

## Saint Albert the Great

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SAINT OF THE DAY

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The genius of St Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) can be appreciated simply through his explanation of the perfect harmony between faith and science, his teaching transmitted to St Thomas Aquinas and his critical appreciation of Aristotle. But apart from being one of the greatest theologians and philosophers of the Middle Ages, the saint, a native of Bavaria, was able to deal brilliantly with so many other fields of knowledge (astronomy, botany, chemistry, physics, mineralogy, music, etc.) that he deserved the title of *Doctor Universalis*.

**He decided to join the Dominicans in 1223, after listening to Blessed Jordan of Saxony**, the first successor of St Dominic as Master General of the Order of Preachers. He studied in Padua and then in Paris. He soon started writing, an activity that he would practise throughout his life, together with teaching. Among his students he had **Thomas Aquinas**, mocked by his companions, who called him the mute ox. Albert, instead, prophesied his greatness: "You call him the mute ox, but I say to you: when this ox will bellow, his bellowing will be heard from one end of the earth to the other!". The fellowship and deep friendship between the two, which would forever influence Catholic theology, never faltered. Albert was flanked by Thomas in the Theological Study of Cologne, and later asked him for help in the dispute with the Averroists and defended his pupil's doctrine when, shortly after the death of Aquinas (1225-1274), some clerics went so far as to contest his orthodoxy.

**He rigorously studied Aristotle's thought, without exalting him or demonising him a priori** as other thinkers did. Instead, he valued his rational arguments, in the wake of all his endless philosophical and theological work aimed at demonstrating the unity between faith and reason. With his thought Albert also made an important contribution to the development of the scientific method, stating that the experiment is the only sure guide in such investigations (*De Vegetalibus*) and "he who is against it is not refuted except in two ways, that is, with the demonstration of the truth and with the manifestation of error".

**With his inspired wisdom, he discerned between the study of the natural and the manifestation of the supernatural.** "In studying nature we do not have to investigate how God the Creator can use his creatures to perform miracles and thus manifest his power: rather we have to investigate how nature with its immanent causes can exist." In virtue of these gifts of his - which were combined with charity, unceasing prayer and tender devotion to Our Lady - Pius XI praised Saint Albert the Great in 1931, the year of his canonization and proclamation as Doctor of the Church: "Figures like Albert remind us that there is no contrast between science and holiness, that contrast

which finds its place in those poor souls who do not feel the ineffable bond of kinship, the depth and sublimity of the relationships that unite truth and goodness”.

**Patron of:** scientists, natural science students

**Learn more:**

[Catechesis of Benedict XVI on Saint Albert the Great](#) (General Audience of 24 March 2010)