

Biography

He was born sometime between 1193 and 1206, to the Count of Bollstädt in Lauingen in Bavaria.^[1] Contemporaries such as Roger Bacon applied the term "Magnus" to Albertus during his own lifetime, referring to his immense reputation as a scholar and philosopher.

Albertus was educated principally at Padua, where he received instruction in Aristotle's writings. A late account by Rudolph de Novamagia refers to Albertus' encounter with the Blessed Virgin Mary, who convinced him to enter Holy Orders. In 1223 (or 1221) he became a member of the Dominican Order, against the wishes of his family, and studied theology at Bologna and elsewhere. Selected to fill the position of lecturer at Cologne, Germany, where the Dominicans had a house, he taught for several years there, at Regensburg, Freiburg, Strasbourg and Hildesheim. In 1245 he went to Paris, received his doctorate and taught for some time as a master of theology with great success. During this time Thomas Aquinas began to study under Albertus.



 Bust of Albertus Magnus by Vincenzo Onofri, c. 1493

In 1254 Albertus was made provincial of the Dominican Order, and fulfilled the arduous duties of the office with great care and efficiency. During his tenure he publicly defended the Dominicans against attacks by the secular and regular faculty of the University of Paris, commented on St John, and answered what he perceived as errors of the Arabian philosopher Averroes.

In 1260 Pope Alexander IV made him Bishop of Regensburg, an office from which he resigned after three years. During the exercise of his duties he enhanced his reputation for humility by refusing to ride a horse—in accord with the dictates of the Dominican order—instead walking back and forth across his huge diocese. This earned him the affectionate sobriquet, "boots the bishop," from his parishioners. After his stint as bishop, he spent the remainder of his life partly in retirement in the various houses of his order, yet often preaching throughout southern Germany. In 1270 he preached the eighth Crusade in Austria. Among the last of his labours was the defense of the orthodoxy of his former pupil, Thomas Aquinas, whose death in 1274 grieved Albertus. After suffering a collapse of health in 1278, he died on November 15, 1280, in Cologne, Germany. His tomb is in the crypt of the Dominican church of St. Andreas in Cologne, and his relics at the Cologne Cathedral.

Albertus is frequently mentioned by Dante, who made his doctrine of free will the basis of his ethical system. In his Divine Comedy, Dante places Albertus with his pupil Thomas Aquinas among the great lovers of wisdom (*Spiriti Sapienti*) in the Heaven of the Sun. Albertus is also mentioned, along with Agrippa and Paracelsus, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where his writings serve as an influence to a young Victor Frankenstein.

Albertus was beatified in 1622. He was canonized and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1931 by Pope Pius XI. St Albert's feast day is celebrated on November 15.