CHAPTER 5

Imagination in the First Two Kinds of Contemplation

5.1 Introduction to Benjamine Major

This chapter will examine Richard's views on the imagination and its operation in the first two books of Benjamin Major. After some introductory remarks in Section 5.1, I shall analyse the ways of knowing and Richard's ideas of contemplation in general in Sections 5.2 and 5.3. In Section 5.4, I will examine his theory by exploring the first kind of contemplation, which begins his six-fold model of contemplation. Section 5.5 deals with the second kind of contemplation. The four highest kinds will be examined in Chapters 6 and 7. This chapter explores Richard's ideas concerning the initial stages of contemplative life, i.e., the lower levels of the spiritual ascent. In this analysis, his interest in the role of the imagination and its significance for contemplation becomes evident. Moreover, the study also assesses Hugh of St. Victor's impact on Richard's Benjamin Major and attempts to show how Richard developed many of Hugh's ideas in an original way. The themes of the Benjamin Major derive mostly from Hugh's works such as Didascalicon, De arca Noe, De unione corporis et spiritus, and De tribus diebus, which had a special impact on Richard's vocabulary and basic orientation. However, his work is a new synthesis in which the received terminology of the time is reshaped and reinterpreted.

Richard wrote the Benjamin Major after having finished the Benjamin Minor. Benjamin Major is a much longer work, and is clearly meant for readers who are already advanced in their studies and spiritual life. The basic idea in Benjamin Major is to divide contemplation into its various kinds using the triple series of abilities of the soul that has already been expounded in Benjamin Minor. These abilities are imagination (imaginatio), reason (ratio), and understanding (intelligentia). With the help of this triad, Richard constructs a theory of contemplation which contains six different kinds (genera) of contemplation. His ambition in Benjamin Major is to analyse these six

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1 Dumeige 1952, 169; Châtillon 1988, 615.
2 Richard's theory of the six kinds of contemplation derives from the idea of six wings of contemplation. With the help of these wings, the soul may ascend to the spiritual spheres. The ultimate source is Isaiah's vision in 6:2, which describes seraphim, each with six wings. With
kinds of contemplation in detail. One of his main presuppositions is that the abilities of the soul may form different combinations of co-operation, a mixing of various abilities which gives a lot of flexibility to his theory. Additionally, Richard specifies all six kinds of contemplation carefully according to the abilities of the soul as well as the class of objects examined in each particular contemplation.

In spite of detailed terminological divisions, *Benjamin Major* has an apparently practical intention. Richard first and foremost tries to understand the experience of the spiritual life with the help of the material derived from the traditions of monastic literature; in addition, the new scholarly trends of the 1100s can be detected. Because he does not use direct quotations from other texts or references to other authors in *Benjamin Major*, analysing the text is demanding, especially finding analogies for the concept of imagination as expounded in *Benjamin Major*.

The anthropological models of *Benjamin Minor* and *Major* differ from each other in many ways. While the structure of the soul and its operations are partly described in the same terms in both works, the terminology and the context of the concepts of *Major* also clearly deviate from the solutions of *Minor*. At the same time, the concepts will become less definite. Furthermore, in *Benjamin Major* Richard examines the significance of the imagination more extensively than in *Benjamin Minor*. The imagination is dealt with in the first three of the six kinds of contemplation and does not disappear completely even after this. The examination of the affective part of the soul is largely missing from *Major*, which is surprising since in *Minor* the affective part is one of the two dominant powers of the soul. The reason for this is that Richard limits himself here to considering the purification of the soul with respect to its intellectual abilities so that he does not really need to address questions which apply to its affective part. For instance, the theme of repelling sinful thoughts which is dealt with in *Minor* is almost absent, apparently

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2 wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and flew with the remaining two. The idea of six wings of contemplation occurs frequently in the medieval texts. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s analysis of a seraph is especially significant in this respect. For this tradition, see Chase’s introduction to this notion and the collection of medieval texts in Chase 2002. Chase also notes that in the medieval texts cherubim and seraphim are repeatedly misconstrued and confused compared to Pseudo-Dionysius’s description of angels. Chase 2002, 124.

3 *BMAJ* I, IX, p. 16–17.

4 For the synopsis of the six kinds of contemplation and the faculties of soul related to them, see *BMAJ* I, VI, p. 12–14.

5 For the new trends, see Chapter 2.3.