"The Gospel of Luke and the Christology of Martyrdom"

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Introduction

Each of the gospels is unique. Attempts at harmonization inevitably blur their theological and literary distinctiveness. This paper will attempt to illustrate and explain one distinctive feature of the Lukan presentation of Jesus. Namely, that Luke intends his passion narrative to serve as a type of martyrdom, so that his hearers come to see the death of Jesus as an object of both admiration and emulation.[1] In order to do this, Luke draws upon motifs from the Graeco-Roman Noble Death tradition.

Graeco-Roman Noble Death: An Introduction

While most in our society would prefer to avoid unpleasant thoughts of death and dying, the ancients seem to have had no such qualms. At its worst, Roman society relished the gore and spectacle of death in the gladiatorial arena, and turned execution into a spectator sport called crucifixion. At its best, Graeco-Roman luminaries shed light on the art of dying well and nobly.[2] The ancients understood death as the final test for one who had been trained in the arts of virtue As Isocrates puts it, "Death is the sentence which fate has passed on all humankind, but to die nobly is the special honor which nature has preserved for the noble" (*Or.* 1.43). In funeral speeches, biographies, and rhetorical exercises, stories of noble death were passed down through the generations, for the purpose of engendering courage and encouraging emulation. Stories of

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[1]See Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (London: Macmillan, 1934) 201. See also Raymond Brown, *Death of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1993) 31-32.

[2]For a recent discussion of the intersection between martyrdom and noble death, see Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). See also David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). See also Peter Scaer, *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Notre Dame: unpublished dissertation).

noble death so much filled the cultural air, that Seneca had to respond to a student who complained that "'those stories have been droned to death in all the schools'" (*Ep*. 24.6).

Graeco-Roman Noble Death traditions can be traced back to the Homeric battlefield. Heroic warriors were expected to exhibit all the martial and manly virtues necessary for victory in war: virtues such as courage, selflessness, and duty. Though their hopes for the afterlife were necessarily dismal and shadowy, Greek warriors knew that an heroic battlefield death could win eternal fame. Achilles captures this spirit well, saying, "If I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans, my return home is gone, but my glory is everlasting" (Homer, *Iliad* 9.412-413.)

The Athenians continued to fuel the spirit of noble death, most famously in their funeral speeches. Pericles and Demosthenes, among others, gained their reputations for eloquence by delivering epitaphs on behalf of soldiers who had died in battle.[3] Athenian eulogists offered special praise for those whose deaths were marked by courage, which Pericles calls "the manly virtue" (*History* 2.421.2). Hyperides praises those who have the "courage to meet danger gladly" (*Funeral Speech* 37). Orators also praise those who faced death willingly as a noble choice. Lysias writes, "Therefore it is fitting to consider those most happy who have closed their lives in risking them for the greatest and noblest ends; not committing their career to chance, nor awaiting the death that comes of itself, but selecting the fairest one of all (*Funeral Speech*, 79).

Noble neath also entailed a type of altruism. The noble man strives to live and die for the sake of others. In death, he confers benefits including salvation. Lysias praises soldiers who "came to the support of the people and fought for our salvation (σωτηρίας) (*Funeral Speech*, 66). The orator of Plato's *Menexenus* similarly praises those who "purchased the salvation (σωτηρίας) of the living by their deaths" (237A).

[3]See John Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens* (Salem, NH: The Ayer Company, 1981).

The noble death was also marked by its victorious character. As Aristotle puts it, victory is "praiseworthy," and accordingly, "a courageous man ought not allow himself to be beaten" (*Rhet*. 1.9.24-25). A fallen soldier remains victorious if he dies with spirit unbowed. So says Demosthenes:

> Of necessity it happens, when a battle takes place, that one side is beaten and the other victorious; but I should not hesitate to assert that in my judgement the men who die at the post of duty on either side do not share the defeat but are both alike victors (*Funeral Speech*, 19).

In all things a noble death was marked by virtue. Lysias speaks of fallen soldiers who "prized virtue above all else" (*Funeral Speech,* 71). Likewise, Demosthenes praises the fallen as "supremely just" (δικαιοτάτοις) (*Funeral Speech*, 7).

The Death of Socrates: The Noble Death of a Philosopher

Socrates took the art of dying nobly to new heights.[4] According to Socrates, the wise man ought "to live and die in the practice of righteousness and all other virtue" (*Georgias* 527 E). Soldiers die for their country, but Socrates died "for the sake of his philosophy" (Plutarch, *Nic*. 23.3). Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo* paint the picture of a just man, unjustly condemned to drink the cup of judgement. In a human way of speaking, Socrates died because his opponents "told many lies" about him (*Apol*. 1B), resulting in "unjust sentence" (*Apol*. 41B). Yet, on a higher level, Socrates interpreted his death as a "necessity" sent by god (*Phaedo* 62C). Socrates demonstrated his virtue by his steadfast refusal to escape from prison. As he put it, "The law must be obeyed" (*Crito* 19A). When he was given an opportunity to retaliate against those who had unjustly imprisoned him, Socrates asked, "Well then, is it right to requite evil with evil?" (*Crito* 49C). Facing imminent death, Socrates remained courageous, in accord with his philosophy: "I think a man who has really spent his life in philosophy is naturally of good

[4]See Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York: Oxford Press, 1943). See also Klaus Döring, *Exemplum Socratis: Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen* Christentum (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag) 1979.

courage when he is to die" (*Phaedo* 64A). Such was the manner of Socrates' death, that Plato ends his account with a description of Socrates as "the best and wisest and most righteous (δικαιοτάτου)" (*Phaedo* 118A). Socrates' demise, not surprisingly, served for the ancients as the noble death par excellence. Centuries after his death, philosophers such as Plutarch, Seneca, and Cicero continued to present the death of Socrates as a model for admiration and emulation.

The Maccabean Martyrs: Jewish Appropriation of the Noble Death Tradition

Noble death traditions were not isolated to the Greeks and Romans, but seeped into Jewish literature as well.[5] 2 and 4 Maccabees recount the stories of Jewish heroes who boldly and defiantly offered up their lives to Antiochus Ephiphanes rather than consent to eating swine's flesh. The story is at once thoroughly Jewish. The Maccabean martyrs are sacrificed for refusing to break the Levitical law. This story is also fully Hellenistic, for the martyrs see themselves as athletes of virtue, stoic philosophers who conquer the passion of fear by virtue of their "pious reason" (4 Macc 1.9). The leader of the Maccabean martyrs Eleazar, is in many ways portrayed by the writers of 2 & 4 Maccabees as a type of Socrates - - an old man who dies for the sake of his virtue and philosophy.[6] Like Graeco-Roman war heroes, the Maccabean martyrs are praised for their "courage and perseverance" (ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ) in the face of death (4 Macc 1.11). Borrowing from the martial imagery of Noble Death, the martyrs are said "to defend the law with their own blood and with their noble sweat in the face of sufferings unto death" (4 Macc 7.8). In an extended metaphor, the author of 4 Maccabees casts the martyrdoms entirely in terms of an athletic contest:

> Divine indeed was the contest (ἁγών) of which they were the issue. Of that contest virtue was the umpire (ἠθλοθέτει); and its score (δοκιμάξουσα) was for constancy. Victory (νῖκος) was incorruptibility in a life of long duration. Eleazar was the prime contestant (προηγωνίζετο); but the mother of the seven sons entered the competition, and the brothers too vied for the prize (ἠγωνίζοντο). The tyrant was the adversary

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[5]See Jan Willem Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviors of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[6]See Moses Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees: Jewish Apocryphal Literature* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1953) 101.

> (ἀντηγωνίζετο), and the world and humanity were the spectators (ἐθεώρει). Reverence for God was the winner, and crowned her own athletes (ἀθλητὰς στεφανοῦσα). Who did not marvel at the athletes (ἀθλητὰς) of divine legislation, who were not astonished by them? (4 Macc 17:11-16)

In a related picture, the Maccabean literature elsewhere depicts martyrdom as a type of theater.[7] Accordingly, the Maccabean martyrs become "objects of marvel" (2 Macc. 7.20). Eleazar, by his death, is said to have "won the admiration (θαυμασθέντες) not only of all humankind, but even of their very torturers" (4 Macc 6.11). In every way, the Maccabean martyrs die a death worthy of praise. Thus, the epitomists of 2 and 4 Maccabees may serve as examples of a Jewish apologists drawing upon the Graeco-Roman noble death tradition to depict their heroes as worthy of admiration and emulation.

Christians and the Scandal of the Cross

Alongside their pagan contemporaries, early Christians, too were fixated on death. Or at least preoccupied with the death of one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The gospels have often been described as passion narratives with long introductions.[8](Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) 80 n.11). And the passion narratives find their theological and literary climax in crucifixion.

When we think of crucifixion, we tend to dwell on its horrific torture and pain. However, for the ancients, the physical suffering of the cross was not its distinguishing feature. In the Graeco-Roman world, the most precious commodity was honor. The ancients deemed it better to be put to death than to shame.[9] They also esteemed crucifixion as the most shameful of

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[7]Alois Stöger, "Eigenart and Botschaft der lukanischen Passiongeschicte," *Bibel und Kirche* 24.1 (1965).

[8]See Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical Biblical Christ*

[9]For a discussion of the place which honor played in the New Testament world, see Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) esp. 28-62. See also Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. Neyrey: Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 25-66.

all deaths: the very antithesis of noble death. Crucifixion symbolized all that was criminal, servile, and lowly. Crucifixion was in fact a public liturgy of degradation. During a show trial, the accused would be publically and verbally abused, and then flogged and tortured, resulting in shameful bodily disfigurement.[10] Criminals would typically carry their crosses to the site of their own execution. Crosses were placed in busy places to ensure a good crowd. Cicero well summarizes the shame of crucifixion in these words: “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thought, eyes, and ears” (*Rab. Perd.* 16).

Not surprisingly, the New Testament has little to say about the physical pain of crucifixion, but repeatedly speaks of its shame. Paul recognizes that a crucified Christ was “a stumbling block” for the Jews, and “foolishness” for the gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). For Paul, the cross represented the ultimate self-humiliation (Phil 2:8) The writer to the Hebrews speaks explicitly of the cross’ shame (Heb 12:2). Justin Martyr, the early Christian apologist, had to defend Christianity against the charge of “madness” for worshiping a crucified man (1*1 Apol.* 13.4).[11]

A Conversation Between Origen and Celsus

Given the Greco-Roman longstanding tradition of noble death, and the apparent shame of the cross, Christians were presented with the dilemma of how best to present and explain the death of Jesus to the prevailing culture. For a window into the early Christian difficulty in introducing a crucified Christ to the Graeco-Roman world, we may turn to a conversation between Origen and his pagan interlocutor Celsus. Throughout the treatise, *Contra Celsum*, Origen endeavors to defend Jesus’ “seemingly infamous death” (1.11). Though Jesus seemed to

[10]For a good summary, see Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

[11]For a succinct summary of the shame of crucifixion in the ancient world, see Jerome Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 139-140.

die, “in a most shameful way” (6.10), Origen argued that Jesus was truly noble, according to precisely the standards of the Graeco-Roman noble death. He argues that Jesus was a just and virtuous man who died courageously, willingly, and for the sake of others. Origen begins by speaking of Jesus’s “courage” in meeting “great danger” (1.11). Repeatedly Origen argues that Jesus benefitted others, that his death was “for the sake of the human race,” (1.11), “to ensure the salvation of men” (1.11). Contrary to the notion that he was a criminal, Origen identifies Jesus as a “just man, dying a voluntary death for the common good” (1.31). In winning the admiration of the world, Origen argues that Jesus won a great “victory” (1.30). Contrary to the accusations of Celsus, Jesus did not flee death like a coward, nor was he taken prisoner against his will (2.10).

Thus, repeatedly Origen describes Jesus’ death as noble, according to the common Greco-Roman standards of noble death. The apologist, however, did not always get the better of the argument. Celsus compares the noble serenity of Socrates with the distress of Jesus. Celsus points particularly to the Garden of Gethsemane, and asks, “Why does he mourn and lament, and pray to escape the fear of death, expressing himself in terms like these: ‘O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me?” (1. 24). Instead of defending or explaining the grief of the Jesus in the Garden, Origen accuses Celsus of “grossly exaggerating the facts, and quoting what is not written in the Gospels, seeing it is nowhere found that Jesus lamented” (I. 24). Of course, the gospel of Matthew says precisely this. Jesus did, in fact, lament, and his soul was sorrowful, even unto death.

The Matthean Passion and the Noble Death

As Origen defended Christianity, he seems to have relied almost exclusively on the gospel of Matthew, with some references to John.[12] Matthew’s passion narrative, however, would have proved problematic for those who trying to introduce Jesus to the Greco-Roman

[12]In his reliance on the gospel of Matthew, Origen is typical of the early church fathers. See Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* (trans. Norman Belval and Suzanne Hecht; Macon, Georgia: Mercer Press, 1992).

world.

For example, the ancients praised people who died willingly. Socrates, for example, willingly took the cup of poison offered him. And yet, as Celsus points out, Jesus prayed *three* times that his own cup would be taken from him. The ancients praised those who displayed unflinching courage in the face death, yet Matthew tells us that as he approached death Jesus was "greatly troubled and distressed," and that his soul was "sorrowful unto death" (Matt 26:38) Socrates had said that "the Law must be obeyed," and yet Jesus' own disciples exhibited revolutionary tendencies, even taking up the sword to defend Jesus. The ancients praised those who died victoriously, but Jesus appears outwardly to be a victim rather than a conqueror. He is shamefully beaten by soldiers. While the Maccabean martyrs spoke boldly in the face of torture, Jesus stood silent in the face of accusation. (Matt 27:14). Noble men face death with serenity, and yet at the hour of his death, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 27:46).

Socrates' followers remained with him until the bitter end. Yet, by Matthew's own account, Jesus was betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, abandoned by all.[13] Athenian warriors, the Philosopher Socrates, and the Maccabean martyrs all merited the praise of those who watched them die. Not so in the first gospel. As Matthew writes, "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads" (Matt 27:39). Even those who were crucified alongside Jesus "heaped insults upon him" (Matt 27:44). Unless a reader more fully understood Matthean irony, he could well relegate Jesus' death to ignobility, and not give the gospel a hearing.

Luke's Portrayal of Jesus as Noble

One wonders why Origen did not more fully employ the gospel of Luke in his defense of

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[13]For a discussion of the role of friends in the story of noble death, see John Kloppenborg, "Exitus Clari Viri: the Death of Jesus in Luke." *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8 (1992) 106-120.

Jesus' passion. One of Luke's goals is to take the gospel into the Graeco-Roman world and to place Christianity on the world stage.[14] Thus he opens Luke-Acts with a distinctively Hellenistic literary preface, and ends his work with Paul in Rome.

Indeed, I would contend that Luke constructs the Passion Narrative in order to appeal to the Graeco-Roman world steeped as it was in the values of Noble Death. As such, he does not so much spell out the theological meaning of Jesus' death, as he paints a picture of it as noble, comely, and salvific. [In this regard, the Lukan Passion parallels his birth story, which so beautifully portrays the Nativity as opposed to the darker story of Matthew]. He desires that the crowds would be drawn to the beauty of Jesus' death, and that the disciples would take Jesus' death as an example to follow. Indeed, Luke intends to enable his hearer to move beyond the shame of the cross, and to see Jesus' death as an object of admiration and emulation.

Jesus' Death as an Object of Admiration

As we recall, in the Greco-Roman noble death tradition as well as in the Jewish martyriological literature, death was understood as a type of public event, a theater for the display of virtue. The death of the noble person merits praise and admiration. Luke also aimed to portray his hero as a person who could be admired and wondered at: an object for admiration. Let us consider, for a moment, the role which the people play in the passion narratives. While Matthew and Mark describe the crowd of people as hostile to Jesus (Mark 15:13, 15, 29), Luke tells us that as Jesus was crucified, the "people stood watching (θϵωρω̂ν")" (Luke 23:35). As Arthur Just perceptively notes, "The text gives the impression that they are struck silent by the spectacle before them."[15] Luke then summarizes the crowd's reaction in this way, "When all the people who had gathered to witness this spectacle (θϵωρω̂ὶαν) saw (θϵωρω̂ρὴσαντϵς) what

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[14]To be sure, Luke portrays Jesus' death according to the OT Jewish type, which inludes Abel, Zechariah, and the prophets of old (see Luke 6:23; 11:47-51; 13:34). According to the OT model, Jesus is a prophet rejected by his own people. Yet, Luke also has a wider audience in mind

[15]Arthur Just, *Luke* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House) 2.935.

took place, they beat their breasts and went away" (23:48). Luke also, alone among the evangelists, tells us that as Jesus approached the cross, "A great multitude of people, and of women, bewailed and lamented him" (23:27). Thus, Luke uses the language of public spectacle, for he realizes that the death of Jesus would stand as a public event to be judged by the world. He encourages the world to, as it were, beat their breasts, in sorrow and repentance at the sight of a good man dying.

Jesus' Death as an Object for Emulation

The Noble Death tradition also was a means of teaching people how to die. So also, Luke aims his gospel to be a type of manual for discipleship. In this regard, it is interesting that after the arrest of Jesus in the garden, Matthew records, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matt 26:56). Luke omits the phrase. For in the Lukan world, Jesus leads and his disciples faithfully follow. In Luke Jesus calls upon faithful disciples to take up their crosses daily. Our Lord prepares his disciples, telling them that they should expect to be seized and persecuted, and as Jesus says, "It will result for you in a witness" (μαρτύριον).[16] Thus, in the book of Acts, Peter and Paul will go willingly to jail rather than disobey God's will. James and Stephen will follow to death. For Christ has shown the way, as the first martyr, and an object for emulation.

Let us consider now, some of the special features of the Lukan passion which pertain to the noble death tradition and Luke's own martyriological presentation of Jesus' passion.

The Mount of Olives: A Window into Luke's Presentation

For a special window into the Lukan passion we would do well to consider more closely the story of Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives, especially as Luke's account differs from that of Matthew.

Consider how the story is framed. In Matthew, Jesus, upon entering the garden laments is said to be "sorrowful and troubled" (Matt 26:37). He says of himself, "My soul is

[16]For a good discussion of the Lukan Passion as paradigmatic, see John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995) esp. 79-81.

exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt 26:38). Luke, drawing upon the noble death tradition, wisely omits the reference to Jesus' sorrow, which the ancients understood as the opposite of courage.[17] How does Luke introduce the story of Jesus' prayer? He writes, "Jesus went according to custom to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him" (22:39) Two features are especially noteworthy. First, Jesus approaches "according to custom" (κατὰ τὸ ἔθος) (Luke 22:39). Jesus does not approach the garden as a sorrowful or desperate man, but as one who has made prayer a customary part of his life. As a boy, Jesus attended the Feast of Passover annually "according to custom." He prayed at his baptism (3:21), the calling of the twelve (6:12), and at his transfiguration (9:28). From 5:16 we learn that Jesus made it a practice of "withdrawing into lonely places to pray." In 6:12 we see that Jesus spends the whole night praying on a mountain. Again, when Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time, Luke tells us that "each evening [Jesus] went out to spend the night on the mountain, the one called Olives" (Thus, contrary to what detractors like Celsus would say, Jesus' prayer was not a desperate act, but an act of piety. As Frederick Danker aptly summarizes, "The phrase 'according to custom' suggests to Luke's public that despite his knowledge of the plot against him Jesus did not hesitate to meet his assigned responsibility."[18] He was simply carrying out his customary piety.

Secondly, we note the fact that as Jesus entered the Mount of Olives, "His disciples followed him" (Luke 22:39). This seemingly throwaway phrase, not found in Matthew, is fraught with meaning. Jesus, even as he faces death, remains in control. He remains a noble leader. Again, it hints at the fact that his disciples will indeed follow him, even unto death.

The very posture of Jesus is revealing. Matthew records that Jesus "fell on his face and prayed" (26:39). Matthew describes one who is overwhelmed by his circumstances. By contrast, Luke says, picturesquely, that Jesus "withdrew about a stone's throw, knelt down, and

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[17]See Jerome Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 50-53. See also Neyrey, "The Absence of Jesus' Emotions - Lukan Redaction of Lk. 22, 39-46," *Biblica* 61 (1980) 153-171.

[18]Frederick Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 354.

prayed" (22:41). This is the posture not of the desperate, but of the pious. It's a lovely picture of Jesus at prayer.

We also note that Matthew records that Jesus prays three times. Celsus points to this fact as an example of Jesus' unwillingness to die. Luke, on the other hand, records only one prayer. Moreover, his prayer is bracketed by pious, filial obedience: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Notably, in his version of the Lord's Prayer, Luke omits the petition, "Thy will be done." However, here, as a man of prayer, Jesus leads by example, "Not my will, but yours be done" (22:42).

The next part of the Lukan narrative bears our special attention. We are told that "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling from the ground" (Luke 22:43-44). The textual evidence on the story of the angel and the agony is admittedly divided. Some contend that these verses describing Jesus' agony do not fit the Lukan picture of Jesus as serene and confident in the hour of death.[19] Yet, this depends how we translate "agonia." For the term "agonia," may refer either to internal anguish, associated with fear, or to the agon or athletic contest. We are reminded of Luke's contemporary Paul, who drawing upon Graeco-Roman atheltic imagery exhorted Timothy to fight the good fight" (1 Tim 1:18). We also recall that Jesus urges his disciples to "Struggle through the narrow door." In each of these cases, agon refers not to emotional turmoil, but to a contest or struggle. And with whom is Jesus struggling on the Mount of Olives? We recall that the Lukan desert temptation narrative ends with this ominous note: "When the devil had finished every trial (πειρασμὸν), he left him until an opportune time" (4:13). The opportune time to which Luke refers is evidently the Passion, which begins when Satan enters into Judas (22:3), and reaches a climax at the Mount of Olives: a story framed by the inclusio of Jesus' admonition: "Pray that you will not fall into trial (πειρασμὸν)." (22:39-46).

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[19]See Bart Ehrman and Mark Plunkett, "The Angel and the Agony: The Textual Problem of Luke 22:33-44," *CBQ* (1983) 401-416.

The trial is, in fact, a contest between Jesus and Satan. It is the type of agon which is represented in the Noble Death tradition, which understood death as the final test of virtue. It is the type of agon depicted in 2 and 4 Maccabees as a contest between light and darkness, between virtue and vice, good and evil. Jesus' bloody sweat is then an outward manifestation of his heroism, and again may be compared to the Maccabean martyrs who gave "their own blood and their noble sweat in the face of sufferings unto death" (4 Macc 7.8).

Thus, Luke takes great pains to tell the story of Jesus in the Garden, with a view to portraying Jesus as a courageous leader, who is engaged in a noble struggle, facing death willingly and piously. Having looked in some detail at the scene of Jesus in the Garden, let us consider other Noble Death motifs found in the third gospel.

Jesus is not a Victim of Circumstances

According to Aristotle, "A courageous man should not allow himself to be beaten, for victory is noble" (*Rhet*. 1.9.25). Luke responds by painting a picture of Jesus in control of the situation. For example, let us consider Luke's description of Jesus' arrest. Matthew tells us that when Judas approached Jesus, he spoke first, saying, "Hail Master," and then he kissed him (Matt 26:49). The ancients would have understood that Judas was in control of the situation, and Jesus the passive victim. Luke tells the story differently. He records that even as Judas was drawing near to kiss Jesus, Jesus spoke up, saying, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"(Luke 22:48). Luke never actually records the fact that Judas kissed Jesus. Jesus remains fully in control of himself and the situation, asking, "Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hold of me" (22:53). Though he is being arrested, Jesus challenges his captors, contrasting his own courage as one who speaks openly during the day with the cowardice of those who arrest him at night because they "feared the people" (20:19).

Jesus is Virtuous and Law-Abiding

The stereotypical victim of crucifixion was the worst type of criminal, a revolutionary or insurrectionist. The ancients understood that true virtue included doing fulfilling one's duty to

the state. Socrates had stated that, in all cases, the law must be obeyed, even when unjustly administered. He even dissuaded his own disciples when they encouraged him to escape. The ancients surely would have wondered about Jesus, especially when his disciples drew swords upon Jesus' arrest. Yet, Luke takes great pains to describe Jesus as law-abiding. In the pericope of "The Two Swords," Jesus' disciples misunderstand their master, and brandish swords, to which Jesus rebukes, "That's enough" (Luke 22:38). When Jesus is arrested, he rebukes the sword-bearing disciple with similar words, saying "No more of this" (22:51). Furthermore, unlike Matthew or Mark, Luke records the fact that Jesus "touched the man's ear and healed him" (22:51). Jesus was clearly no revolutionary, at least not in a worldly sense.

This theme of Jesus as innocent especially comes to the fore in his trial. Concerning the charge that Jesus claimed to be an earthly king, "Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man" (23:4). Concerning the charge that Jesus had incited the people to rebellion, Pilate responded, "I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him" (23:14). When further pressed to have Jesus crucified, Pilate responded a third time, "What evil has this man done? I have found in him nothing worthy of death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him" (23:22). This innocence of Jesus is echoed by Herod, who, though given Jesus, hands him over to Pilate (22:15). Here we may also note that while Matthew tells us that both criminals crucified alongside Jesus mocked him, in the gospel of Luke, one of the criminals remarks, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (23:41). Thus, Luke would have his hearers know that Jesus in no ways fits the shameful criminal stereotype of a crucified man.

Jesus Offers Salvation, Especially in His Death

As we have seen, the Noble Death entailed a type of altruism. It is particularly noble to live and die for the sake of others. The Athenian orators often praised soldiers who benefitted others and offered salvation for their people. Thus, we should not be surprised that repeatedly Luke speaks about Jesus as the Savior (2:11) who offers salvation (6:9; 7:50; 8:36, etc.). Luke

also emphasizes this theme in his Passion Narrative. Again, Luke alone among the synoptics records the healing of the high priest's servant's ear (Luke 22:50). Jesus' death as a benefit for others is also seen in his narration of the Last Supper. As opposed to the "kings of the gentiles," who "Lord it over" others, and are called "benefactors" (22:25), Jesus is the true benefactor who gives of himself. While Matthew and Mark record the fact that Jesus' blood was shed "for many," they remain silent concerning the body. Luke fully explicates the value of both elements, noting that Jesus' body is given "for you," and his blood is shed "for you" (22:19-20). As Fitzmyer notes, "This 'for others' aspect of this added phrase is unmistakable . . . it implies the soteriological aspect of his life and death."[20] This language "for you" is the language of benefaction, associated with noble death. According to Luke, Jesus is the true benefactor, whose death is for the sake of others (see Acts 10:38).

Finally, even on the cross, Jesus shows himself to be a Savior and Benefactor, dying for the sake of others. He is taunted for claiming to be able to "save others" and is challenged to "save himself" (23:35, 37). He does precisely this when he tells one of the criminals hanging beside him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43). This incident is recorded only in Luke, and emphasizes the fact even in death Jesus benefits others, and thus dies a noble death.

Jesus Remains Pious and Righteous

The ancients regarded piety before God (eusebeia) among the highest virtues. Socrates understood his death as a necessity sent from God (*Phaedo* 62C). He accepted death saying, "This is where God leads us" (*Crito* 54E). The Maccabean martyrs likewise are ready to die rather than transgress Torah and the divine will. Likewise, Luke emphasizes that Jesus dies piously in accord with the divine will. In Luke δεῖ indicates divine necessity. Jesus' life (2:49; 4:43; 19:5) and most especially his death (9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:7) are determined by this divine necessity: "It is necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things." In Luke Jesus dies in obedience to the divine will and in fulfillment of scripture (18:31 and 24:44-46). Death comes as

[20]Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985) 2.1401.

a result the divine will, and Jesus' willing acquiescence. The same one who "resolutely set his face towards Jerusalem" (9:51) dies the death of a pious man, in obedience to the divine will.

Two final features distinctive to the Lukan death scene need to be mentioned in this regard. First, let us consider our Lord's words on the cross. Matthew and Mark record the jarring, even shocking words of Jesus: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jews versed in the Scriptures would have understood that this cry of dereliction comes from Psalm 22, which ends on a note of divine vindication. Yet, as it stands, the Greco-Roman reader might easily take this as an example of a man who has no hope and who faces death unwillingly. Luke accordingly omits this word from the cross and substitutes another, which more closely fits his portrait of Jesus as noble and pious: "Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit." The contrast between these two portraits is striking: "My God, My God , why have you forsaken me?" is a powerful statement of our Lord's ultimate sacrifice. Meanwhile, "Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit," presents for us an object for admiration, and a model to follow. Luke would have us know that as followers of Jesus, we, too can die in peace. Jesus here is the first martyr, and others are encouraged to follow in his footsteps.

Secondly, let us consider the centurion's reaction to Jesus' death. In both Matthew and Mark, the centurion exclaims, "Surely, this was the Son of God." The phrase is fraught with theological potency. Only in the cross do we truly see Jesus as God's Son. Yet, Luke chooses to include other words spoken by the centurion: "Surely, this person was δίκαιος.." Some would translate this as "innocent," which fits into the theme of Jesus' political innocence. There is, to be sure, an allusion to Jesus "as the Righteous one," the long-awaited Messiah (see Jer 23:5 ; Zech 9:9).

Yet, the words of the centurion make special sense in terms of noble death. Luke would have his hearer know that in spite of cross' shame, Jesus was in fact a most noble, virtuous, and righteous man. And perhaps, Luke was gently reminding his readers of another man, whose death had been, up until the time of Jesus, the most famous ever. Luke's readers would have been very familiar with the story of Socrates, who like Jesus suffered an unjust sentence because

of the many lies told about him, and yet who understood his death as a necessity brought by god, all the while obeying the law and refusing to requite evil for evil. Luke's readers may have also recall that upon dying, Socrates was called "the most righteous man." The final words of Plato's famous *Phaedo*. Was this Luke's subtle way of saying to the Graeco-Roman world, you have made mistakes before, do not make the same mistake again. Do not judge a book by its cover; for this crucified man may be your savior.

Summary

It was fashionable, not all that long ago, to say that Luke has no "theology of the cross," per se. He omits, for instance, Matthew and Mark's reference to the cross as the ransom for sin (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28). Yet Luke, we see, has a somewhat different agenda. His work is introductory in nature. He aims not so much to explain the meaning of the cross as to paint a winsome picture of it. He does not explain why the cross is the source of salvation, but shows that the cross is the place where Jesus saves.

Luke's Passion Narrative is not merely a martyrdom, but as a martyrdom is serves the function of inviting the Graeco-Roman world to see Jesus' death as an object for wonder and beauty, and for offering the church an example to emulate. Thus, with Simon of Cyrene, we are invited by Luke to take up the cross, whether it be the cross of martyrdom or simply the cross of suffering for the sake of Christ. Having heard the Lukan Passion, and having seen Jesus as the willing and obedient man, who offers salvation, we are persuaded to read the gospel of Matthew, and see there the deeper theology of atonement which he offers. It has long been said that Matthew is the 'most powerful book ever written' and Luke is 'the most beautiful book ever written.'[21] To this the Passion Narrative of Luke bears witness.

[21]Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows* (St. Louis: CPH, 1961) 181.