

## *Ad altiora vel mirabiliora.* Richard of Saint Victor on Admiration and Affection

**Keywords:** affectivity, Richard of St. Victor, medieval humanism, mystical ecstasy

### Introduction

In *De contemplatione*, Richard of Saint Victor suggests that the term “affectivity,” or “affection” (*affectio*) should be understood twofold. He points out that the term “*affectio*” has a complex meaning; more precisely it refers not only to particular affections or emotions (such as joy, pleasure or anger), but also connotes a wider range of volitional psychic phenomena.<sup>1</sup> The term affection conno-

tes affects in the first sense, then, would encompass not only emotions, but also desires, cravings, decisions, intentions, etc.; in other words—the entire sphere of mental life which is separate from rationality (thinking, formulating rational judgments, calculating, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, by identifying virtue (*virtus*) with *affectio ordinata et moderata*,<sup>3</sup> Richard addresses the role that affection plays in

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<sup>1</sup> “In tertio huius contemplationis gradu consideramus rationalis animi voluntatem, multiplicem que eius affectionem”. Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, ed. J. Grosfillier, 2013 [Sous la règle de saint Augustin, 13], p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between rationality and affectivity see the second part of this article.

<sup>3</sup> “Cum enim nichil aliud sit uirtus quam affectio ordinata et moderata, ex intentione bona agitur ut sit affectio ordinata, et per discretionem efficitur ut fiat moderata”. Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 340.

a moral life. From among the heterogeneous set of affects, he selects a particular subset which he calls virtues. In this regard, he defines virtues (such as, for example, justice or moderation) as ordered and controlled affections.

Let us note that the problem concerning the concept of affectivity formulated within Richard's anthropology fits fully into the framework of Victorine spirituality which describes the inner life of man in its full complexity and density. The central issue of this spirituality is, as emphasized by Hugh St. Victor, the problem of the "restless heart of man",<sup>4</sup> and its main goal is the renewal of the human person. Thus, the spiritual transformation of man becomes a fundamental anthropological, psychological and theological problem for the Victorines. Hugh points out that "The subject matter of all divine scriptures is the works of human restoration," which plays out in what Dale M. Coulter refers to as "moral transformation" and "intellectual discovery".<sup>5</sup>

That is why, as Richard emphasizes, the spiritual transformation of a person concerns, above all, affections. As Ro-

bert Glenn Davis observes, the "nature of affect and its relationship to the intellectual faculty was a primary concern for the medieval interpreters of the *corpus* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, whose writings were formative for medieval mystical thought and practice".<sup>6</sup> Therefore, following Pseudo-Dionysius, Richard applies the idea that the path to wisdom leads through moral life. He justifies this by referring to allegories and biblical metaphors; his theoretical concept absorbs the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius that the three steps of purgation, illumination and perfection describe the process of transformation.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this process, anxiety and lack of control are replaced by peace and order.

As I will try to show in this paper, affections are both a vehicle and a tool for the spiritual transformation of a human being. The article consists of three parts. The first one will present briefly the historical context in which the school at the Abbey of St. Victor was founded and, more importantly, Richard's theoretical background. Since the topic has been developed quite widely by other scholars,<sup>8</sup> I will focus on a few of the most ba-

<sup>4</sup> M. Gorman, *Hugh of St. Victor*, in: *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. E. Garcia, T. B. Noone, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 324.

<sup>5</sup> D. M. Coulter, *Per visibilia ad invisibilia: Theological Method in Richard of St. Victor (d.1173)*, Belgium: Brepols, 2006, p. 23. See R. E Boéré. *A Clean Mirror: the Relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Richard of St. Victor*, A, MA thesis manuscript, Vancouver 2010, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> R. G. Davis, *The Seraphic Doctrine: Love and Knowledge in the Dionysian Hierarchy*, in: *The Weight of Love. Affect, Ecstasy, and Union in the Theology of Bonaventure*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2017, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> D. M. Coulter, *The Victorine Sub-structure of Bonaventure's Thought*, "Franciscan Studies", 2012, Vol. 70 (2012), pp. 406, 408.

<sup>8</sup> See *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. A. E. Matter, L. Smith, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, pp. 247-280; P. J. Healy, *The Mysticism of the School of Saint Victor*, "Church History" 1 (1932), pp. 211-221; R. Baron, *Hugues & Richard de Saint Victor*, Tournai: Bloud & Gay, 1961.

sic issues. The next two parts will deal with the problem of affection. Whereas the second part addresses the question of purifying affections and preparing them for ecstasy, the third part examines the topic of engaging affections in the experience of ecstasy itself. I will present Richard's general view of affectivity; I will focus on the tropological alle-

gory from *Beniamin maior* and use it as a point of departure to show how the transformation of affections becomes a necessary condition for Richard's moral transformation in preparation for mystical ecstasy. The purpose of the third (last) part is to address the question on how affections participate in mystical ecstasy and what role they play.

## I. Richard and St. Victor's School

The abbey of Saint Victor—founded by William of Champeaux—was a product of the enthusiasm for reform exhibited by two popes: Gregory VII and Urban II. One of the goals of this movement was to put a stronger emphasis on the renewal of the clergy, increase the intellectual and moral competences of clergymen and improve the quality of pastoral care.<sup>9</sup> Stephen Chase describes the School of St. Victor as a place where “the spiritual and contemplative exploration of the inner person [was] accomplished under the guidance, supervision, and love of the community intent on union with God through the imitation of Christ in order to become an example for others”.<sup>10</sup> William's new project raised so much hope that the school of Saint Victor received royal privileges as ear-

ly as 1113. The school's popularity attracted intellectuals from all over Europe, whilst its student body included, for instance, the theologian Hugh, the poet Adam and the mystic Richard.

There is widespread agreement among scholars that the most eminent philosopher of the Victorine school was Hugh, but Richard was the most prominent mystic. John of Toulouse, who wrote Richard's biography in the 17th century, claimed that Richard came to the abbey at the time when Gilduin (who inherited from Hugh) was its abbot. If that was the case, Richard would have come to the abbey by 1141.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, however, do not agree with this chronology and argue in favor of Richard's later arrival at the school, probably around 1145, but certainly earlier than 1155.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> H. Feiss, *Preaching by Word and Example*, in: *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. Ann E. Matter et al., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> S. Chase, *Contemplation and Compassion: The Victorine Tradition*, New York: Orbis 2003, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> R. Angelici, *Introduction to On the Trinity by Richard of St. Victor*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011, p. 5; See Ch. Evans, *Introduction to On the Trinity*, in: *Trinity and Creation*, ed. B. T. Coolman, D. M. Coulter, Victorine Texts in Translation, 1, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> Ch. Evans, *Introduction to On the Trinity*, p. 198; D. M. Coulter, *Per visibilia*, p. 21. Not only is it difficult to pin down the dates from Richard's life, but a similarly exact chronology of his works is almost impossible to establish. Clare Kirchner estimates that Richard wrote the following

Before discussing the issue of Richard's concept of affections, let us define briefly those threads in Richard's work that classify him as a "Victorine humanist". Dante Alighieri described Richard as a man who is "more than human" and placed him in *Paradise*.<sup>13</sup> As we will see, Richard noticed in a human being a potential ability to transcend his or her human nature, go beyond it, and become "more than man" while developing a close union with God. Given this, Richard is considered to be one of the most outstanding representatives of not only "Victorine humanism", but of the wider movement called the 12th century humanism. This movement<sup>14</sup>—initiated by Anselm of Bec and consolidated in the 12th century by, among others,

Peter Lombard—focused on the issues of human dignity and nobleness, the rationality of the world and the concept of a more human-like God. A distinctive feature of Victorine spirituality was the emphasis it put on the combination of Christian theology and classical humanism (ancient rhetoric, poetry etc.).<sup>15</sup> This feature can be found first and foremost in the writings of Richard, who methodically synthesized elements of Greek thought, especially Pseudo-Dionysius, with the Western tradition of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great. His writings focus on contemplation, the role of reason, virtuous actions of a person, beauty of the natural world and beauty of God.

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works between 1153 and 1165: *Liber exceptionem, Benjamin minor, De exterminatione mali et promotione boni, Benjamin major, De statu interioris hominis, De eruditione hominis interioris*, and many sermons. In turn, Richard's other works were written, as Kirchberger claims, between 1165 and the date of his death in 1173. They are: *De tribus appropriatis personis in Trinitate, De Trinitate, De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* and *Edictum super exitu*. However, not all researchers share Kirchberger's opinion and set an earlier date for the work: if Richard came to the abbey in the 1230s, an earlier date for the writings seems more likely. Despite the discrepancy in dates, it is generally agreed that *Benjamin minor* precedes *Benjamin Major* and both precede *De Trinitate*, whilst *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* was written towards the end of Richard's life. C. Kirchberger, *Introduction to Selected Writings on Contemplation*, by Richard of St. Victor, London: Faber and Faber, 1957, pp. 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* canto X:130-148.

<sup>14</sup> However, it should be borne in mind that in the Middle Ages humanism was not a "movement" in the same sense in which Renaissance humanism was a "movement". As C. Stephan Jaeger emphasizes, the term "medieval humanism" refers rather to several separate phenomena, which, while institutionally unrelated, were characterized by a similar attitude to the legacy of Cicero, Platonic philosophy, ancient ethics, etc. See C. S. Jaeger, *Victorine Humanism*, in: *A Companion to the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris*, ed. J. Mousseau, H. Freiss, Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 79-112.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Godfrey, right after the Gospels, most often referred to Seneca. See. F. Gasparri, *Philosophie et cosmologie: Godefroid de Saint-Victor*, w: *Notre-Dame de Paris: Un manifeste Chrétien (1160-1230)*, ed. M. Lemoine, Turnhout: 2004, pp. 119-142.

## 2. Affection as a tool of contemplation

Richard placed affectivity in the rational soul of a human being. Affectivity is thus an element of the human psyche and can be understood as comparable yet irreducible to reason (being parallel to it). Much like reason, affectivity participates in the moral and spiritual transformation of man. Richard argues that if man was created in the likeness and image of God, then the image is modeled on reason, but man's likeness to God lies rather in affectivity. As a result of the Fall, both the image and the likeness are doomed, but their beauty can be restored through spiritual transformation of man (God is beauty and man has to imitate beauty).<sup>16</sup> Affectivity is actively involved in this transformation.

The fullest and most detailed description of the role of affectivity in the process of human renewal can be found in Richard's work entitled *Beniamin minor*. Richard's work is a tropological interpretation. Stephen Chase describes it as "a system of moral progress" and "an allegory of the human person",<sup>17</sup> because

it includes psychological reflections on the spiritual development of a person on his or her way towards contemplation. In addition, Richard's thirteen-stage ascent was not only a spiritual, psychological and individual path to contemplation, but also the basis of the curriculum in which each stage was implemented in the study program.<sup>18</sup> Following Wade A. Carpenter, the steps of soul's ascent to contemplation are: "1) fear, 2) the contrition that follows fear, 3) the hope given upon our repentance, 4) the love that arises in response, 5) the prudence with that love looks ahead for dangers, 6) the disciplined will that arises from prudence, 7) temperance in prosperity, 8) patience in hardship, 9) the radiance that comes with all that above, 10) the zeal with which we so often respond to that excitement, 11) the shame that inevitably follows our making a pig's breakfast out of our zeal, 12) the discretion that we learn as a result of that shame, 13) contemplation—direct, non-discursive experience of grace".<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> William Otten stresses that, regarding the emphasis on the dignity of human nature, it should be remembered that medieval culture was more religious and theological (than Renaissance) and therefore more heteronomous. The thesis about human dignity stems from religious reasons (from Christianity itself); e.g. man is considered more passive and receptive in creative activity (art, technology), because in this way he realizes the likeness to God (i.e. man's activism is not strictly rooted in his manhood, but rather has its source in the divine element in it). See W. Otten, *From Paradise to Paradigm. A Study of Twelfth-Century Humanism*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> S. Chase, *Contemplation and Compassion: The Victorine Tradition*, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Didactic and educational aspects of *Beniamin minor* are pointed out by Wade A. Carpenter or Robert Glenn Davis, among others. Affects (as a function) not only had psychological or spiritual significance, but also constituted a rationale for the program of following Christ (it had a didactic and educational function). See W. A. Carpenter, *Jacob's Children and Ours: Richard of St. Victor's Curriculum for the Soul*, "Educational Horizons", Vol. 82, No. 1, p. 45; Robert Glenn Davis, *The Seraphic Doctrine: Love and Knowledge in the Dionysian Hierarchy*, in: *The Weight of Love. Affect, Ecstasy, and Union in the Theology of Bonaventure*, Fordham University Press, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> W. A. Carpenter, *Jacob's Children and Ours. Richard of St. Victor's Curriculum for the Soul*, "Educational

The steps of the soul to divine contemplation are described fully in Richard's interpretation of *Exodus* 35: 1-29 which tells the story of Jacob (Israel) and his family. Richard takes Jacob as a rational soul and dwells on his offspring. Jacob had two wives: Rachel, who represents reason, and Leah who represents affectivity. The consecutive births of Jacob's sons symbolize the births of every individual virtue. In the following parts of the text Richard describes Jacob's offspring in the context of the role played by individual virtues and spiritual powers in contemplation. However, rather than presenting all of them in their entirety, I will focus only on affectivity, i.e. on Leah and her descendants. Richard starts by explaining why he ranks affectivity so high in the hierarchy of spiritual powers. He admits that theologians seem to be skeptical about affections and prefer instead an intellectual type of spirituality. In response to this, he sketches an alternative view of spirituality by using the figure of Leah with her near-blindness and the status of an emotional outcast and an unloved wife.<sup>20</sup> However, as we will see, his concept of

spirituality also appears to be more intellectual than emotional. So, Richard offers to compare attitudes towards Rachel and Leah. In his opinion, everyone loves Rachel because everyone is able to appreciate reason, even those who are not intelligent enough (and have little reason). However, one cannot love justice without having justice, according to Richard. What is more, marriage with Leah, which represents here the appreciation of the sphere of affectivity, is much more demanding and difficult than man's love of wisdom. Work and effort in the sphere of affections require, among others, love for enemies or patient endurance of evil. On the other hand, effort in the sphere of reason (e.g. studying a topic, or reading an academic study) allows for distance and a lack of commitment.<sup>21</sup> An additional reason for prioritizing Leah is that Leah symbolizes justice. As Dale M. Coulter points out: "Prioritizing justice is necessary because the process of moral formation is the means by which wisdom gradually seeps into the soul and by which the soul positions itself through the proper ordering of the interior life to pursue wis-

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Horizons", Vol. 82, No. 1, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> "Sed videamus nunc quae sint instituta verae iustitiae, et inveniemus cur homines tantum detestantur connubia Liae. Quaerendum namque est cur fere omnes coniugia Liae tantopere abhorreant, qui amplexus Rachel tantum suspirant. Perfecta iustitia iubet inimicos diligere, parentes, propria quaeque relinquere, illata mala patienter ferre, oblatam gloriam ubique declinare. Sed ab huius mundi amatoribus quid stultius, quid laboriosius esse reputatur? Hinc est quod ab eis Lia et lippa creditur, et laboriosa vocatur. Lia namque laboriosa interpretatur. Magnus namque labor, sed non minor error videtur eis esse, in tribulatione gaudere, prospera mundi quasi pestem fugere. Sed quia copiam mundi ad necessitatem non respuit, et ad voluptatem non admittit, Liam lippam, non caecam vocant, quam in rerum iudicio errare putant". Richard de Saint-Victor, *Les Douze Patriarches (Beniamin minor)*, ed. J. Châtillon, M. Duchet-Suchaux, J. Longère (*Sources Chrétiennes* 419), Cerf, p. 94.

dom”.<sup>22</sup> The interpretation Coulter offers sheds a lot of light on the psychic functions symbolized by Leah. The path to wisdom leads through the ordering of affects (emotions) so that they support and develop wisdom. This ordered, harmonious arrangement of the mental acts of the human affective sphere is justice and it is governed by virtues.

Following Richard’s tropological analysis: Reuben is the first son of Leah. He is “the son of vision” and represents insight. Next, Simeon is born, the second son of Leah and Jacob. Simeon represents regret and repentance. Because of the initial insight, the soul saw its own shortcomings and sins, so that repentance could occur. Then Levi is born. He represents hope. After the birth of her first three sons (representing vision, repentance and hope), Leah gave her husband a servant girl named Zelpha who represents sensory experience. The first son of Zelpha and Jacob is Judah who heralds the birth of pure love in the soul. He also represents ordered love, i.e., love of God as the highest good. In other words, when rationality embraces sensory experience and sensory experience is full of reason, pure love is born. Then, as a result of the union of Jacob (rational soul) and Zelpha (sensory experience), two sons are born: Gad symbolizes self-control, and Asher stands for patience.<sup>23</sup> Richard interprets Gad as happi-

ness and Asher as a blessing. Gad is born first, because self-control and the ability to temper desires must be preceded by the ability to avoid external threats. What is the relationship of the three sons, Judah, Gad, and Asher? Richard reads the story in the context of his theory of contemplation. And so, the first step in contemplation is love for God (Judah), which causes aversion to worldly pleasures. To resist temptation towards them, the soul must develop self-control (Gad) and patience (Asher). Then Isaacar is born, and he represents pure joy and sweetness, but also the beginning of ecstasy. Isaacar symbolizes, following Richard, spiritual freedom, order, moderation, self-control and internal harmony. Also, Isaacar represents the act of preparing for mystical ecstasy as he signifies purification of the affective realm. However, the path to spiritual transformation does not end with sweetness and joy for, after Isaacar, Zebulon and Dinah are born. Zebulon represents hatred of vices<sup>24</sup>, a “perfect hatred”, as Richard calls it. Carpenter proposes a pejorative interpretation of the figure of Zebulon as a zealot, one of the “eternally angry, who loves humanity but hates humans”.<sup>25</sup> However, as Richard points out, Zebulon’s hatred is directed at both one’s own sins and the sins of others: it does not cause cruelty, but compassion. Zebulon’s zeal is not aimed

<sup>22</sup> D. M. Coulter, *The Victorine Sub-structure of Bonaventure’s Thought*, p. 401.

<sup>23</sup> “Isti sunt Gad et Aser, duo filii Zelphae, rigor uidelicet abstinentiae, et vigor patientiae”. Richard de Saint-Victor, *Les Douze Patriarches (Benjamin minor)*, p. 158.

<sup>24</sup> “Hinc est quod post Ysachar Zabulon nascitur qui habitaculum fortitudinis interpretatur. Quid enim per Zabulon intelligimus, nisi odium vitiorum? Odium bonum, odium ordinatum, odium vitiorum”. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> W. A. Carpenter, *Jacob’s Children and Ours*, p. 51.

at punishing others for their sins, but rather at caring for the weak. He is the protector of the weak. After Zebulon, Dinah is born and she represents shame.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the spiritual journey culminates in the simultaneous death of Rachel, who symbolizes reason, and the birth of Benjamin, the symbol for contemplation.<sup>27</sup>

While the main trope of Richard's mystical theology is the issue of spiritual renewal, the key to understand it is the fact that human transformation takes place due to affectivity. More precisely, this renewal is accomplished through the reordering of affectivity, and this new order is brought about by virtues. According to Richard, this is because sin has its source in disordered affections. Let us now focus on the very beginning of the process of ordering affectivity. The process originates with love (represented by Judah). If someone experiences love, he or she does not voluntarily do evil. Judah, however, represents pure love: God is the proper object of love-affectation, and all the work of renewing a human being, transforming his or her affectivity, consists in separating affection from what is pleasant to arrive at what is right. This process is symbolized by successive descendants on Leah's side who symbolize individual virtues and affections: patience, self-control, sweetness, aversion to defects, or shame. Let

us also note that affectivity which leads towards ecstasy (contemplation) is not—according to Richard's interpretation—sweet and peaceful as it involves more violent affects such as hatred (represented by Zebulon). Perfect hatred towards vices and sins can also symbolize intense resistance, a kind of passion in the form of strength required to fight. Patience or self-control are not enough to fight against the tendency to evil; sometimes resistance to evil requires strength, activity and struggle. The figure of Zebulon can also symbolize the effort of spiritual improvement<sup>28</sup> that is worth taking. Richard's interpretation of the biblical Zebulon and his role sheds more light on the processes which take place within affectivity. The act of purifying or harmonizing affects does not consist in denying or suppressing them. Rather, Richard shows how strong negative emotions such as anger and hatred can be manipulated to serve spiritual purposes. He also warns of what will happen if human affectivity remains disordered and chaotic. Excessive fear often falls into despair; excessive sadness into bitterness; immoderate hope turns into self-conceit; excessive love into flattery; unnecessary joy into disintegration; and unbridled anger into rage.<sup>29</sup>

Affectivity plays a key role in shaping a human person (and ultimately enables one to see God), as long as the practice

<sup>26</sup> Richard de Saint-Victor, *Les Douze Patriarches (Beniamin minor)*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>27</sup> D. M. Coulter, *The Victorine Sub-structure of Bonaventure's Thought*, p. 401.

<sup>28</sup> Richard de Saint-Victor, *Les Douze Patriarches (Beniamin minor)*, p. 208.

<sup>29</sup> "Caute ergo circa omnes debet custodiri, ut non solum sint ordinati, sed etiam moderati. Timor enim nimius saepe cadit in desperationem, dolor nimius in amaritudinem, spes immoderata in praesumptionem, amor superfluous in adulationem, laetitia supervacua in dissolutionem, ira intemperata in furorem". *Ibid.*, p. 280.



virtues results in a transformation of affectivity. The allegorical structure from *Beniamin minor* shows that properly developed virtues organize emotionality and, consequently, bring happiness. What is more, Richard seems to claim that seeing God is transformative for man, i.e. man does not see or experience God passively, but rather transforms and changes himself or herself. Indeed, the experience of purifying affectivity in preparation for seeing God also has an ethical meaning. I have already mentioned that the characteristic feature of Richardian ethics is that it focuses not so much on individual human actions or deeds as on the inner transformation of a person. However, it is worth noting that such transformation—in line with Richard's postulate—should result in actions taken together with other people. Citing Christ, Richard explains that we should imitate His obedience and, after the stage of purifying the soul of disordered affects, return to an active life and lead others, by a good example, to God.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the achieved stage of spiritual development is not only reflected in inner morals, but also in social life (including the “external man”), i.e. in the form of harmonious gestures, elegant body arrangement, etc. In other words, emotional balance and harmony (as an expression of spiritual development) can already be seen in the physi-

cal and social aspects of human life. C. Stephen Jaeger claims that the emphasis on gestures and the physical arrangement of the body or the appropriate greeting of guests are to be understood as signs of hospitality, restraint and moral order not only of the welcoming person, but also at the level of the entire school at the Abbey.<sup>31</sup> However, there is disagreement among scholars regarding the direction of these changes. Is external harmony an effect or a result of internal balance? In this regard, Jaeger argues that the prerequisite for harmonizing affectivity is the control of the body and its gestures; in other words, the body and the superficial must be controlled first before the affective sphere can be managed. Grover A. Zinn, in turn, notes that the appropriate body arrangement is already the result of changes made “inside”, i.e. in sensuality, imagination, etc.<sup>32</sup> Hugh of St. Victor's in *De institutione novitium* describes the relationship between human mind and physicality, suggesting that the direction of influence is two-sided: “mental instability is born from disordered body members, so when the body is disciplined, the mind is hardened to steadiness, but on the other hand the inner discipline allows the limbs of the body to be regulated” (*interior namque est custodia que ordinata servat exterius corporis membra*).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> R. E. Boéré, *A Clean Mirror: the Relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Richard of St. Victor*, MA thesis manuscript, Vancouver 2010, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> C. S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p. 152.

<sup>32</sup> G. A. Zinn, *Personification Allegory and Visions of Light in Richard of St. Victor's Teaching on Contemplation*, “University of Toronto Quarterly” 46 (1977), p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> “Sicut enim de inconstantia mentis nascitur inordinata motio corporis, ita quoque, dum corpus

### 3. Affectivity in contemplation

While *Beniamin minor* is the work which describes the process of ordering, purifying and harmonizing affections, *Beniamin maior* (*De contemplatione*) discusses the issue of contemplation itself and focuses on the involvement of affections in contemplation and meditation. Let us note, however, that “contemplation” and “meditation” are not synonymous terms in Richardian anthropology and refer to two different psychic acts. Meditation is a study and reflection that requires intellectual effort. Contemplation, in turn, is “the fruit of meditation”. It is understanding, and it no longer requires the discursive work of the intellect.<sup>34</sup>

In his presentation of the role of affectivity in contemplation, Richard focuses primarily on *mentis excessus*—the transcendence of mind or ecstasy. *Mentis excessus* has three sources: piety, wonder and exaltation. Let us focus on the last two because—as it seems—they are connected in such a way that one can le-

ad to the other (surprise to exaltation). In addition, as we will see, descriptions of the Richardian concept of ecstasy and affective transformation show that the concept was thoroughly natural and intellectual.

Richard is the first author to have focused on the role of *admiratio* in perceiving God, linking it to the suspended mind: “contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa” (*Beniamin maior* 1.4). The starting point of ecstasy is wonder.<sup>35</sup> The more we wonder about something new (for instance, new knowledge acquired as a result of studies), the more we pay attention to it. The more we pay attention to it, the more we learn about it. Thus wonder transforms itself into attention (concentration) and concentration turns into contemplation, that is, the mindful insight into the object. Throughout this experience the mind transcends,<sup>36</sup> although the experience it-

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per disciplinam stringitur, animus ad constantiam solidatur. Et paulatim intrinsecus mens ad quietem componitur, cum per discipline custodiam mali motus eius foras fluere non sinuntur. Integritas ergo uirtutis est, quando per internam mentis custodiam ordinate reguntur membra corporis. Interior namque est custodia que ordinata seruat exteriora corporis membra”. Hugo de Sancto Victore, *De institutione novitiorum*, cap.: 10 (*Quid sit disciplina et quantum valeat*), ed. H.B. Feiss et P. Sicard (Sous la règle de saint Augustin, 3, 1997), p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione* (*Beniamin maior*), p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> According to Caroline Walker Bynum, wonder in medieval culture had a strong cognitive component, because surprise only arises in a situation of incomplete understanding or incomplete knowledge. It was both a stimulus and an encouragement to study. See C. W. Walker Bynum, *Wonder*, in: *Metamorphosis and Identity*, New York: Zone, 2001, pp. 72-75.

<sup>36</sup> “Quis autem nesciat inde fieri admirationem, cum aliquid cernimus preter spem, et supra estimationem? Novitas itaque visionis et rei uix credibilis adducere solet admirationem mentis, quando aliquid incipit uideri, quod vix possit credi. Ille igitur mentis excessus qui ex admiratione oritur, attende quam conuenienter describatur, in eo quod dicitur: <Que est ista que progreditur quasi aurora consurgens?> Quid est aurora, nisi lux nova, tenebris que permixta? Et unde, queso, admiratio, nisi ex inopinato incredibili que spectaculo? Habet itaque ipsa admiratio lucem subitam tenebris que permixtam, lucem visionis cum quibusdam reliquiis incredulitatis ambiguitatis que

self is natural and psychological. Finally, admiration appears as a result of a distinction Richard makes between *cogitatio*, *meditatio* and *contemplatio*. As Valentina Attura and Alice Bourke point out, Richard “believes that to proceed from meditation to contemplation, the contemplator must remain in an extended moment of *admiratio* to enable ascension on the ladder of spiritual *sensorium*”.<sup>37</sup> The Latin word *admiratio*, which is Richard’s key concept for his theory of contemplation in *Beniamin maior*, means the special kind of gaze which is fixed and directed toward an object of longing.<sup>38</sup> Admiration “denotes a selective and determined vision, which is directed upward”. The instant of *suspensio mentis* exists at the moment of passage from the meditative state to the contemplative state during an act of prolonged concentration.<sup>39</sup>

Let us also bear in mind one more element of Richard’s concept of ecstasy: according to Jaeger, the passage from *De contemplatione* (*Beniamin maior*) describing the path which leads from curiosi-

ty through meditation (studying) up to admiration in ecstasy is important since it shows that the catalyst of mystical ecstasy is not a supernatural power, but only an object that is new and unknown to the mind (*novitas*).<sup>40</sup> In this sense, Richard’s mystical ecstasy is first mediated (unification with God is triggered by an intermediary element), and then subjected to a kind of sublimation whereby natural emotions or affective acts (e.g. wonder) are transformed and “elevated” (*elevatio*).<sup>41</sup> The hypothesis that Richard’s description from *De contemplatione* which concerns the transition from natural affective states (such as joy) to religious ecstasy describes the process of sublimation is presented in detail and elaborated by Jaeger in his essay on *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*. Jaeger defines sublimation as the psyche’s ability to be dazzled in the face of objects it recognizes as great, and its ability to adjust (increase) to the greatness of the things it contemplates.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Richard’s mystical ecstasy is an intermediary process which starts from

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tenebris, ita ut modo mirabili mens absque dubio videat quod credere vix valeat. Sed rei novitatem quanto magis miramur, tanto diligentius attendimus, et quanto attentius perspicimus, tanto plenius cognoscimus. Crescit itaque ex admiratione attentio, et [ex] attentione cognitio. Mens itaque velud aurora consurgit, que ex visionis admiratione paulatim ad incrementa cognitionis proficit”. Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 532.

<sup>37</sup> V. Atturo, A. Bourke, *Contemplating Wonder: “Ad-miratio” in Richard of St. Victor and Dante*, “Dante Studies”, No. 129 (2011), p. 108

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>40</sup> C. S. Jaeger, *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*, in: *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, Palgrave Macmillan: The New Middle Ages Series, 2010, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 524.

<sup>42</sup> C. S. Jaeger, *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*, p. 20. Jaeger also argued that Bernard of Clairvaux believed that the ultimate pursuit of sublimation, i.e. transformation of man into something higher that surpasses him, is an inherent feature of human nature, and that Christ came into the world in order to prove that such a transformation is possible and desirable.

visible things in order to arrive at what is invisible, mysterious and miraculous.<sup>43</sup>

It is true that the reference to sensuality (what is visible) is characteristic of the medieval culture, but it gains special importance in the period when Richard of St. Victor lived. A taste for the magical, miraculous, mysterious etc. was spreading in Latin and vernacular literature since the 12th century, as evidenced in France and England by an extraordinary surge of interest for a new style of narrative describing the experience of knights. An analogous description of the transition from the visible to the supernatural in mystical contemplation can be found in abbot Suger of St. Denis: he describes contemplation that begins with admiration for church ornaments (jeweled crosses, elements of church decorations made of gold and bronze, etc.) and is supposed to lead to mystical ecstasy of a religious nature.<sup>44</sup> The common basis of Suger and Richard's perspectives is their emphasis on the perception of what is visible, material and sensual as a path to wonder<sup>45</sup> and, ultimately, delight; the mediation of the visible between sensuality and supernaturality becomes an essential characteristic of the 12th-century spiritual and aesthetic mindset and is clearly present in the work of the Victorines.

This kind of perception that is able to grasp the supernatural in a pile of sensual matter is fully described in Richard's commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John.<sup>46</sup> He distinguishes four degrees of perception. The first degree is the perception of simple matter, when one looks at the altar and sees the elaborate material decorations made of bronze or gold, etc. The second degree is the intellectual perception of matter, and the third degree is the perception of the truth hidden under material things. The fourth degree—unavailable even to artists—is the perception of pure and naked Divine reality. Madeline H. Caviness draws a parallel between Richard's description and the description of stained glass windows in the basilica in St. Denis.<sup>47</sup> Both thinkers—Richard and Suger—are inspired by the work of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite and his metaphysics of light, so the Areopagite is most likely the common source for this concept.<sup>48</sup>

The ultimate goal of the sublimation of affectivity is religious. The distance between man and God could be partially abolished under two conditions. First, when God "manifests" Himself in the visible, for example in the aesthetical structure of a medieval cathedral. Second, when the senses and

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> See Ch. J. Organ, *Divine Showings and the Efficacy of Symbols in the Minds of Suger of St. Denis and Richard of St. Victor*, Ma thesis, Regent University, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Richardus a Sancto Victore, *In Apocalypsim Joannis*, ed. Migne, PL, CXCVI, cols. 686-87.

<sup>47</sup> M. H. Caviness, "The Simple Perception of Matter" and the Representation of Narrative, ca. 1180-1280, "Gesta", vol. 30, no 1 (1991), pp. 54-55.

<sup>48</sup> See the discussion between Abbot Suger of St. Denis and Bernard of Clairvaux on the role of church decorations in J. Fuehrer, *Suger et Bernard de Clairvaux*, in: *Suger en question. Regards croisés sur Saint-Denis*, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Muenchen 2004, pp. 81-93.

affections are “elevated” (to use Richard’s term).<sup>49</sup> As a result, emotional symmetry occurs when the affectivity of a person (e.g. a visitor to a cathedral) corresponds with the object that triggered the emotional response.<sup>50</sup> The relationship of man with God which is mediated by nature (visibility and sensuality) is an essential feature of Victorine humanism. The relationship can be called a trilogy, the elements of which—nature, God, a human being—are not separate segments, but parts of one complex reality. This trope appears clearly, for example, in Hugh’s *Didascalion*; he shows that the principles of nature, whose author and creator is God, are the key to understand humanity, which, in turn, is a reflection of God.

Wonder turns into exaltation, i.e. joy, joyful affection, sweetness and enthusiasm. Exaltation is also the second source of ecstasy, according to Richard. The process of transitioning from exaltation to ecstasy takes place as follows: when a person experiences joyful excitement and this affect increases in strength and intensity, it may become excessive and “surplus”. Richard compares this experience to drinking a huge portion of a sweet drink (the mystical “drink”, however, has purifying and detoxifying properties). As a result, a person intoxicated with such sweet-

ness forgets his or her present and past identity, being carried away by ecstasy in a state of overwhelming happiness. The person’s experience (exaltation and joy) is turned into a kind of supernatural and otherworldly affect, a *tripudium* or dance.<sup>51</sup>

Richard uses two Latin terms in this very context: “*iucunditas*” and “*felicitas*”. The former means joy that is the beginning of ecstasy, and it is a natural psychological affective experience. When *iucunditas* is elevated and intensified, it transforms into *felicitas*, which is the final supernatural and religious affection. In other words, *iucunditas* is a tool which leads towards *felicitas*.

The affectivity involved in ecstasy causes mind expansion as the mind detaches from itself; consequently, the mind reaches a higher mystical reality, characterized by a greater degree of miracle (*ad altiora vel mirabiliora ducitur*).<sup>52</sup>

Richard himself uses the metaphor of light to describe the changes which take place in the human mind during ecstasy. He compares the mind to the light of dawn: as time passes, the narrow streak of pale dawn light turns into bright morning sunlight; likewise, the mind, initially dimly illuminated, eventually begins to shine with full daylight. Starting from this suggestive image, Richard draws attention to a certa-

<sup>49</sup> Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 524.

<sup>50</sup> C. S. Jaeger, *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> “Sic utique sic humana intelligentia diuino lumine irradiata, dum in intellectibilium contemplatione suspenditur, dum in eorum admiratione distenditur, quanto semper ad altiora vel mirabiliora ducitur, tanto amplius, tanto copiosius dilatatur, et unde infimis remotior, inde in semetipsa purior, et ad sublimia subtilior invenitur”. Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 532; see C. S. Jaeger, *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*, p. 20.

in paradox: the mind (*intelligentia*) under the influence of full light remains the same, but at the same time it is not the same mind (*ut ipsa iam non sit ipsa*), it is no longer “the same man” (*iam non sit humana*), but becomes “more than human” (*efficitur plus quam humana*), it becomes a “miraculous transformation”.<sup>53</sup> Just as dawn light finally expands into morning light, so the mind expands its own nature and abilities.<sup>54</sup> What is interesting, affectivity

is the vehicle of expansion and transformation of the human mind. *Mentis excessus* consists in the fact that, under the influence of ecstasy, the mind is transformed into an unearthly affect that is all-embracing and total (*et in supermundanum quemdam transformata affectum, tota supra semetipsam eat*).<sup>55</sup> As Richard writes, the human mind ceases to be fully human: Jaeger calls this process transhumanization.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

As Wade A. Carpenter points out: “In a synthesis remarkable for an era in which the affective appeal of the Franciscans and Cistercians contended with the intellectual rigor of the Benedictines and Dominicans, Richard depicted affection as leading to intelligence, the two combining to make wisdom”.<sup>57</sup> The concept of affects and affectivity in the works of Richard of St. Victor is certainly developed in the religious context: Richard presents in detail the process through which affects are purified and modified, and finally “raised” in such a way that they correspond adequately

to the object of their reference. As a result, there is an “emotional symmetry” between the subject of affections (a human person) and their (divine) object. The Victorine *signum specificum* of the concept of affectivity lies in Richard’s claim that the stimulus and catalyst for the sublimation of affects should be the visible, sensual and material world. His attachment to the thought that in the natural world one can find traces of what is divine partly resembles the aesthetic vision of Suger of St. Denis, and fully complies with the postulate formulated by Hugh that by learning

<sup>53</sup> “Et sicut matutina lux crescendo desinit non quidem esse lux, sed esse lux matutina, ut ipsa aurora iam non sit aurora, ita humana intelligentia ex dilatationis sue magnitudine quandoque accipit ut ipsa iam non sit ipsa, non quidem ut non sit intelligentia, sed ut iam non sit humana, dum modo mirabili mutatione que incomprehensibili efficitur plus quam humana, dum, gloriam Domini speculando, in eandem imaginem transformatur a claritate in claritatem tanquam a Domini Spiritu”. Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De contemplatione (Beniamin maior)*, p. 534.

<sup>54</sup> “Aurora siquidem paulatim elevatur, elevando dilatatur, dilatando clarificatur, sed miro modo dum tandem in diem desinit, per promotionis sue incrementa ad defectum venit, et unde accipit ut maior sit inde ei accedit tandem que accidit, ut omnino non sit”. Ibid, p. 532.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> C. S. Jaeger, *Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime*, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> W. A. Carpenter, *Jacob’s Children and Ours*, p. 49.

about the world one also discovers God in the world. Richard's concept of affects is therefore not only naturalistic (affects are caused by what is natural),

but also intellectual (the starting point is curiosity, the affective-cognitive state).

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## *Ad altiora vel mirabiliora.* Ryszarda od św. Wiktora koncepcja zachwyty i afektu

**Słowa kluczowe:** afektywność, Ryszard od św. Wiktora, średniowieczny humanizm, mistyczna ekstaza.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie i omówienie koncepcji afektywności w ujęciu Ryszarda od św. Wiktora. Dokładniej, artykuł próbuje pokazać, w jaki sposób afektywność jest płaszczyzną, platformą i jednocześnie narzędziem w duchowej przemianie człowieka. W pierwszej części omówione zostanie tło historyczne powstania szkoły Św. Wiktora, a w szczególności zostanie ukazana sylwetka samego Ryszarda. Kolejne dwie części będą dotyczyły problemu afektów: oczyszczenia afektów i przygotowania ich do ekstazy (część druga) oraz anga-

żowania afektów podczas ekstazy (część trzecia). Artykuł przedstawia ogólne rozumienie afektywności przez Ryszarda. Następnie artykuł skupia się na alegorii tropologicznej z dzieła *Beniamin maior* i pokazuje, jak przemiana uczuciowości staje się warunkiem koniecznym przemiany moralnej w koncepcji Ryszarda i w konsekwencji – przygotowania do mistycznej ekstazy. Celem trzeciej części jest odpowiedź na pytanie, w jaki sposób afekty uczestniczą w mistycznej ekstazie i jaką rolę odgrywają w tym zakresie.