There is a well-known legend according to which Albert the Great grew weary of the spiritual life soon after entering the Dominican order. It even appeared to him too arduous to investigate the depths of theological wisdom. During his attempt to flee from the monastery he encountered Mary the Mother of God. She offered him a great wisdom but he would have to choose between theological wisdom and secular wisdom. Albert chose the secular wisdom in which he soon became the most learned man. However, since he decided against theological wisdom, Mary took all wisdom away from him at the end of his life, so that he concluded his life in simplemindedness.

Popular piety is the source for such stories that explicate Albert’s special relation to Mary. Thus it was much easier to attribute to him extensive treatises that deal with Mary, through which Albert was said to have expressed his admiration for her. The current state of scholarship indicates that Albert’s work on Mary is significantly smaller than the old editions of his works suggest.¹ In this chapter there is no room to take up again the discussion about the authenticity of those treatises that in the past were attributed to Albert. Following the studies by Albert Fries, these texts will not be considered in this presentation.² Peter of Prussia, the medieval biographer, had already claimed in his list of works that Albert had also written Mary-sequences.³ Although there is better evidence for their authenticity I shall not discuss these texts here because of their special nature.⁴

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¹ See Alb., *De laudibus beatae Mariae Virginis libri XII*, Borgn. 36, and *Mariale sive CCXXX quaestiones super Evangelium Missus est Angelus; Biblia Mariana*, Borgn. 37.


Setting aside legends and inauthentic works, on what basis can we present Albert’s Mariology? Even though we have to realize that Albert did not compose a separate systematic Mariological treatise, we find a wealth of Mariological claims embedded in larger theological contexts. In part, these are merely brief notes. However, Albert also wrote longer treatises on the central themes of Mariology: sanctification, Annunciation, virgin birth, divine motherhood, and assumption into heaven. These expositions are found most of all in discussions of Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Albert did not compose “a systematic but rather a situational Mariology”, as Albert Fries has put it.5

In presenting Albert’s Mariology in this chapter I shall consider the following works: his early works De natura boni and De bono, the treatises De sacramentis, De incarnatione, De resurrectione, the Commentary on the Sentences from when he taught in Paris, as well as the theological Quaestiones composed in the same chronological context. Apart from these systematic works I shall consider Albert’s exegesis of the four Gospels and his commentators on the Old Testament prophets.

The earliest known work, De natura boni, which was composed while Albert taught in German convents, is a text of moral theology, written primarily for instructional purposes. This work contains within the teaching on the virtues extensive Mariological passages that are expanded to a relatively integrated Mariology. In the same way, Albert primarily deals with Mary’s virginity in his work De bono, which is a more scientifically developed theory of the virtues. In the Sentences commentary—the required lecture course on dogmatic themes—Mariological statements are found especially in the third book in the context of Christology; we find parallels in the preceding work, De incarnatione. Passages from the fourth book of the Sentences commentary, within the context of eschatology, have a parallel in Albert’s De resurrectione. In his exegetical works Albert carefully interprets the relevant texts that deal with Mary. Albert’s exegesis of

5 Albert Fries, Was Albertus Magnus von Maria sagt (Cologne: 1962), 17: “Was er über Maria schreibt, ist nicht als geschlossenes Ganzes vorgelegt. Es ist vielmehr eine marianische Theologie, wie sie jeweils an einem Punkt der Glaubenswissenschaft sich nahelegt, eine Summe von Ausserungen über Maria, die sich je aus dem Ganzen eines Traktates von selbst ergeben. Er erhebt die Herrlichkeit Marias dort, wo er von Gott kündet und von Christus Zeugnis gibt.” [“What he writes about Mary is not presented as a complete whole. Rather, it is a theology of Mary as it offers itself, given a certain issue, a sum of remarks about Mary that follow from the entirety of a treatise. Albert raises the topic of Mary’s glory when he talks about God and gives testimony of Christ.”]