

THE INFLUENCE OF ALBERT ON THOMAS

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THE Bull of Our Holy Father Pius XI, issued on December 16, 1931, declaring Albertus Magnus "Saint and Doctor", ended the long deliberations of the Holy See about Albert's eligibility for sainthood. At the same time this bull revived the devotion to Albert which has intermittently manifested itself in the Catholic and scholastic world since the thirteenth century. After nearly seven hundred years, Albert the Great, the *Doctor Universalis*, theologian, philosopher, botanist, chemist, the most learned man of his time in every science, is recognized officially by the Church as Saint and Doctor.

Paradoxical as it may seem, one of Albert's outstanding claims to distinction has dimmed the lustre of his reputation. In the latter half of the thirteenth century Albert was eclipsed by Thomas Aquinas, a luminary of his own production. Thomas, scholastically speaking, was not a Melchisedech without father, without mother, without genealogy; indubitably his greatness redounds, in a large measure, to the glory of Albert. The influence of Albert on Thomas is worthy of further analysis. We propose to consider the personal relations of these two men in themselves and as reflected in the writings of Thomas. We shall consider their personal relations, first, as professor and student; secondly, as fellow professors; and thirdly, the personal aspect of their friendship. Our consideration of the writings of Thomas as indicative of Albert's influence, due to the limited amount of space allotted for this paper, must necessarily be restricted to a panoramic survey.

In the year 1245¹ the Dominican Master General brought Thomas, who the year before had taken the Dominican Habit at Naples, to Cologne, in order that he might begin his studies for the priesthood under the care of Albert the Great. This youth had received nine years of elementary education at Monte Cassino, where he was excellently trained in those virtues of religion so conspicuous in his subsequent life, and five years of secondary education at the

¹ For chronology cf. Walz, O.P. "*Delineatio Vitae S. Thomae de Aquino*," Romae, in Pont. Collegio Angelico, 1927.

University of Naples, where he earned for himself an enviable reputation for his intellectual ability. When he was presented to Albert for instruction the latter was forty years of age; he had been teaching in the leading universities of Europe, Hildesheim, Friburg, Ratisbon and Strasburg, for seventeen years, and was recognized, even by his contemporaries, as the greatest teacher of the time. Thomas, who was twenty years old, entered upon a six years' course of assiduous study under the expert guidance of Albert. During this time he was introduced to two outstanding problems of the day, namely, to harness the dynamic influence of perverted Aristotelianism and to systematize theology.

The works of Aristotle, tainted by Averroism, were spreading over Western Europe and were threatening the unity of Christendom. Albert first conceived the idea of converting this grave menace to the Church into an instrument of defence. He realized the worth of the Stagirite's doctrine and exerted his trenchant influence to baptize and Christianize Aristotle as well as to foster this movement among others. The second problem arose from the fact that in the early thirteenth century theology was not as definitely organized as it is today. It embraced all that is now comprised in the sciences of theology, philosophy and exegesis. On the one hand Albert was the foremost scholar of his day; he had an encyclopedic knowledge and had written treatises on every branch of science from botany to theology, from ants to the Triune Godhead. On the other hand the intellectual endowments of Thomas, the student, clearly marked him as a genius. We can imagine the degree of perfection to which the mind of Thomas had developed when he completed his course under Albert. In the year 1251, the Master General, in need of a man to occupy a professorial chair at the University of Paris, consulted Albert as to who should be appointed. Albert immediately replied that Thomas was fully equipped to assume professorial command. That same year Thomas took leave of his devoted Master to launch upon his career as professor.

Their concurrent teaching careers transferred their activities to widely separated fields. Thomas lectured at Paris for seven years, first as Bachelor and then as Doctor of theology. In 1259 he was summoned to Italy where he was engaged, during the ensuing ten years, in teaching and in diplomatic negotiations of the Holy See. At the age of forty-four he returned to Paris and taught there for three years. In 1272 he was called to teach at the University of Naples and two years later, while on his way to the Council of Lyons to defend the Church against the errors of the Greeks, he died.

During these twenty-two years (1252-74) Albert was not idle. Besides doing most of his writing during this period, he taught at the *studium* of the Papal Court at Anagni, he was Provincial of his province, Bishop of Ratisbon, Papal Legate and preacher of a crusade. In 1268, at the age of sixty-three, he retired to the Dominican Convent at Cologne where he taught till his death in 1280.

Of the relation of these two men after Thomas began teaching at Paris, little is known. The chroniclers of the thirteenth century seem to have been so engrossed in recording their scholastic accomplishments that there is a dearth of data from which to glean an idea of their personal friendship. We do not know how frequently they met. They may have encountered each other at some of the annual General Chapters of the Order and from time to time at the Papal Curia at Anagni. We know definitely that they were both members of a commission, appointed to create a new plan of study for their Order, which met at Valenciennes in 1259. However, their characters assure us that their friendship was founded not on sentimentality but on mutual admiration. The older man realized the potentialities of his disciple, and the student honored and respected the vast scope of the erudition of his pedagogue. We know that this early and mutual admiration and respect endured for when the death of Thomas was announced to Albert we find him disclosing his silent love for his student by giving way to tears and eulogizing him as the "flower and glory of the world." Finally we have that inspiring example of fraternal devotion when Albert, aged seventy-two, leaves the calm serenity of his monastery, to which he had retired nearly ten years previously, in order to defend the memory of his beloved student whose doctrine was being unjustly condemned at Paris.

Let us now consider the writings of Thomas and seek in them some manifestation of Albert's influence. The first fact that commands our attention is that, although Thomas was a prodigious writer, nowhere does he mention the name of his master. This might be due to the thirteenth century literary practice of suppressing the names of contemporaries. However this circumstance does not completely explain Thomas' failure to mention his master since we know that Albert's name was cited by other contemporaries.² Thomas is always generous in his acknowledgment and treatment of the opinions of others but usually does not mention contemporaries by name. For this reason, it would hardly be fair to conclude that his studied exclusion of the name of Albert from the excellent history of philosophy, which his writings afford us, was due to any intention of neglecting his master. This question seems to be a Thomist enigma. Perhaps the solution lies in the fact that Thomas took it for granted

that everyone knew he was a disciple of Albert and consequently would realize that much of his doctrine was received through Albert.

We have purposely avoided making any reference to the spiritual character of either of the subjects of our discussion; but, in justice to Thomas, we must call attention to the fact that humility is the "Cephas," "the pearl of great price" of Dominican life of which both of these men are archetypes. As a tribute to Albert's esteem of humility, Thomas may have refrained from expressing those laudatory sentiments which he carried in his heart for his master.

The influence of Albert on Thomas is evident from the objects of research to which Thomas, especially in his younger days, devoted himself. Comparing the catalogues³ of the authentic writings of each of these men we find many subjects of mutual interest, for instance: Thomas, "*De Mixtione Elementorum*"; Albert, "*De Causis Proprietatum Elementorum*"; Thomas, "*De Sortibus*"; Albert, "*De Divinatione et Remiscentia*"; Thomas, "*De Judiciis Astrologorum*"; Albert, "*Summa Astronomica*."

Albert's influence is quite visible in the two outstanding works of Thomas. We know that Albert was devoted to the systematization of theology on a unified and coherent philosophic framework. He dreamed his dreams, as most men do, but in the Divine Plan he was not destined to be the instrument of their realization. This was the privilege of his disciple. The "*Contra Gentiles*" in which Aristotle, under the magic wand of Thomas, is reborn to vindicate the claims of the Church from a rational viewpoint, and the immortal "*Summa Theologica*" of Thomas, are the realization of Albert's dream.

Knowing that Albert wielded a tremendous influence over Thomas, we are by no means justified in concluding that the latter stood in relation to the former as the expressed species does in relation to the passive intellect. Even in the current problems of the day which both men attacked independently, as the defence of Religious Orders, refutation of Averroism and the reconciliation of the Greeks, there is abundant manifestation that although the disciple received his doctrine from his master, he has nevertheless rethought, remod-

² M. De Wulf in his "*History of Mediaeval Philosophy*," Vol. I, p. 395, has the following citation from Roger Bacon: "Nam sicut Aristoteles, Avicenna et Averroes allegantur in scholis, sic et ipse (Albertus)"; also one from Giles of Lessines "Haec est positio multorum magnorum et praecise domni Alberti quodam Ratisponensis episcopi."

³ Dr. Martin Grabmann: "*Die Echten Schriften Des Hl. Thomas Von Aquin*."

Francis Cardinal Ehrle: "*Positio pro Canonizatione Beati Alberti Magni, O.P.*"

Pierre Mandonnet, O.P.: "*Ecrits de S. Thomas d'Aquin*."

eled and supplemented it to such an extent that it is really new.⁴ When we consider the points of doctrine found in the works of Thomas which are directly opposed to those of the older scholastics and particularly of Albert, as the "unity of form", "the attribution of the *forma corporeitatis* to the soul", "the doctrine of prime matter being pure potency" and the consequent rejections of the "*rationes seminales*" of St. Augustine, to which Albert adhered, this conclusion vanishes like darkness in the presence of light. It would take too long to enumerate all the points of doctrine on which Thomas departed from the older scholastics; but more clearly to establish Thomas' independence as a scholar we might mention that he opposed the hylomorphic composition of spiritual substances and established in its stead the doctrine of subsistent forms. With an air of finality he unhesitatingly declared a real distinction between the soul and its faculties; he expressly taught the real distinction between essence and existence and against the voluntarism of Augustine he proposed a more intellectual conception of mental life.

The most striking difference between the two men and one that accounts for Thomas' manifest superiority over Albert seems to lie in the power of the former to digest and reduce doctrines to their underlying fundamental truths as well as in his almost preternatural critical sense of doctrinal values. Albert had a most extensive learning and two bright jewels shine in his glorious crown. His collection of data was universal in scope and opened up unexplored roads in the speculative world. His reconstruction of scientific highways through the introduction of the experimental method has been as permanent as the military roads of the old Romans. Thomas on the other hand was the penetrating rational type. Whatever he met he weighed, investigated, reduced to principles and, if accepted, coordinated and systematized into his cosmic system.

The exact extent of Albert's influence over Thomas will never be known. He had complete charge of the scholastic development of Thomas as a Dominican and it was through Albert that Thomas was launched upon his career. The God-given talents of Thomas were detected and ably developed by that glorious Saint and eminent Doctor of the Church—Albert the Great.

⁴William of Tocco says of Thomas: "He used to introduce new articles into his lectures, was in the habit of employing a new and clear method of argumentation and of adducing new reasons for his conclusions. And consequently anyone who had witnessed the newness that he injected into his teachings and into the solution of difficulties could only conclude that God had favored with a new illumination one who did not hesitate to advance with such conviction these novel opinions both in his teachings and in his writings." (Acta SS. VII martii, n. 15).