CHAPTER 6

The Third Kind of Contemplation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the third kind of contemplation in *Benjamin Major*. I will also analyse Richard's ideas concerning similitudes, which he regards as an essential component of this contemplation. Accordingly, I will evaluate Richard's related anthropological speculation, which he expresses through the notions of the inner and outer person. I will also compare his views concerning the function of the imagination in the transition from visible things to invisible things in *Benjamin Major, Benjamin Minor*, and *In Apocalypsim Joannis*.

Dealing with the higher levels of contemplation, Richard supports his treatment by utilizing tropological interpretation of selected features in the description of the Ark of the Covenant. As stated in the preceding chapter, the first kind of contemplation refers to the wooden parts of the Ark, while the second kind denotes their gilding. In the third kind of contemplation, the Ark gets a golden crown and in the fourth kind it is covered by the golden propitiatory. The two golden cherubs who spread their wings over the Ark represent the fifth and sixth kinds of contemplation. Richard examines the details and measurements of the Ark scrupulously, giving them a tropological interpretation on the basis of how the four highest kinds of contemplation are further divided into different stages.1

The characterization of the third kind of contemplation differs from the definitions of the first and second kinds. The third kind is said to take place completely in reason (*in ratione*) and not in imagination (*in imaginatione*). However, it is formed in reason, according to imagination (*formatur in ratione secundum imaginationem*).2 Furthermore, Richard uses the parallel notion that the third kind agrees with reason but follows imagination (*constat in ratione sed sequitur imaginationem*).3 He also states that reason draws (*trahit*) imagination with it to consider higher things, in which case imagination rises above itself.4 However, Richard reminds the reader that the third kind is in

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2 *BMAJ* I, VI, p. 13.8–9: ’Tertium contemplationis genus esse diximus quod in ratione secundum imaginationem formatur’.
4 *BMAJ* I, VIII, p. 16.8, 13–14, 19, 21–22: ’In tertio imaginatio ad rationem ascendit...in tertio imaginationem secum quasi ad altiora trahit...in tertio imaginatio supra semetipsam ascendit...in tertio imaginatio ascendit ad summum’.
reason, and both its attention and investigation go beyond the scope of mere imagination.5

Since this shift to the area of reason in the third kind of contemplation is a significant breakthrough in the spiritual life, Richard does not hesitate to describe it in poetic terms. He values the co-operation between imagination and reason because it provides the opportunity to approach the things in invisible reality. Thus Richard explains how one unlearns being an animal being and learns to be made into a spiritual being, which is required for grasping the sublime objects of contemplation. One should make a daily effort to taste those things which are spiritual.6 He also incidentally mentions how the distinct new senses (novitas sensus) begin to take shape in the third kind of contemplation, in consequence of which the human being grows into a spiritual (spiritualis) person. Here Richard is likely to refer to the special spiritual senses. He tells the reader that now is the moment when the heavenly visions flowing from divine wisdom begin. Here the soul finally recovers its ancient dignity and wins back its inborn honour and freedom.7 This is Neoplatonist language which strongly emphasizes the significance of illuminating knowledge.8

Richard repeatedly stresses that a person cannot rise to know invisible things without the exterior foundation of ascent. He also explains that the knowledge of exterior things (notitia exteriorum) is needed in this transition. One should begin with the lowest and best-known and ascend little by little by

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5 BMAJ I, VI, p. 13.11–12: ‘Haec vero speculatio in ratione consistit, quia his solis, quae imagina -

tionem excedunt, per intentionem et investigationem insistit’.

6 BMAJ II, XIII, p. 35.8–10: ‘In hoc primo statu dedocetur homo esse animalis et discit effici

spiritualis, eo quod tunc incipiat spiritualia comparare et reformari in novitate sensus sui

satagens cotidie magis magisque sapere quae sursum sunt non quae super terram’. For the

notion of sensus spiritualis in Richard’s texts, see Tedoldi 1999, 84–88.

7 BMAJ II, XIII, p. 35.12–15,17–23: ‘Hic primo illa quae docet hominem scientiam, dei sapientia,

lux illa, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum, incipit se ingerere et

lucis suae oculis infundere, nunc subtrahendo iterum abscondere.…

Incipit hic demum quoddam mirae visionis praeludium ante intuentis aspectum formare et

sicut aquila provocans ad volandum pullos suos assiduo revelationum suarum evolutu et

revolatu, seipsam in diversa rapere et contemplantis animum ad volandi desiderium primo

inflammare et quandoque ad plenum volatum perfecte informare. Hic primum animus anti-

quam dignitatem recuperat et ingenitum sibi propriae libertatis honorem sibi vindicat’.

8 Richard’s ideas derive from Augustine’s theory of illumination, which emphasizes the need

for divine illumination for knowledge. According to Augustine, all human knowledge arises

from illumination. It also grants access to invisible realities, which are beyond the senses. For

Augustine’s theory of illumination, see Matthews 2001, 179–183.