I. Summary

1. “In the war between Jerusalem and Babylon, the lines are drawn up for battle. On the one side, David courageously leads forth the ranks of the virtues, drawn up in battle array and fearsome to behold. On the other side is Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who, on behalf of the spiritual powers of wickedness, leads against him the rowdy army of the vices.”

But from David’s camp an inexperienced novice stepped forward, only recently sworn in by the king. He had been girded with the sword of God’s word by David’s own hand and distinguished with spiritual weapons. But he was impatient and proud. He had a fiery horse on which he sat with a remarkable bearing. King David warned him “through his son Solomon”: “Woe to one who is alone, because if he falls he has no one to lift him up”. But the novice did not mind the warning; he was waiting for an opportunity to prove his great virtue. Then his eye was caught by one of the enemies, strong in vice, the spirit Fornication.

2. Now the novice directed his attack towards this particular enemy and he urged his horse forwards with lashes of fasting and the spurs of vigils. Prudence called: “Stop, stop!” Judgement called: “Wait, wait”. But the novice rushed ahead. Fornication pretended to flee, and the novice followed him—right through the open gate into the centre of Babylon. In Babylon the novice suffered all kinds of torments until at last Fornication left him to Nebuzaradan, the cook of the Babylonian king, to be ridiculed by filthy and horrible vices. Thus captured by the enemy the novice was bound with the ropes of evil custom and thrown into the prison of desperation.

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1 “Inter Ierusalem et Babyloniam ordinatae sunt acies ad bellum. Hinc David manu fortis aciem producit virtutum terribilem et ordinatam; inde Nabuchodonosor Babylonis spiritualia nequitiae, suumque illum viitiorum tumultuosum exercitum dirigit ex adverso.” Par III.1; Winkler IV: 832. Casey’s translation, 45.
2 Eccl 4.10, Vulgate: “vae soli quia cum ruerit non habet sublevantem”.

3. King David mourned for his son, and he sent Fear and Obedience to search for him. They found him and released him from his chains. They also gave him back his horse which hardly recognized him, and Obedience gave it a bridle though it fought against it.

4. Obedience received the soldier of Christ from Fear and led him by another way to his land. He established a first home for the soldier with Piety, so that Piety could revive his courage, which Fear had scared, in order that he might be courageous enough to approach his father, who was calling for him to come home. And so the novice took up residence in several places along the way home: with Knowledge so that he would know from what place he had come and to what place he must return, and with Fortitude “who strengthened him so that he might continue his journey of return.” The fourth home was with Counsel, the fifth with Understanding, and his sixth home was with Wisdom “who escorted him with kindness and would not desert him on his journey so that he might already taste the good things of the Lord and so, like Moses on Mount Abarim, might begin to contemplate what God has promised. It was from here that he arrived in Jerusalem, in the kingdom and city of David, in the vision of peace, where those blessed peace-makers who are God’s children dwell and all things are at peace, within and without.”

II. Discussion

Par III presents a narrativization of the dialectic between ascetic progression and relapse which is otherwise depicted in *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*. The parable does not have the simultaneity of the treatise; here the tension takes the form of a development from lapse to retained progression.

1. Setting

There is—permanently—war between Babylon and Jerusalem. In this parable, the belligerent parties are further characterized. Babylon’s army is chaotic in accordance with the etymology of Babel in Gen 11.9, and Jerusalem’s is drawn up and terrifying, consonant with Song 6.3

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3 “[…] quae eum ad peragendum reditus sui iter confortaret.” Par III.4; Winkler IV: 836. Casey’s translation, 48.

4 “[…] hospitibus suis eum prosequentibus, nec iter eius deserentibus, ut iam ei sapiant bona Domini, et exinde cum Moyse, velut de monte Abarim, repromissiones Dei incipiat contemplari. Et hinc iam pervenitur in Jerusalem, in regnum et civitatem David, in visionem pacis, ubi beati pacifici filii Dei, interius et exterius […]” Par III.4; Winkler IV: 836. Casey’s translation, 49.