

## QUESTION 180

### The Contemplative Life

Next we have to consider the contemplative life. And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Does the contemplative life belong only to the intellect, or does it reside in the affections as well? (2) Does the contemplative life involve the moral virtues? (3) Does the contemplative life consist in just a single act or in many acts? (4) Does the contemplative life involve the consideration of any sort of truth whatsoever? (5) Could a man's contemplative life in our present state be elevated all the way up to the vision of God? (6) What about the movements of contemplation assigned by Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4? (7) What about the delight that belongs to contemplation? (8) What about the duration of contemplation?

#### Article 1

##### Does the contemplative life contain anything that belongs to the affections, or does it reside wholly in the intellect?

It seems that the contemplative life contains nothing that belongs to the affections, but resides wholly in the intellect (*vita contemplativa nihil habeat in affectu, sed totum in intellectu*):

**Objection 1:** In *Metaphysics 2* the Philosopher says, "The end of contemplation is truth." But truth belongs wholly to the intellect. Therefore, it seems that the contemplative life resides totally in the intellect.

**Objection 2:** In *Moralia 6* Gregory says, "Rachel, whose name means *the principle as seen* (*visum principium*), signifies the contemplative life." But the seeing of principles properly belongs to the intellect. Therefore, the contemplative life properly belongs to the intellect.

**Objection 3:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says that the contemplative life involves "being at rest from exterior action." But the affective power, i.e., the appetite, inclines one toward exterior actions. Therefore, it seems that the contemplative life does not in any way belong to the affective power.

**But contrary to this:** In the same place Gregory says, "The contemplative life retains, with one's whole mind, charity with respect to God and neighbor, and it adheres to the sole desire for the Creator." But as was established above (*ST 1-2*, q. 25, a. 2 and q. 26, a. 2), desire and love belong to the affective or appetitive power. Therefore, the contemplative life contains something that belongs to the affective or appetitive power.

**I respond:** As has been explained (q. 179, a. 1), the life that is said to be contemplative belongs to those who are intent mainly on the contemplation of truth. Now as was established above (*ST 1-2*, q. 12, a. 1), intending is an act of the will, since intention has to do with the end, which is the object of the will. And so as regards *the very essence of its action*, the contemplative life belongs to the *intellect*, but as regards *what moves the intellect to such an operation*, the contemplative life belongs to the *will*, which, as was explained above (*ST 1*, q. 82, a. 42 and *ST 1-2*, q. 9, a. 1), moves all the other powers, and the intellect as well, to their acts.

Now the appetitive power moves an individual to look at a thing, whether by means of the senses or the intellect (*vel sensibiliter vel intelligibiliter*)—sometimes (a) because of his love for the thing seen, since, as Matthew 6:21 says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is as well," and sometimes (b) because of his love for the cognition itself that he pursues on the basis of his having looked. And this is why Gregory bases the contemplative life on charity with respect to God; more specifically, an individual is inflamed by the love of God to observe His beauty. And since each individual delights when he has arrived at what he loves, it follows that the contemplative life terminates in delight, which exists in the affections and by which the love is also intensified.

**Reply to objection 1:** By the very fact that truth is the end of contemplation, it has the character of

a desirable and lovable and delightful good. And on this score it belongs to the appetitive power.

**Reply to objection 2:** The love of the first principle, viz., God, incites one to the very vision of Him. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Once all cares have been set aside, the contemplative life is on fire to see the face of the Creator.”

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained, the appetitive power not only moves the corporeal members to exercise exterior actions, but also moves the intellect to exercise the operation of contemplation.

## Article 2

### Do the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life?

It seems that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life:

**Objection 1:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “The contemplative life retains, with one’s whole mind, charity with respect to God and neighbor.” But all the moral virtues, which are such that precepts of the law are given with respect to their acts, are traced back to love of God and neighbor, since, as Romans 13:10 says, “Love is the fulfillment of the law.” Therefore, it seems that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life.

**Objection 2:** The contemplative life is ordered mainly toward the contemplation of God; for in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Once all cares have been set aside, the contemplative life is on fire to see the face of the Creator.” But no one can reach this point except through cleanness (*munditia*), which is caused by the moral virtues; for Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,” and Hebrews 12:14 says, “Pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one shall see God.” Therefore, it seems that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life.

**Objection 3:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “The contemplative life is beautiful in the mind,” and this is why it is signified by Rachel, of whom Genesis 29:17 says, “She was beautiful of face.” But beauty of mind has to do with the moral virtues, and mainly with temperance, as Ambrose points out in *De Officio* 1. Therefore, it seems that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life.

**But contrary to this:** The moral virtues are ordered toward exterior actions. But in *Moralia* 6 Gregory says that the contemplative life involves “being at rest from exterior action.” Therefore, the moral virtues do not belong to the contemplative life.

**I respond:** There are two ways in which something can belong to the contemplative life: (a) *as part of its essence (essentialiter)* and (b) *as disposing one for it (dispositively)*.

Now the moral virtues do not belong to the contemplative life *as part of its essence*. For the end of the contemplative life is the consideration of truth. But as the Philosopher puts it in *Ethics* 2, in the case of the moral virtues “knowledge”—which pertains to the consideration of truth—“has little weight.” Hence, in *Ethics* 10 he claims that the moral virtues belong to *active* happiness, but not to *contemplative* happiness.

On the other hand, the moral virtues do belong to the contemplative life in the sense of disposing one for it (*dispositively*). For the act of contemplating, in which the contemplative life consists essentially, is impeded both (a) by strong passions, through which the soul’s attention is drawn away from intelligible things to sensible things, and (b) by exterior disturbances. But the moral virtues impede strong passions and quiet down the disturbances caused by exterior distractions. And so the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life in the sense of disposing one for it.

**Reply to objection 1:** As has been explained, the contemplative life has its motive on the part of the affections and, accordingly, the love of God and neighbor is required for the contemplative life. However, moving causes do not enter into the essence of the thing [caused], but instead effect a

disposition for it and bring it to completion. Hence, it does not follow that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life as part of its essence.

**Reply to objection 2:** Sanctity (*sanctimonia*), i.e., cleanness, is caused by the virtues which deal with the passions that impede the purity of one's reasoning (*quae est circa passiones impediens puritatem rationis*).

Peace, on the other hand, is caused by justice, which has to do with operations—this according to Isaiah 32:17 (“The work of justice is peace”)—namely, because an individual who refrains from injuring others eliminates occasions for quarrels and disturbances. And so the moral virtues dispose one for the contemplative life insofar as they cause peace and cleanness.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 145, a. 2), beauty consists in a sort of clarity and due proportion.

Now both of these are rooted in reason (*radicaliter in ratione invenitur*), which involves both a light that makes things manifest and also putting together a due proportion in other things. And so in the contemplative life, which consists in an act of reason, beauty is found *in its own right and essentially* (*per se et essentialiter*). Hence, Wisdom 8:2 says of the contemplation of wisdom, “I have become a lover of her form.”

By contrast, beauty is found *by participation* (*participative*) in the moral virtues, viz., insofar as the moral virtues participate in reason's ordering—and especially in the case of temperance, which most of all curbs the sentient desires that obscure the light of reason. And thus it is that the virtue of chastity renders a man fit for contemplation most of all, since, as Augustine points out in *Soliloquia*, sexual pleasures especially press the mind down toward sensible things.

### Article 3

#### Does the contemplative life involve diverse acts?

It seems that the contemplative life involves diverse acts:

**Objection 1:** Richard of St. Victor distinguishes *contemplating*, *meditating*, and *cogitating* from one another. But all of them seem to belong to the contemplative life. Therefore, it seems that diverse acts belong to the contemplative life.

**Objection 2:** In 2 Corinthians 3:18 the Apostle says, “Now we, seeing (*speculantes*) the glory of God with His face revealed, are transformed into the same clarity.” But this belongs to the contemplative life. Therefore, besides the three acts noted above, *seeing* (*speculatio*) also belongs to the contemplative life.

**Objection 3:** In *De Consideratione* Bernard says, “The first and greatest sort of contemplation is admiring majesty.” But according to Damascene, *admiring* is a species of fear. Therefore, it seems that several acts are required for the contemplative life.

**Objection 4:** *Praying*, *reading*, and *meditating* are said to belong to the contemplative life. *Listening* also belongs to the contemplative life, since Luke 10:39 says of Mary, by whom the contemplative life is signified, “Sitting at the feet of the Lord, she was listening to His words.” Therefore, it seems that many acts are required for the contemplative life.

**But contrary to this:** ‘Life’ is here being used for the operation that a man principally intends. Therefore, if there are many operations that belong to the contemplative life, then there will be many sorts of contemplative life and not just a single sort.

**I respond:** We are presently talking about the contemplative life insofar as it belongs to a man. Now as is clear from Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, there is this difference between a man and an angel, viz., that an angel intuitively truth by a simple apprehension, whereas it is by means of a

process involving many things that a man reaches the point of seeing a simple truth (*homo quodam processu ex multis pertingit ad intuitum simplicis veritatis*).

So, then, the contemplative life has a *single act* (a) in which it is brought in the end to completion (*unum actum habet in quo finaliter perficitur*), viz., the act of contemplating the truth (*scilicet contemplationem veritatis*), and (b) from which it has its unity.

On the other hand, the contemplative life has *many acts* by which it arrives at that final act. Some of them have to do with the reception of principles by which one proceeds toward the contemplation of truth; others involve the movement away from the principles toward the truth, the cognition of which is being sought; and the last and completing act is the very act of contemplating the truth.

**Reply to objection 1:** According to Richard of St. Victor, *cogitation* seems to involve the inspection of many things from which an individual intends to obtain one simple truth. Hence, what can be included under *cogitation* are (a) the perceptions of the senses for having cognition of certain effects, (b) acts of the imagination, and (c) chains of reasoning with respect to diverse signs or whatever things lead to the cognition of the intended truth—though according to Augustine in *De Trinitate* 14, any actual operation of the intellect can be called a cogitation.

On the other hand, *meditation* seems to involve a chain of reasoning from principles that attain to the contemplation of some truth. And according to Bernard, *consideration* (*consideratio*) pertains to the same thing—though according to the Philosopher in *De Anima* 2, every operation of the intellect can be called a *consideration*.

By contrast, *contemplation* involves a simple looking (*simplex intuitus*) at truth.

Hence, the selfsame Richard says, “*Contemplation* is the mind’s clear and free gazing upon (*contuitus*) the things that were to be examined, whereas *meditation* is the mind’s looking (*intuitus*) when it is occupied with seeking the truth, and *cogitation* is the mind’s looking about (*respectus*) when it is prone to wander.”

**Reply to objection 2:** A Gloss of Augustine’s on this same passage says, “*Speculating* comes from *speculum* (mirror), not from *specula* (watchtower).” But to see something through a mirror is to see a cause through an effect in which the cause’s likeness is reflected. Hence, *speculating* seems to be reduced to *meditation*.

**Reply to objection 3:** *Admiration* is a species of fear that *follows upon* the apprehension of a thing that exceeds our capacity. Hence, admiration is an act that *follows upon* the contemplation of a sublime truth. For it has been explained (a. 2) that contemplation is terminated in the affections.

**Reply to objection 4:** There are two ways in which a man arrives at the cognition of truth:

In the first way, it is through those things that he has *received from another*. And on this score, as regards those things that a man receives from God, *prayer* is necessary—this according to Wisdom 7:7 (“I called upon [the Lord], and the spirit of wisdom came upon me”). On the other hand, as regards those things that he receives from a man, *listening* is necessary insofar as he receives it from the voice of a speaker, and *reading* is necessary insofar as he receives it from what has been handed down in writing.

In the second way, he has to make use of *his own study*. And on this score *meditating* is required.

#### Article 4

##### Does the contemplative life consist just in contemplating God, or also in considering any truth at all?

It seems that the contemplative life consists not just in contemplating God, but also in considering any truth at all:

**Objection 1:** Psalm 138:14 says, “Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows right well.” But

the cognition of God's works is effected by some sort of contemplation of truth. Therefore, it seems that the contemplative life involves not only contemplating divine truth but also contemplating any other sort of truth as well.

**Objection 2:** In *De Consideratione* Bernard says, "The first contemplation involves admiring [God's] majesty; the second has to do with God's judgments; the third has to do with God's benefits; the fourth has to do with God's promises." But among these four, only the first involves God's truth, whereas the other three involve God's effects. Therefore, the contemplative life consists not only in the consideration of divine truth, but also in the consideration of truths having to do with God's effects.

**Objection 3:** Richard of St. Victor distinguishes six species of contemplative acts (*sex species contemplationum*): (a) the first involves only the imagination, when we attend to corporeal things; (b) the second is in the imagination with respect to reason, viz., when we consider the ordering and arrangement of things that can be sensed; (c) the third is in reason with respect to the imagination, viz., when we rise toward invisible things through the inspection of visible things; (d) the fourth is in reason with respect to reason, viz., when the mind is directed toward invisible things that the imagination has no cognition of; (e) the fifth lies above reason (*supra rationem*), when by divine revelation we have cognition of things that cannot be comprehended by human reason; and (f) the sixth lies above reason (*supra rationem*) and outside of reason (*praeter rationem*), viz., when by divine illumination we have cognition of things that seem to conflict with reason, e.g., those things that are said of the mystery of the Trinity. But only the last one seems to involve divine truth. Therefore, contemplation has to do not only with divine truth, but also with the truth that is considered in creatures.

**Objection 4:** In the contemplative life, the contemplation of truth is sought insofar as it is a perfection of the man. But every truth is a perfection of the human intellect. Therefore, the contemplative life consists in any sort of contemplation of truth.

**But contrary to this:** In *Moralia* 6 Gregory says, "What is sought in contemplation is the principle, i.e., God."

**I respond:** As has already been explained (a. 2), there are two ways in which something belongs to the contemplative life: *in the manner of a principle (principaliter)* and *in the manner of a disposition (dispositiva)*.

What belongs to the contemplative life in the manner of a principle is the contemplation of divine truth, since contemplation of this sort is the end of a whole human life. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 1 Augustine says, "The contemplation of God is promised to us as the end of all our actions and as the eternal completion of our joys." In the future life this contemplation will be complete (*perfecta*), when we will see him "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). For now, however, the contemplation of divine truth belongs to us incompletely (*imperfecte*), viz., "through a mirror and in a dark manner" (1 Corinthians 13:12.), and so through it there comes to exist in us a sort of beginning of beatitude, which starts here in order to be brought to completion in the future. Hence, in *Ethics* 10 the Philosopher likewise locates the ultimate happiness of a man in the contemplation of the best intelligible thing.

However, because we are led by the hand through divine effects to the contemplation of God—this according to Romans 1:20 ("The invisible things of God are seen through the things, now understood, that have been made")—it follows that even the contemplation God's effects belongs in a secondary way to the contemplative life, viz., insofar as a man is thereby led by the hand to the cognition of God. Hence, in *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, "In our consideration of creatures we must not exercise an empty and futile curiosity, but instead we should make them a stepping-stone to the things that are immortal and never-ending."

So, then, from what has been said (aa. 2-4) it is clear that the contemplative life involves a sort fourfold ordering: first, the *moral virtues*; second, *other acts* besides contemplation; third, the *contemplation of divine effects*; and, fourth, what completes it is the *contemplation itself of divine truth*.

**Reply to objection 1:** David is here seeking cognition of the works of God in order that he might

thereby be led by the hand to God. Hence, in another place (Psalm 142:5) he says, “I will meditate on all Your works, I will meditate on the works of Your hands; I have stretched forth my hands to You.”

**Reply to objection 2:** From the consideration of God’s judgments a man is led to the contemplation of divine justice, whereas from the consideration of God’s benefits and promises, a man is led to the cognition of God’s mercy or goodness, in the sense of being led by effects that have been or will be exhibited.

**Reply to objection 3:** The six acts in question are designated as steps by which one ascends by means of creatures to the contemplation of God. What is posited in the first step is the perception of sensible things themselves; what is posited in the second step is the progression from sensible things to intelligible things; what is posited in the third step is the judgment of sensible things by reference to intelligible things; what is posited in the fourth step is the absolute consideration of those intelligible things that are reached through sensible things; what is posited in the fifth step is the contemplation of intelligible things which cannot be found through sensible things but which can be grasped by reason; what is posited in the sixth step is the consideration of intelligible things which reason cannot either find or grasp and which belong to the sublime contemplation of divine truth, in which contemplation comes to completion in the end.

**Reply to objection 4:** Divine truth is the ultimate perfection of the human intellect, whereas other truths perfect the intellect in relation to divine truth.

## Article 5

### In the state of the present life, can the contemplative life reach the vision of God?

It seems that in the state of the present life, the contemplative life can reach the vision of God:

**Objection 1:** As we read in Genesis 32:30, Jacob said, “I have seen God face to face, and my soul has been saved.” But the vision of God’s face is the vision of the divine essence. Therefore, it seems that in the present life an individual can, through contemplation, reach the point of seeing God through His essence.

**Objection 2:** In *Moralia* 6 Gregory says that contemplative men “withdraw within their very selves in order to explore spiritual things, and they do not carry with them in any way the shadows of corporeal things—or perhaps by the force of separation (*manu discretionis*) they drive away those shadows they have carried with them—but instead, ardently desiring the uncircumscribed light, they suppress all ideas of their own limitations and in their desire to go beyond themselves, they overcome what they are.” But a man is impeded from the vision of the divine essence, which is the “uncircumscribed light,” only because he has to pay attention to the images of corporeal things. Therefore, it seems that contemplation in the present life can reach the point of seeing the uncircumscribed light through its essence.

**Objection 3:** In *Dialogi* 2 Gregory says, “To the soul that sees its Creator, all creatures are limited. Therefore, when the man of God”—viz., St. Benedict—“saw a fiery globe in the tower and angels returning to heaven, without doubt he could see such things only by the light of God.” But St. Benedict was still living in the present life. Therefore, contemplation in the present life can extend itself to the point of seeing God’s essence.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “No one, as long as he is living in this mortal flesh, advances in the power of contemplation to such an extent that he might fix the eyes of his mind on a ray of the uncircumscribed light.”

**I respond:** As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, “No one who sees God is living the present life by which one lives mortally with these bodily senses. Rather, unless an individual in

some way departs from this life, either by exiting his body altogether or by withdrawing from his carnal senses, he is not carried up into that vision.” This was explained more thoroughly above, when we talked about rapture (q. 175, aa. 4-5), and in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 12, a. 11), when we discussed the vision of God.

So, then, one should reply that there are two ways in which an individual can exist in this present life:

In one way, *actively* (*secundum actum*), viz., insofar as he is actually using his bodily senses. And under these conditions there is no way in which the contemplation that belongs to the present life can reach the point of seeing God’s essence.

In the second way, an individual can exist in this life *in potentiality* (*potentialiter*) and *not actively*, viz., insofar as his soul is conjoined with his body as its form, but in such a way that, as happens in a rapture, he is not using his bodily senses or even his imagination. And under these conditions it is possible for the contemplation that belongs to this life to reach the vision of the divine essence. Hence, the highest level of contemplation that belongs to the present life is contemplation of the sort that Paul had in his rapture, in accord with which he was in a mode that lies between the state of the present life and the state of the future life.

**Reply to objection 1:** As Dionysius says in a letter to the monk Caius, “If someone who saw God understood what he saw, then he did not see God Himself, but instead saw something of what belongs to God.” And in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “God is by no means seen now in His clarity; instead, the soul sees something lower than that clarity, thereby obtaining direction, and afterwards he attains to the glory of that vision.” Therefore, the fact that Jacob said, “I saw God face to face,” should be understood to mean not that he saw God’s essence, but instead that he saw a form—more specifically, a form belonging to the imagination—in which God was speaking to him.

An alternative reply is that, as Gregory says in a gloss on the same passage, “Because we recognize someone by his face, Jacob called his cognition of God ‘His face’.”

**Reply to objection 2:** In the state of the present life, human contemplation cannot exist without images (*absque phantasmatis*), since, as the Philosopher explains in *De Anima* 3, it is connatural to a man to see intelligible species in images. Still, intellectual cognition does not consist in the images themselves, but instead contemplates the purity of intelligible truth within them—and this not only in natural cognition, but also in the case of those things that we have cognition of through revelation. For in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 1, Dionysius says, “The divine light manifests the hierarchies of angels to us in certain symbolic figures, and by its power we have been brought back to the simple ray of light,” i.e., to the simple cognition of intelligible truth.

And so what Gregory says has to be understood to mean that those who contemplate do not carry the shadows of corporeal things with them in the sense that their contemplation does not consist in those shadows but instead consists in the consideration of intelligible truth.

**Reply to objection 3:** These words of Gregory do not mean that in that vision St. Benedict saw God through His essence, but instead he wants to show that since every creature is limited to someone one who sees the Creator, it follows that all things can be easily seen by the illumination of the divine light. This is why he adds, “For no matter how little he may see of the Creator’s light, everything that has been created seems small to him.”

## Article 6

### Is it appropriate to divide the operation of contemplation into three movements, viz., the circular, the straight, and the oblique?

It seems to be inappropriate to divide the operation of contemplation into three movements, viz., the circular, the straight, and the oblique, as does *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4:

**Objection 1:** Contemplation involves rest—this according to Wisdom 8:16 (“When I enter into my house, I shall repose with [wisdom]”). But movement is opposed to rest. Therefore, the operations of the contemplative life should not be divided by *movement*.

**Objection 2:** The action of the contemplative life belongs to the intellect, in which man agrees with the angels. But Dionysius assigns the movements in question differently for the angels and for the [human] soul.

For he claims that an angel’s *circular* movement has to do with “illuminations of the beautiful and the good,” whereas he attributes the soul’s circular movement to many things. The first of these is the soul’s entry into itself and away from exterior things; the second is a sort of folding of its powers through which the soul is freed from error and from exterior distraction (*ab exteriori occupatione*); the third is the soul’s union with the things that are above it.

Again, he likewise describes the *straight* movement of the two of them differently. For he claims that an angel’s straight movement has to do with “his proceeding to the providential care of those who are subject to him.” By contrast, he places the soul’s straight movement in two things: first, the soul’s progressing toward those things which are around it, and, second, its being lifted away from exterior things toward simple acts of contemplation.

Again, he assigns *oblique* movement in different ways for the two of them. For in the case of the angels, he assigns oblique movement to the fact that “while providing for those who have less, he retains the same relationship to God.” By contrast, he assigns oblique movement to the soul from the fact that “the soul is illuminated by divine cognitions through reason and in a diffused way (*rationabiliter et diffuse*).”

Therefore, it does not seem appropriate for the operations of contemplation to be assigned in the ways named above.

**Objection 3:** In *De Contemplatione* Richard of St. Victor posits many other sorts of differences among movements by way of a comparison to the birds of the sky: “Some of them rise now to higher places, then swoop down to lower places, and they seem to repeat this many times. Others turn to the right or to the left again and again. Still others move frequently to the front or to the back, while some fly in circles, where these circles are bigger or smaller. Still others remain suspended almost immovably in one place.” Therefore, it seems that there are not just three movements of contemplation.

**But contrary to this** is the authority of Dionysius.

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 179, a. 1, ad 3), the operation of the intellect in which contemplation essentially exists is called a movement insofar as it is, in the words of the Philosopher in *De Anima* 3, “the act of what is being brought to completion” (*actus perfecti*). For since we arrive at the cognition of intelligible things through sensible things, whereas sentient operations are not effected without movement, it follows that intelligible operations are likewise described as certain movements, and the differences among them are designated by their likeness to diverse movements.

Now as is shown in *Physics* 8, among corporeal movements the primary and more complete ones are local movements. And so intellectual operations are very usefully described by their likeness to these movements. Among these movements there are three differences. For some are *circular* movements, in accord with which something moves uniformly around the same center; others are *straight* movements, in accord with which something proceeds from one [terminus] to another; and the third are *oblique*

movements in the sense that they are composed of the other two movements.

And so, among the intellectual operations, that which has uniformity absolutely speaking is attributed to a *circular* movement, whereas an intellectual operation that proceeds from one thing to another is attributed to a *straight* movement, and an intellectual operation that has some degree of uniformity while progressing toward different things is attributed to an oblique movement.

**Reply to objection 1:** Exterior bodily movements are opposed to the sort of rest that belongs to contemplation, which is thought of as being at rest from exterior distractions. But the ‘movement’ of intellectual operations belongs to the very sort of rest that accompanies contemplation.

**Reply to objection 2:** Man agrees *in general* with the angel as regards the intellect, but the intellective power in an angel is much higher than in a man. And so the movements in [human] souls and in angels have to be assigned differently according to the different ways in which they are related to uniformity [of cognition]. For an angel’s intellect has uniform cognition in two respects: first, because it does not acquire intelligible truth from a variety of composite things; and, second, because it understands by a simple seeing and not discursively (*non discursive sed simplici intuitu*). By contrast, the soul’s intellect receives intelligible truth from things that can be sensed, and it understands intelligible truth with a sort of discourse of reason (*cum quodam discursu rationis*).

And so Dionysius assigns *circular* movement in angels insofar as they see God uniformly and unceasingly, without beginning and without end—in just the way that a circular movement, which lacks a beginning and an end, goes uniformly around the same center. In the soul, by contrast, its two kinds of variability (*difformitas*) need to be removed before it arrives at this sort of uniformity. The first is the variability that stems from the diversity of the exterior things, and this is removed by the soul’s abandoning the exterior things. And that is why Dionysius *first* posits in the soul’s circular movement its entry into itself away from exterior things. Second, the second sort of variability, which is because of reason’s discursiveness, has to be removed. And the same thing happens to the extent that *all* the operations of the soul are led back to the simple contemplation of intelligible truth. This is why he says, *second*, that there has to be “a uniform folding of [the soul’s] intellectual powers (*uniformis convolutio intellectualium virtutum ipsius*),” so that, when discursive reasoning ceases, the soul’s sight is fixed on the contemplation of one simple truth. And in this operation of the soul there is no error, in the way that it is clear that there is no error with respect to the understanding of first principles, which we know by simply seeing them. And then, given these two points, Dionysius posits, *thirdly*, a uniformity that conforms to that of the angels, insofar as [the soul] *persists in* the sole contemplation of God. And this is why he says, “Then being thus made uniform in a united way”—i.e., in a conforming way—“with its powers united, it is led by the hand to the good and the beautiful.”

Now *straight* movement in angels cannot be understood to involve an angel’s proceeding from one thing to another in his consideration, but instead it involves only the order of his providential care, viz., insofar as a higher angel illuminates lower angels by means of angels that lie in between them. And this is why Dionysius says that angels move along a straight line (*in directum moventur angeli*) “when they proceed to the care of the angels subject to them, passing through everything in a straight line (*recta omnia transeuntes*), i.e., insofar as those angels are arranged in a direct ordering (*secundum rectum ordinem*). By contrast, he posits a straight movement in the soul insofar as the soul proceeds from exterior sensible things to the cognition of intelligible things.

On the other hand, in the case of angels Dionysius posits *oblique* movement, composed of the straight and the circular, insofar as they care for lower angels in their contemplation of God. In the case of the soul, by contrast, he posits oblique movement, similarly composed of the straight and the circular, insofar as the soul makes use of divine illuminations in its reasonings.

**Reply to objection 3:** The diversity of the movements that are taken from the difference between *upwards and downwards, to the right and to the left, back and forth*, along with the differences among diverse circles are all contained under the *straight* and *oblique* movements. For it is reason’s train of

thought that is designated by all of them. If, as Richard himself explains, this movement goes from *genus* to *species* or from *whole* to *part*, then it will be upwards and downwards; if it goes from one opposite to another, then it will be to the right and to the left; if it goes from *causes* to *effects*, then it will be forwards and backwards; and if it involves the nearby or remote accidents that surround a thing, then it will be circular. Moreover, as is clear from what has been said, when reason's discursive movement goes from sensible things to intelligible things in accord with the order of natural reason, then it belongs to the *straight* movement, whereas when it moves in accord with divine illuminations, it belongs to the *oblique* movement. It is only the immobility which he posits that belongs to the *circular* movement.

Hence, it is clear that Dionysius describes the movements involved in contemplation much more adequately and with more subtlety.

## Article 7

### Does contemplation involve delight?

It seems that contemplation does not involve delight (*delectationem non habet*):

**Objection 1:** Delight belongs to the appetitive power. But contemplation mainly exists in the intellect. Therefore, it seems not to be the case that contemplation involves delight.

**Objection 2:** Every sort of contention and every sort of struggle impedes delight. But there is contention and struggle in contemplation; for in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, "When the soul, pitched in a sort of struggle, tries to contemplate God, at one moment it almost overcomes, because, by understanding and feeling, it tastes something of the uncircumscribed light, and at another moment it is almost defeated, because even while tasting, it falls short." Therefore, the contemplative life does not involve delight.

**Objection 3:** As *Ethics* 10 explains, delight follows upon a completed operation. But the contemplation that belongs to this life (*contemplation viae*) is incomplete—this according to 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("Now we see through a mirror, darkly"). Therefore, it seems that the contemplative life does not involve delight.

**Objection 4:** A bodily wound impedes delight. But contemplation induces bodily wounds; thus, that after Jacob had said, "I have seen the Lord face to face," Genesis 32:31 reports, "[Jacob] was lame in one foot ... because [the man] had touched a nerve of his thigh and it shrank." Therefore, it seems that there is no delight in the contemplative life.

**But contrary to this:** Wisdom 8:16 says of the contemplation of wisdom, "Her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tedium, but instead joy and gladness." And in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, "The contemplative life is exceedingly lovable sweetness."

**I respond:** There are two ways in which an act of contemplation can be delightful:

In one way, *by reason of the operation itself*, since what is delightful to an individual is an operation that is appropriate to him by his own nature or by habit. But the act of contemplating truth befits a man by his nature, insofar as he is a rational animal. Because of this it happens that all men desire to know and that, as a result, they delight in the cognition of truth. And it becomes still more delightful for someone who has the habit of wisdom and the habit of scientific knowledge, by which it happens that an individual engages in contemplation without difficulty.

In the second way, the act of contemplation is rendered delightful *because of the object*, viz., insofar as an individual contemplates something that is loved—in the way it likewise happens in the case of corporeal vision that the vision is rendered delightful not only by the fact that *seeing itself* is delightful, but also by the fact that the individual *sees a beloved person*.

Therefore, since the contemplative life consists mainly in contemplating God, toward whom, as has

been explained (aa. 1-2), charity moves one, it follows that in the contemplative life delight exists not only by reason of the act of contemplation itself, but also by reason of the very love of God. And in both regards the delight exceeds all human delight. For it is both the case that (a), as was established above when we were talking about the passions (*ST* 1-2, q. 31, a. 5), spiritual delight is more powerful than carnal pleasure, and that (b) the very love by which God is loved out of charity exceeds every sort of love. Hence, Psalm 33:9 says, “Taste and see how sweet the Lord is.”

**Reply to objection 1:** Even though the contemplative life lies essentially in the intellect, it nonetheless has a principle in the affections, viz., insofar as the individual is prompted by charity to contemplate God. And since the end corresponds to the principle, it follows that the end and terminus of the contemplative life likewise lies in the affections as long as (a) the individual delights in the vision of the thing that is loved and (b) the very delight in the thing seen excites the love more fully. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “When someone sees the very one whom he loves, he is inflamed to a greater love of him.” And the ultimate completion of the contemplative life lies in this: that divine truth is not only *seen*, but *loved* as well.

**Reply to objection 2:** Contention or struggle that comes from the opposition of an external thing impedes delight over that thing, since no one takes delight in a thing against which he is fighting. By contrast, in the case of a thing for the sake of which a man is fighting, when he has acquired it, then all other things being equal, he delights more in it. As Augustine puts it in *Confessiones* 8, “To the extent that there is more danger in the battle, to that extent there is more joy in the triumph.”

Now in the case of contemplation, there is contention or struggle not because of opposition on the part of the truth that we contemplate, but because of the defectiveness of our intellect and because of our corruptible body, which drags us down toward lower things—this according to Wisdom 9:15 (“The corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind that muses upon many things”). And so it is that when a man reaches the contemplation of truth, he loves it more ardently, but he hates all the more his own his own defectiveness that stems from the weight of his corruptible body—so that he says with the Apostle, “Unhappy man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “When God is once known through desire and understanding, He dries up all carnal pleasure.”

**Reply to objection 3:** The contemplation of God in the present life is imperfect in relation to the contemplation in heaven and, similarly, the delight of contemplation along the way is imperfect in relation to the delight of contemplation in heaven, of which Psalm 35:9 says, “You shall make them drink of the torrent of Your pleasure.”

However, even if the contemplation of divine things that is had along the way is imperfect, it is nonetheless more delightful than any other sort of perfect contemplation whatever. Hence, in *De Paribas Animalism* the Philosopher says, “We happen to have our own lesser theories about those sublime beings and godlike substances. But even if we attain just a modicum of them, still, because of the sublimity of having cognition of them, they give us more delight than do all the things that lie close at hand around us.” And this is likewise why Gregory says in *Super Ezechiel*, “The contemplative life is an exceedingly lovable sweetness that carries the soul away above itself, opens up heavenly things, and exposes spiritual things to the eyes of the mind.”

**Reply to objection 4:** After his contemplation Jacob was lame in one foot because, as Gregory explains in *Super Ezechiel*, “it is necessary that once one’s love of the world is weakened, he grow strong in his love of God, and so after our recognition of God’s sweetness, one foot remains healthy and the other is lame. For everyone who is lame in one foot depends only on the foot that is healthy.”

## Article 8

### Is the contemplative life long-lasting?

It seems that the contemplative life is not long-lasting:

**Objection 1:** The contemplative life essentially consists in things that belong to the intellect. But all the intellectual perfections of the present life are made void—this according to 1 Corinthians 13:8 (“... prophecies will be made void and tongues will cease and knowledge will be destroyed”). Therefore, the contemplative life is made void.

**Objection 2:** A man tastes the sweetness of contemplation for short periods of time and fleetingly. Hence in *Confessiones* 10 Augustine says, “You introduce me by a very unusual inner affection to a strange sweetness ... but I return to these mundane things because of my miserable weight.” Likewise, in *Moralia* 5, while expounding on Job 4:5 (“When a spirit passed before me”), Gregory says, “The mind is not fixed for a long time on the sweetness of contemplation, because, shaken by the very immensity of the light, it is recalled to itself.” Therefore, the contemplative life is not long-lasting.

**Objection 3:** What is not connatural to a man cannot be long-lasting. But as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 10, the contemplative life is “better than life as a man.” Therefore, it seems that the contemplative life is not long-lasting.

**But contrary to this:** In Luke 10:24 our Lord says, “Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her.” For as Gregory says in *Super Ezechiel*, “The contemplative life is begun here in order to be brought to completion in our heavenly homeland.”

**I respond:** There are two ways in which something can be called long-lasting: (a) *in its own nature* (*secundum suam naturam*) and (b) *with respect to us* (*quoad nos*).

It is clear that the contemplative life is *in its own right* (*secundum se*) long-lasting—and this in two ways. First, because it has to do with incorruptible and unchangeable things. Second, because it does not involve any sort of contrariety; for as *Topics* 1 says, “There is nothing working against the delight that is found in careful meditation (*in considerando*).”

But the contemplative life is likewise long-lasting even *with respect to us*, both because (a) it belongs to us in accord with the action of the incorruptible part of the soul, i.e., in accord with the understanding (*secundum intellectum*), and so is able to endure after the present life, and also because (b), as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 10, in the works of the contemplative life we do not labor corporeally, and so we are more able to persist continually in works of this sort.

**Reply to objection 1:** The mode of contemplating is not the same here and in heaven; instead the contemplative life is said to remain by reason of charity, in which it has its beginning and its end. And this is why Gregory says in *Super Ezechiel*, “The contemplative life is begun here in order to be brought to completion in our heavenly homeland. For the fire of love, which begins to burn here, flames up even more in its love for Him when it sees Him whom it loves.”

**Reply to objection 2:** No action can endure for a long time at its peak. But the peak of contemplation is to reach a *uniformity* of divine contemplation, as Dionysius says and as was claimed above. Hence, even if contemplation cannot endure for a long time in this respect, it can nonetheless endure for a long time with respect to the other acts that belong to contemplation.

**Reply to objection 3:** The Philosopher claims that the contemplative life lies beyond a man in the sense that it belongs to us “insofar as something divine exists in us,” viz., the intellect, which is incorruptible and impassible in its own right, and so its action is able to be more long-lasting.