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The status of knowledge at Richard of Saint Victor

Abstract: The present paper aims to shed light on the theory of knowledge developed by Richard of Saint Victor, the so-called *model of knowledge-contemplation* that supports all the mystical and trinitarian works of the victorine. The framework of these writings is given by the functioning of a complex system of *affective life* and *cognitive life*, of adequate operation of *the faculties of knowledge of the rational soul*, admirably described by an original allegorical and tropological commentary on *Genesis*, in the spiritual treatise *Benjamin minor*. Of course, the greatest dignity is the knowledge of divine truths, but mystical ecstasy is reached only after ascending the levels of the science of sensible realities. If the nature of the spirit mirrors the divine essence, the faculties of the mind are the image of the life of Trinity's persons. Thus, the richardian trinitarian doctrine comes to complete the mystical one, composing together the ample gnoseological project of understanding the functioning and the limits of human knowledge. We will refer to the whole of Richard's work, but we will insist on the two treatises that bring more use to this research: *Benjamin minor* and *De Trinitate*.

Keywords: Richard of Saint Victor, knowledge, gnosiology, mysticism, contemplation, Trinity.

Introduction

The gnoseological model proposed by Richard of Saint Victor, one of the most influential spiritual theologians of the 12th century, occupies a legitimate place in the history of philosophy being the fruit of a cultivated and refined spirit that accurately evokes the operation of the faculties of knowledge and the limits of language in transcendence description. This *model of knowledge-contemplation* can be considered therefore a significant part of the tradition of philosophical approaches to the functioning of human experience and the attainment of truth. We are dealing with a trinitarian model, analogous to the relationship of the persons of the Trinity. Even though this analogy is part of a certain tradition, Richard manages to arrive at his own precise model that takes into account both the thematizable and the non-thematizable part of experience. For the understanding of what will be presented, we consider it welcome and offer further a brief familiarization with the author and the spirit in which he was formed.

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The Victorines, along with Bernard of Clairvaux, are considered the founders of medieval Christian mysticism (Gilson 1922, 79-80). If Saint Bernard, who is at permanent war with dialectics and the dialecticians, subscribes to the affective tradition that places the beatific union in love, the Augustinian canons from the Parisian Abbey of Saint Victor practice a *speculative mysticism* that assumes the intellectual character of ecstasy and places it in knowledge. For them, profane knowledge is added to the sacred, and dialectical reason is used as exercise in order to acquire wisdom and reach the pinnacle of contemplation. No teaching is useless, but the liberal arts must not consider themselves as an end, but together with theology and on the background of a preparatory way of life, seek the ways that can reach contemplation. Richard, Hugo's disciple and successor, builds rational arguments by which he seeks to reach from the weak ontological domain of appearance to that of fullness and essence. Reason starts from the realm of the sensible, the world of alteration and change, and, always calibrated by the strength of faith, climbs until it overcomes its conceptual limits and reaches the highest step of knowledge where it meets the *Supreme Wisdom*. In this register there are no more borders, and the soul, in expansion and formless (*dilatatio mentis* and *excessus mentis*), merges with the divine substance in an ecstasy that deifies it. The desired end is therefore that of any mysticism, but in the present case the path will be marked by certain *necessary reasonings*, which validate to the logician the fact that he has not deviated from the right path. By such an approach of intuitive intellectual knowledge of the supreme singular - the divine essence, the Victorine mediates the transition from Saint Anselm to Duns Scotus. For them, the universal is not formed through inductive abstraction, starting from the sensible, from the particular to the universal through the mediation of a phantasm, but deductively, through the direct apprehension of the relationships between things or concepts, assuming a *common nature* as a condition of possibility for the existence of things (Libera 1996, 424-453). Richardian speculative mysticism places love on a comparable position to knowledge, because only through the contribution of both its cognitive model can function. But it is about divine supersensible love, called by the words *caritas*, *dilectio*, *condilectio*; sensitive love has a lower dignity and is designated by the word *amor*.

The School of Saint Victor, consolidated by Hugo, remains a spiritual landmark for more than a century and heralds the universities of the next century. The abbey followed the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, more permissive and open than the other monastic orders, which does not repudiate any study intended to bring more knowledge to the human mind, connects pagan texts with Christian spiritual meditation and models a complete educational program according to which all human studies are unified in the ascent of fallen man towards divine contemplation: Victorine

mysticism therefore assumes encyclopedism, logic, learning but also teaching, prayer, meditation, action and contemplation, any form of experience through which one gradually advances in the true knowledge of things, of the human and the divine. And the truth of knowledge is guaranteed only by assuming the divine Word as the transcendental origin of experience and by the harmonious functioning of the soul's faculties.

As previously mentioned, Richard claims the use of deductive reason to research higher truths. Arguments in favour of the existence of divinity must be based on experience, and from here reason will universalize knowledge until it is overcome in transcendence. The Boethian gradual universalization, the necessary reasonings and the Anselmian ontological argument, the pre-eminence of faith and the Augustinian positive theology, the neoplatonic hierarchical model, are dominant influences of Richard's thinking, which, however, succeeds in an original synthesis of a trinitarian *knowledge-contemplation model*.

Because the data about Richard's life are not very well known, and they have an essential contribution to his intellectual formation, we consider it opportune to quickly outline a few significant features: his date of birth is unknown, he is Scottish and he arrived at Saint Victor as a young man, in the time of Abbot Gilduin. In 1159 he was sub-prior, and from 1162 until his death, on March 10, 1173, he was prior. He finds at the School of Saint Victor an elite of diverse nationalities, under the guidance of the Saxon Hugo. As a prior, Richard is involved in a series of problematic situations generated by the tyrannical abbot Ernis (1161-1172), a fact that distracted him from his activity as a preacher and writer. He addresses this crisis in the oratorical treatise *Super exiit edictum*, where he symbolically reminds his confreres the true vocation, with its inherent demands. The Victorine gets involved in the conflict between Thomas Becket and King Henry II, being on the side of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who took refuge for a while at Saint Victor.

The Richardian work, vast and still not completely edited, was classified by Jean Châtillon as follows: biblical commentaries, theological treatises (*De Trinitate*), spiritual works (*Beniamin minor*, *Beniamin maior*, *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis*), sermons, letters. The works mentioned in parentheses are the best known, most widespread and most exemplary for constituting the epistemological model that guides all Victorine's writings. The letters and dedications of the works show that many Richardian writings were drawn up at the request of friends or disciples; therefore, contemporaries showed Richard admiration and respect. Spiritual theologian, mystic, confessor, thinker and teacher, Richard succeeds Hugo in the leadership of the School, strengthens the Victorine spiritual centre and earns his highest appreciation: Dante believes in the genuine mystical

experiences of the Victorine when he says of him: "See, flaming beyond the glowing breath / of Isidore, of Bede and of Richard, / who in contemplation was more than man" (Dante 1975, 115), the Italian editor of the treatise *De Trinitate*, Mario Spinelli, calls Richard "Doctor Contemplationis" (Riccardo di S. Vittore 1990, 27) and considers him "the most brilliant" Victorine (Riccardo di S. Vittore 1990, 17), and Umberto Eco refers to him with the formula "the learned Richard of Saint Victor" (Eco 2003, 134), who is interested in everything that exists: theology, philosophy, alchemy, numerology, etc. He deals with the spiritual meaning of the sacred text, researches the measurements of the Temple of Jerusalem, wanting to reconstruct its plan and obtain its model, despite the textual obscurity regarding this aspect, making of all those assimilated the scaffolding for contemplation.

Richard's mystique – presentation of the functioning of the faculties of knowledge

The mystical work of Richard of Saint Victor transmits in an allegorical form his philosophy, respectively the precise model of the human faculties of knowledge and their mode of functioning in the experience of knowledge and truth.

The path to contemplation is symbolically presented by Richard in the spiritual treatise *Beniamin minor*, where he offers an allegorical and tropological interpretation of the name and history of each of Jacob's twelve sons with his wives Leah and Rachel, and the slaves of the wives, Zilpah and Bilha. Richard was inspired by Jerome's work, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, which etymologically explains biblical proper names, but, unlike Jerome, who is attached to the literal meaning of Scripture, the Victorine reaches extensive spiritual and moral considerations. The originality of the work lies in the fact that it does not deal with Jacob's wives on the one hand and his sons on the other, both episodes being included in a vast project of symbolic interpretation that wants to offer the model of Christian life (spiritual and moral) and to communicate the soul's itinerary to God.

The tradition of allegorical commentaries for the two Old Testament episodes can be quickly sketched as follows (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 19-39): at Philo of Alexandria, *Jacob's wives* are *faculties of the soul*, Leah is reason, and Rachel is sensitivity; Rachel's death at the birth of Benjamin symbolizes the death of the soul that gives birth to the vain glory of the sensible. Philo's position, which favours Leah, did not influence Christian thinking. The Fathers of the Church initiate the tradition of interpretation according to which the relationship between *Leah and Rachel* is that between the *Synagogue and the Church* and that between *active life and*

contemplative life (predicative reason and contemplative intellect). The *Marta - Mary model* was associated with Leah - Rachel by Augustine and Gregory the Great. Rachel, who dies on the way to Ephrata, is the Church always on the way, and the way is Christ. Allegorical meanings will also be attributed to the maidservants of the two wives, as well as to the 12 sons of Jacob, the *12 patriarchs*, ancestors of the Jewish people, those who gave their names to the tribes of Israel. The allegorical meaning of the patriarchs is established by commentaries on *Genesis 49*, the episode "*Jacob's Blessings*", where Jacob speaks to his sons; the coming of the Messiah is announced here, whom the commentaries identify with Christ and his Church. The medieval commentaries on the mentioned biblical episodes (Leah-Rachel and the sons of Jacob) are inspired by patristic interpretations and reveal all four meanings of biblical reading: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical.

Richard of Saint Victor prefers the allegorical meaning, also targeting the moral one. If the Bible speaks about God, it also speaks about man. He sees in Scripture as in a mirror, because it proposes a vocabulary, a system of symbols and images whose meaning must be established. Thus, the Old Testament characters are feelings to be controlled, virtues to be practiced, right judgments to be operated, knowledge to be acquired, activities to be exercised, and the history of Israel is that of every man. For the restoration of fallen man, therefore, a good understanding of divine writings is necessary, in the interpretation of which profane disciplines are helpful, but exercised under the light of divine grace.

The knowledge of the *rational soul* becomes central, whose double force determines the two powers: *cognitive life* and *affective life*, i.e. *ratio* and *affectio* (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 42-48). Thus, the faculties of knowledge are the following: *senses* (sensitivity), *imagination* and *intellect* – with its two registers: *proper reason* (predicative, conceptualizing) and *contemplative intellect* (intelligence). As imagination is at the service of reason, three forms of soul activity correspond to the three powers of extended reason (cognitive life): *cogitatio* with the help of imagination, *meditatio* through reason and *contemplatio* through intelligence.

Rachel (reason) with her servant Bilha (imagination) constitutes the *cognitive life*, and Leah (affection) with her slave Zilpah (sensitivity) represents the *affective life*. *Benjamin minor* will establish correspondences between Jacob's sons with the four women and the states of the rational soul in its ascent to God. *Knowledge (through right judgments and spiritual senses)* and *love (through virtue and holy desires)* will control every stage of rational and virtuous behaviour in this ascension.

Leah the dull-eyed, the older sister, is the desire for justice, the instruction in virtue, and her eyes are sick because she misjudges things from the point of view of the unjust, the majority of people. Rachel of unique beauty is the love of wisdom, the teaching of truth; although she is

the one he loves, Jacob has to wait seven years to marry her (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 91-95). You can accompany yourself with spiritual intelligence only after you have fully established yourself in the virtuous life. The two servants are necessary, because reason could not know anything without imagination, and affectivity could not experience and order anything without sensitivity (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 101-105).

The wives of Jacob - the rational soul touched by the Holy Spirit and eager for divine knowledge - represent the faculties of knowledge as instruments (powers) with which the soul is endowed, and Jacob's sons are the faculties (instruments, powers of the soul) in exercise.

If the affects (feelings) are ordered, they are good and are called virtues, otherwise they are bad and represent vices. Leah first gives birth to four sons, and these correspond to the first four affections: *fear* of sin and divine punishment (Reuben), *pain* of penance (Simeon), *hope* of forgiveness (Levi) and love between the soul and God, *love* of truth, charity (Judah) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 111-127).

Rachel is not yet fertile, and Jacob still has two sons with her servant, Bilha (the faculty of judgment): *the consideration of the evils that will befall the sinner* (Dan - determinative judgment, the conceptualization of the visible) and *the consideration of the rewards intended for the righteous* (Nephtali - analogical judgment, the transition from sensitive to supersensitive) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 137-157).

Next come the two sons of Zilpah, virtues that help to overcome the dangers of sensitivity: *rigorous abstinence*, renouncing the pleasures of the senses (Gad) and *tenacious patience*, enduring the sufferings of the sensible world (Asher) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 157-163).

The sons of the two maids fortify the peace of the soul (internal, through thoughts and external, through the senses), so that they can transform into virtues the last three affections, i.e. the last children of Leah: *the joy and inner sweetness* of the quiet soul that has glimpsed the eternal reward (Issachar), *the contempt of vices*, which gives the courage and zeal necessary for the continuation of the soul's ascent (Zebulon), and *the shame* (before God, not men) of the sin committed after installation in virtue, *modesty*, *calming* the excess of zeal of previous virtues (daughter Dinah, the last born); as she does not initiate actions, but quells them, she is not the founder of a Jewish tribe. Dinah is violated by Shechem when the soul finds pleasure in the vain glory of worldly praises and goods; the rape takes place when her brothers are away with the flocks to graze, so the soul can fall at any time if it does not keep its defenders close. The fact that her brothers avenged her dishonour is a new soul imbalance, even if it intends to suppress the first one (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 197-263).

The two sons of Rachel are: *the discernment* that can regulate the virtues and orient the spirit, which culminates in full *self-knowledge* (Joseph,

who must lead his brothers) and *the knowledge of God - contemplation* (Benjamin). Benjamin is born last, and his mother dies at birth. Rachel dies so that Benjamin can be born. Only after harmonizing all affections and full self-knowledge is it possible to contemplate divine realities, and for this reason must die, it is annihilated. The sublime knowledge of contemplation takes place on the summit of the holy mountain, the end of the spiritual journey, where the spirit arrives led by Christ, to see him transfigured, clothed in the light of divine intelligence (the transfigured Christ is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, witnesses of the transfiguration). At the height of the soul, the human meets the divine, full self-knowledge suddenly turns into the knowledge of God, Joseph is followed by Benjamin, meditation turns into contemplation. Benjamin is the soul united with God in the divine betrothal, true happiness (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 283-341).

At the end of the treatise *Beniamin minor*, Richard distinguishes three degrees of knowledge of God, which correspond to the ascent of the soul to three heavens: by faith (sub-rational), by meditation (rational) and by contemplation (supra-rational) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 341-347). He also distinguishes two types of contemplation, identical to types 5 and 6 that he establishes in *Beniamin maior* and that we will present below.

In *Beniamin maior*, Richard proposes the following *definition of contemplation*, often criticized because of its too general and intellectual character and the lack of reference to grace or love, which must animate the Christian: “*contemplation is the free and penetrating gaze of the spirit arrived at the show of wisdom and remained suspended in admiration*” (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 97).

The Victorine distinguishes here *six genres of contemplation* (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 103-109), according to the nature of the touched objects and according to the faculties of knowledge involved. Genres 1 and 2 refer to the knowledge of sensible objects with the help of imagination; genres 3 and 4 aim at knowing intelligible realities using reason; and genres 5 and 6 denote knowledge of what is purely intelligible, through the exercise of intelligence (intellect). The last two genres are above reason and refer to things whose existence is admitted but impossible to prove. In the fifth kind, Grace makes accessible to the spirit truths concerning the divine nature and attributes of the divinity (the unitary God), and faith is thus strengthened. The sixth genre is not only above reason, but also contrary to it, since mysteries such as the unity of the Trinity and the Eucharist are revealed here. By distinguishing the six degrees of knowledge, from the experience of the created to the mystical union with the unique divine substance, Richard inspires the work of Saint Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.

Richard also establishes *three degrees or ways of progressing in the grace of contemplation* (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 505-509), depending on the role of the human spirit and divine Grace in the act of contemplation: the dilatation of the spirit (*dilatatio mentis*), the elevation of the spirit (*elevatio mentis* or *sublevatio*) and alienation of the spirit or ecstasy (*excessus mentis* or *alienatio*). The first degree is reached through meditation, so only through human effort, and the soul gets an overview of the created multiple. In the second way, human spiritual effort cooperates with Grace to acquire truths (still thematizable) from the upper limit of predicative reason, which were previously unknown to him. In the third way, the soul is led exclusively by divine Grace above the possibilities of human faculties (with the suppression of the limits of reason) and reaches the joy of contemplation. The soul is enflamed in this gradual ascent by the *love* of God, the *admiration* for the superhuman truths promised in revelation and the desire to attain them, and the *joy* of reaching ecstasy.

De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis is a spiritual opusculum that helps to understand Richard's spiritual theology and the two treatises, *Beniamin minor* and *Beniamin maior*, with which he presents correspondence. The four degrees of *charity* (*divine love*), a central concept of Richardian spirituality, established here (Richard de Saint-Victor 1955, 126-176), are: (1) *caritas vulnerans* (wounding love) through which the divine will, manifested itself in the level of sensitivity, causes the soul to crave the supersensible and to renounce the sensible world. This is the love of Christ, which violently pierces the human soul and reorients it towards the only desirable object; (2) *caritas ligans* (the love that binds), when the speculative element of contemplation prevails over the affective one. The soul passes into this stage when it becomes seized with an unceasing ardor, and is entirely subjugated and chained to the desired object; (3) *caritas languens* (love that languishes), the state in which the maximum force of divine love makes the soul forget the world and itself in full ecstatic union with God, is the death of the soul in God; (4) *caritas deficiens* (love that annihilates) is the highest degree of charity, which crowns Richard's spiritual teaching: after the ecstasy, the soul, transformed by the Holy Spirit, will annihilate itself, yield to the divine will and centre on dedication, and will be modelled as an *imitation of Christ*, for the glory of God and the salvation of man. It is the rebirth of the soul in Christ. The first degree is the encounter with the self and the inner divine, the second corresponds to the ascent of the soul to God, the third to the transformation through the divine fusion, and the fourth to the renunciation of self through Christian humility.

Between the degrees and genres of contemplation and the degrees of charity, the following correspondences can be highlighted: the 1st degree of charity corresponds to the 1st degree and genres 1 and 2 of contemplation (the sensitive level); the 2nd degree of charity causes the soul

to be in the 2nd degree of contemplation of gender 3 and 4 (rational level); 3rd degree charity corresponds to ecstasy, i.e. contemplation of degree 3 and gender 5 and 6 (the purely intelligible, contemplative level); and charity of the 4th degree, that is, *the love of the neighbour*, does not find any correspondent among the degrees and genres of contemplation.

If until the 12th century theology was a glossed reading of the text of Scripture, and from then on the use of dialectical reason would be integrated into philosophical theology, a fact that would catalyse the systematic constructions of the following century, Richard of Saint Victor is a typical representative of this inflection point, his work being divided into and linking these two main directions. Thus, the theory of knowledge illustrated by him glossed in *Benjamin Minor* is applied as a method of rational demonstration in the treatise *De Trinitate*. Therefore, the two works presented here provide a complete overview of the trinitarian model of human experience developed by Richard, its analogy with the relationship between the Trinity's persons and its application to the legitimate demonstration of the highest epistemological truths. If his contemporaries usually comment on Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra*, Richard surpasses them through the systematic and rational attempt in which he forges and applies his own epistemological model, which has influenced the modern critique of knowledge.

Trinitarian doctrine – the application of the model of knowledge previously illustrated

The gnosiological model illustrated allegorically in the mystical work is brilliantly applied in the treatise *De Trinitate*, the only dogmatic treatise of the Victorine, consisting of a *Prologue* and *six Books*, in which Richard wants to reach a deep understanding of the plurality of persons in the unity of the divine substance. On the level of human experience we are dealing also with a trinitarian epistemological (and wide psychological) model, in which the human person corresponds to the divine substance, and its faculties of knowledge correspond to the three divine persons.

We will deal with two consecutive demonstrations: the first for the unity of God as a simple (uncompounded) supreme substance, and the second for God as a Trinity (tripersonal manifestation of the same divine essence). The mentioned *model of knowledge-contemplation* gives the background of Richardian demonstrations and guarantees the attainment of the truth. The analogy between human and divine is used here, because the demonstration is valid within the framework of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the dignities of existence, of the creature's participation at the Creator, in which reason is the closest to God and of similar essence to him. Likewise, the transition from knowledge to contemplation would not be possible if

the demonstration were not governed by the Augustinian principle *credo ut intelligam*, which Anselm also appropriated when he considered the role of the reckless, the one who is guided only by reason (*acies mentis*) and only in this way he can doubt the existence of God (Baumgarten 2003, 88-103). Saint Augustine takes the Plotinian idea of the convertibility of divine principles into functions of the soul (Plotinus 1984, 45-49) and forges in the Christian world the model of the human mind as a divine image (Saint Augustine 1962, 208-209): the nature of the spirit mirrors the divine essence, and the faculties of the mind - memory, understanding, love - are the image of the trinitarian life. This correspondence between the divine persons and the faculties of the rational soul enjoyed a prodigious hermeneutical career and reached Richard through the Augustinian tradition.

Richard begins with the demonstration of the divine existence as a simple supreme substance, following Anselm in the *Monologion*: all the attributes of created things (e.g. goodness) must participate at the supreme attributes, and their existence implies a supreme being, to which they belong. The supreme being exists by itself, which means identity between essence and existence, proper only to God. He resumes the Anselmian ontological argument and concludes: "In conclusion, nothing greater, nothing better than God can be conceived by God himself, nor can it be comprehended by his intelligence" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 86). The supreme substance is the only one that has its being from itself and from eternity and is the origin of all other existences. Next comes the demonstration of the identity between substance and divine attributes, an approach also carried out by Augustine (Saint Augustine 1962, 208-209, 223-225, 508-509). If humans do not possess absolute attributes, but only participate at them, divinity and divine attributes coincide, these being undistributed, belonging only to God and identical to him: if people have power, wisdom, etc., God is the *power*, is the *wisdom*. The plenitude of attributes make God complete, universally perfect, *supremely good* and *supremely happy*. God is *ineffable* and can only be understood analogically.

In the second part of the treatise, Richard demonstrates the Trinitarian divinity. The necessity of the plurality of persons in the unity of the divine substance is demonstrated on the basis of the fullness of charity, of inter-subjective spiritual love. Thus, the supreme goodness of God claims charity, the sharing of supreme divine love reciprocally with a partner of the same nature. However, supreme charity claims a third consubstantial co-lover, witness and co-participant in the same perfect love. Perfect inter-subjective love must therefore be shared in a Trinitarian structure: "Then, in order to be authentic, charity-love needs a plurality of beings; equally, in order to be perfect, it requires a Trinity of persons" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 128). Inspired by Augustine, the idea of perfect charity represents for Richard a

trace of the Trinity in the human soul. All three divine persons have identical essence, existence and attributes, so their way of being different will have to be found.

The Victorine further establishes the concept of *person* and the possibility of distinguishing the divine persons according to the differences of provenance. In order to distinguish the divine persons, two criteria must be used: of existence (what a thing is) and of origin (from where it has its fact of being that thing). Richard ingeniously finds the word *existentia*, which accounts for both criteria as follows: *sistere* means *to be substantially something* and *existere* means *to be substantially from someone*. Existence therefore means *substance and origin*, the first *property to be distributed*, the second *not to be distributed* (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 151-152). It follows that the divine persons must be distinguished by origin. The definition of the person formulated by Boethius is further discussed: “*individual substance of a rational nature*” (Boethius 2004, 36). He says that this is too general and applies rather to human nature, and corrects it as follows: “*a divine person is an incommunicable existence of the divine nature*” (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 163). The incommunicable existence is given by the indivisible personal property - provenance, and the rational nature is given by the only one divine substance.

The Trinitarian life is demonstrated in what follows by establishing the incommunicable property of each person by origin or manifestation. The special attention to determining what is proper to each person is an approach of Abelard, unlike his predecessors Augustine and Boethius (Thom 2012, 64), and Richard takes it further. Thus, the incommunicable property of the first divine person consists in the fact of existing by itself. The second person comes directly from the first, and the third, which must have a direct connection with both, comes directly from both, so it comes from the first both mediated and unmediated. More persons are not possible (they are not necessary), because from the fourth onwards their provenance mode would be common with that of the third. Thus: the first person does not come from someone else, but has someone who comes from her, the second comes from someone else and has someone who comes from her, and the third person comes from someone else, but does not have someone who comes from her. As the divine being is identical with the attributes, the three ways of provenance are just as many ways of manifestation, of conveying the attributes. The three divine persons are coequals: “It is certainly unquestionable that according to total perfection there is no difference of love or worth in the Trinity” (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 199).

At the end of the treatise, Richard is concerned with establishing the divine names as personal names, respectively finding proper names for the three divine persons, which are distinguished by origin or mode of

manifestation. As the creature is the mirror of the Creator, the divine persons will be named after the corresponding human kinship. Since unmediated provenance represents the highest kinship, that of filiation, the first two persons will be called *Father* and *Son*. The third person originates in a different way, and for it no kinship can be found, but a relationship of similarity. It will be called *Spirit* by analogy with the human spirit, that breath without which man does not live; similarly, the divine Spirit is a breath of love of the Father and the Son through which they communicate their supreme love to each other and can pour it out into human spirits. The Spirit is also called the *Gift* or the *Finger of God*, the Son is also called *Image* of the Father, *Word* of God, *Face of God's substance*. The Father is *Power*, the Son is *Wisdom*, and the Spirit is *Goodness*. The Father is *unborn*, the Son *born*, and the Spirit neither, but *proceeds* without begetting. There is one God as substance and three divine persons as modes of manifestation: "Without a doubt, in all of them, there is one and the same wisdom and consequently, one and the same substance" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 238).

The treatise *On the Trinity* shows that Richard joins the demonstrability of the Trinity tradition having as an instrument his proper trinitarian model of the functioning of knowledge. The dualism of the material and spiritual ontological levels can be comprehended through the trinity of the faculties of the human soul: senses, imagination and intellect. In this respect, Richard's theory of imagination acquires special significance because it is about defining the appropriate intermediary that connects the two extreme terms in the cognitive process. Even though he aims at intellectual contemplation, Richard insists a lot on the lower faculties, emphasizing the necessity of transforming vices into virtues and the correct use of the imagination as an intermediary between the soul and the world. Only in this way the gnosiological effort does not deviate from the truth.

Conclusions

Richard of Saint Victor, called by D. Poirel "the theologian of contemplation and the Trinity" (Poirel 2010, 6), is also *the philosopher of contemplation and the Trinity*, since both his mysticism and his trinitarian doctrine converge in a *knowledge-contemplation model* that establishes the rigors of cognitive and affective life that makes possible the work of human restoration through the ascent of the soul to God. Contemplation is only the last step of knowledge, so to be able to get there it is necessary to understand the human faculties of knowledge and how they operate. Until the religious (spiritual) experience is reached, we are dealing with an elaborate *gnosiology*.

Even if without the light of faith only the reckless can claim that reason would reach the truth, the fulfilment of the spiritual path is

conditioned by a very good understanding of the functioning of reason in relation to the other faculties of the soul, thus a knowledge of the possibilities and effectiveness of human experience. Through the distinction with which he knows to present clearly and thoroughly, using glosses to the Scriptures or reasonings, the whole and the elements of human experiences that produce knowledge, Richard proves to be a high-level thinker.

If the invisible divine realities are made visible to the intelligence through the mediation of the divine work of creation, the traces most suitable to mediate our knowledge of God are imprinted in his image, that is, in our rational soul. In order for the divine light to shine in the mirror of the soul, it must be cleaned, the soul must be purified.

Contemplation is at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge, after knowledge of things and self-knowledge. By considering the fact that the spirit that tries to reach the high knowledge of divine truths must first know itself, Richard adheres to the so-called *Christian Socratism*, initiated by St. Augustine and through which the self discovers itself as the image of divinity. Self-knowledge opens to the knowledge of otherness, up to radical otherness, divinity.

The sources that formed the Richardian thinking are diverse: the Scriptures, patristic writings, Latin classics, Augustine, Boethius, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena, Anselm, the School of Chartres, his Victorines colleagues (especially Hugo) and his brilliant contemporaries (in a special way Abélard) represent only a few influences visible. The taste for hierarchies, orders and trinitarian structures is a Neoplatonic infusion, and the same Neoplatonism is the environment in which medieval mysticism and mystical speculation develops. Greek patristics captures Plato through the thought of Philo of Alexandria and the Gnostic one, Clement of Alexandria and Origen develop the spirituality thus created which with Plotinus takes its classical form. It is transmitted in the Middle Ages with the addition of indirectly Aristotelianism through Porphyry, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Proclus, Boethius, Dionysius, Scotus Eriugena, Bernard of Clairvaux, Chartresians, Victorines, etc.

Richard continues Saint Anselm using the method of rational deduction initiated by the latter. The Victorine practices, like Anselm, a *revealed theology*. Even if his logical approach is a positive one, for the knowledge of the ineffable it must be followed by a negative understanding, and only after the synthesis of the positive with the negative can reason transcend into a higher register. This spiritual journey is an asceticism, and the final experience is a mystical one: not the divine falls under the concept, but the human soul is deified.

Saint Augustine is the one who inoculated Western thought with several paradigms that have changed the ages. Along with the concept

according to which the city of people is subordinate to the city of God and included in it, a concept that determined for a millennium the subordination of the state to the Church (Taubes 2009, 80), Augustine formulates, as I mentioned above, the analogy between human and divine: the cognitive faculties of the rational soul are the image of the perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Trinity. This thematization of the bishop of Hippo proved to be one whose validity transcends the spirit of the age, as it reveals an essential truth of the timeless human condition. Even secularized, it continues to preoccupy human thought, offering the possibility of the experience of a perfect knowledge in the indefinite limit between the actions of the faculties of knowledge, the same as the limit between the faculties and that something that transcends and encompasses them: Augustine discovers God in faith and in prayer, as being the one in the interiority of the self deeper than the self itself. This *depth of the soul* with function of transcendental origin of the human experience is an influential component of the Augustinian tradition, which, mediated by the Richardian approach, reaches the Eckhartian concept of *scintilla synderesis* (Libera 1998, 192-220). The inner divinity is one, but the manifestation through which we can experience it is in the trinitarian person of the Son. The Word is the divine spark from the soul and the guarantor of true knowledge; hence the capital importance of the understanding of the Trinity and the justification of the trinitarian analogies between human - divine, created - uncreated.

Thus, triadic models from the created world formulated by analogy with the activity of the Trinity's persons were built until the dawn of modernity. For instance, Kepler, the founder of the new astronomy, considers the world an image of God that symbolizes the Trinity (Koyré 1957, 58): the Sun is the Father, the sky is the Son, and the space between them is the Spirit. Although a promoter of modern science, he still has a model of the world inscribed in the tradition of Aristotelian scholasticism, a world created *ex nihilo* as a closed universe, which cannot be uniform, infinite or even indefinite, in which an infinite number of finite bodies are thoughtless and contradictory. For him, the phenomenal world is harmonious, regular, geometric, rational, in accordance with the image of the sky.

The Augustinian psychological model of the relationship between the faculties of the mind was the most fruitful and, metamorphosed and secularized, it is taken over by Kant, who establishes sensitivity, intellect and imagination as the faculties of knowledge. Formulated in secular frameworks or vice versa, such a model reveals the fact that Truth is ineffable, cannot be fixed by human faculties of knowledge, and a discursive knowledge can only approach it analogically; total experimentation is only possible through an exercise of the faculties beyond their partiality, in the limit between them, also the limit between them and their perfect, divine model, because simple, unitary and complete. Saint Anselm understands the

human condition very well when, in the *Proslogion*, he speaks of the intellectual experience of knowing God as that in which the thinking mind tries to comprehend him and ends up understanding and confessing that it itself is contained in him. This experience is that of passing from the concept of an object in general to that which can no longer be the object of any concept, because it is the comprehensive (“*continens*”) par excellence (Anselm of Canterbury 1995, 112).

Developing both a logical and psychological model of the Trinity (divine and human), Richard realizes that the correct operation of the imagination is of prime importance in the functioning of the trinitarian cognitive system, so he makes long analyses of its process and establishes three modes for it: “the first is the basic operation of imagination (*imaginatio*), the second is imagination directed by reason (*imaginatio per rationem disposita*), and the third is imagination which is mixed with understanding (*imaginatio intelligentiae permixta*)” (Palmén 2014, 11). The basic mode is called Bilha-Imagination and operates as a bridge between visible and invisible world, between fleshly senses (*sensus carnis*) and the eye of the heart (*oculus cordis*) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 103), so between sensitivity and conceptualizing reason, as long as without imagination, reason is unable to know anything. The objects with which imagination operate at this level are forms and similitudes, the material stored in memory can be provided to reason even in the absence of sensations and the operation can be both voluntary and involuntarily; therefore, the affective power of the human soul may change the content of imagination and so this can serve reason well or badly. The following two modes of imagination appear when reason (Rachel – *ratio*) tries to be fertile and desires wisdom (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 125). This is not yet possible without a moral reform, so the two sons of her slave Bilha are born, Dan and Naphtali, who represent the two forms of rational imagination (*imaginatio rationalis*) which fabricates new images on the basis of sensory material (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 133) and offer generalizations from individual images. This use of imagination, when reason tries to approach the rational principles of reality, is a necessary step to proceed toward invisible objects of contemplation. Until it can see through the pure understanding of contemplation, the soul needs to think with the help of imagination. If basic imagination is the instrument of the mind, rational imagination represents imagination’s activity and its “most important task [...] is to construct images which are related to the future, [...] concerning the punishments or rewards” (Palmén 2014, 103). Dan-Imagination is the first kind of speculation and the lower form of rational imagination, closest to the operation of the senses, but directed by reason. The human mind works in this register when based on a known image of a visible thing, creates new visible images, so their ontological status remains the same. A possible

eternal punishment can be understood according to the model of a real punishment, so that all possible evils can be imagined starting from real images (and physical perceptions) of earthly torments. The terrifying promise of eternal punishment is part of the spiritual life, so Dan-Imagination is an important part of personal moral reform. Naphtali-Imagination is the second kind of speculation and the highest form of rational imagination where alongside discursive reason, the contemplative intellect (intellectual understanding) is also involved to guide the functioning of the imagination and to lead the soul to contemplate invisible objects through visible images. The human mind tries to imagine and to understand the absolute good and the eternal reward, but these are beyond the capacity of human imagination and divine enlightenment is needed to understand them. This third form of imagination makes the leap from experiencing visible things to knowing the invisible or spiritual ones, so leads to a higher ontological register.

Richard includes divine intervention in knowledge precisely to legitimize the possibility of ordering affects and transforming them into virtues, the epistemological and ontological advance to the post-discursive contemplation of truth. The analysis he makes of the imagination as a faculty of connection between the sensible and the supersensible prepares it for a critique as a faculty of judgment. Medium term of a trinitarian model, imagination in turn operates trinitarian. The Victorine understand imagination as a key element in knowledge and innovates an authentic model in which the techniques of comparison (*comparatio*) and transference (*translatio*), as well as the differences between images (*species*) and similitudes (*similitudines*), validate analogical knowledge and therefore cognitive advance in both divine and human realities.

The model of knowledge-contemplation circulated in the work of Richard of Saint Victor announces the modern theory of knowledge, and Kant's critique best illustrates this: if the first *Critique* deals with the mode of operation of the faculties and the limits of predicative knowledge, i.e. that harmonization of affects and judgments necessary for the ascent to the summit of the soul, as presented by Richard, the third *Critique* speaks of the experience of the sublime, for Victorine the meeting of the soul with God at the summit.

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