the realm of pastoral activity, essays on Albert as a bishop and mediator show him to be a person of both administrative and pastoral gifts. Congar studied the efforts of the Dominican community as a “team” where the Friars Preachers’ intellectual apostolate was realized by men with varied expertise and ministries.  

Manfred Enrich has written on Albert’s medieval pastoral plan for religious education. There are essays on prayer and movements of


religious women in Albert’s view as well as on forms of popular
devotion to Albert. 58 Simon Tugwell has published an analysis of
Albert’s spirituality along with texts illustrating it. 59

Albert’s eschatology has attracted attention: resurrection, the
death of Jesus, purgative fire, and German piety in the face of death.
Anzulewicz offers an essay on the finitude of creation, the
omnipresence of time, and the role of fire in destruction and
transformation. “In his philosophical writings Albert does not discuss
the end of the world because he cannot assume with purely rational
principles that this world has an end. Biblical revelation tells him that
the world had a beginning (this is at the same time the beginning of
time) and that it will have an end….This world must have an end and
must experience a renewal because in its origins it was more perfect


58 Entrich, Albertus Magnus. Gebete zu ihm, Gebete von ihm
(Cologne: St. Andreas, 1979); see the essays listed under

59 Simon Tugwell, Albert and Thomas. Selected Writings (New York:
Paulist Press, 1988).
and because it strives towards renewal."  

The universe’s term is not a consequence of the process of nature but results from the external and unique cause of the total reality of the universe. The process of renewal begins with periods of destruction by fire at lower levels and moves to higher levels where fire becomes illumination, holiness, and vision. 

F. Representations of Albert in Art

Erhard Schlieter offers a survey of how Albert is presented in art over the centuries. In 1980 an exhibition on Albert in art was

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assembled in Cologne for which Hugo Stehkämper wrote an introduction. Albertus Magnus, der grosse Neugierige is an illustrated guide to an exhibit held in Regensburg in 2002, a colorful, brief presentation of the many sides of Albert. Further studies on this topic are listed in the section on “Iconography and Albert in Art” in Resnick and Kitchell.

G. The Influence of Albert

Scholars speak of “Albertism,” the influence of Albert in subsequent decades and centuries. Does this imply a school at

Magnus in der Volkskunst. Die Alberti-Tafeln (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1980).


64 Albertus Magnus, Begegnungen in Regensburg (Regensburg: Stadt Regensburg, 2002).
Cologne or a movement beginning there? Resnick and Kitchell arrange articles around three special figures who may have been influenced by Albert in some way: Dante, Meister Eckhart, and Galileo. Then their bibliography offers ten pages listing articles on wider movements and important disciples. Alain de Libera has published a number of studies on Albert and his disciples. *Albert le Grand et la philosophie* surveys current research before turning to Albert’s treatment of philosophy, God and being, a dynamic metaphysics, and a theological psychology of mind. This book

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presents the influence of Albert on major thinkers of the following generation like Ulrich of Strassburg and Dietrich of Freiburg. “Even as bishop of Regensburg and as professor at the University of Paris, Albert the Great was not the only mentor of his German confreres in philosophy, science, and theology. He did, however, exercise a marked influence on the theology and spirituality of his Dominican province to which he gave impressive Neo-Platonic, Dionysian, and Neo-Plerotic, Dionysian, and Dionysian, 67 and


Avicennan forms (more and more articles are devoted to Albert’s relationships to Arabic commentators on Aristotle\(^{68}\)). Aertsen writes of a dynamic conjunction of Arab thought, Dionysian theology, and Albert’s own perspectives resulting in a transcendent science.\(^{69}\)

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\(^{69}\) Aertsen, “Albertus Magnus und die mittelalterliche Philosophie” 111-28.
The expression ‘a Dominican school of Cologne’ stands for a number of influences and a number of persons active in writing and teaching. There was a mutual interaction in terms of books and people that formed a network or terrain for Rhenish mysticism.”  

Experts describe this intellectual milieu as a speculative mysticism, a metaphysical mysticism, or a mysticism of essence of which all are a metaphysics of the Word. De Libera has focused on the mystical dimension in the thought of the Cologne school. “Rhenish theology is the theology of Rhenish mysticism: there is its place of discussion, its

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school of discussion, and its product. This is the theology that comes from Albert, and it is not totally a German theology.”  

A comment from Alain de Libera on Albert’s influence in theology and mysticism offers a conclusion for this survey. Albert is not simply a stage prior to Thomas Aquinas or a version of Avicenna. Albert has his own originality, and his works are not paraphrases or syntheses of the texts of others. “The ‘paradigm of Albert’ has its coherence, its proper horizon, its particular objects….Albert’s theology is not an alternative to Thomism. We need to forget Thomas and face directly -- without intermediaries or codes habitually used to describe Albert -- the real philosophical project of Albert. This project, born at Paris and reaching maturity at Cologne, had an epochal importance.”

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Books and articles are researching and thereby spotlighting the theology of Albert of Lauingen. There is much to discover in his thought and not a little to be learned from it. He was an independent

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scholar and believer -- independent in the birth of a new age,

independent in science and in faith, independent in political turmoil

and in church life.