

The Glorious Dying of the Son

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The Gospel of Luke & Jesus' Noble Death

by **Peter J. Scaer**

Ancient Greco-Roman society enjoyed death, as seen in the Romans' relish for the gore and spectacle of death in the gladiatorial arena and in their turning execution into a spectator sport called crucifixion. But at its best, as seen in some of its greatest philosophers, it shed light on the art of dying well and nobly, as the final test for one who had been trained in the arts of virtue.

As Isocrates put it in his first oration, "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." In funeral speeches, biographies, and rhetorical exercises, stories of noble death were passed down through the generations to engender courage and encourage emulation. Stories of noble death so much filled the air that in one of his Epistles, Seneca had to respond to a student who complained that "those stories have been droned to death in all the schools."

But Jesus did not appear to this mind to have died nobly. Christians were presented with the dilemma of how best to present and explain the apparently shameful and ignoble death of Jesus, a death that seemed to violate all the tenets of the ideal of the noble death. To the pagan world, to worship such a man was, as Justin Martyr wrote in his *Apology*, simply "madness."

This was an especially pressing problem for Luke, as one of his goals was to take the gospel into the Greco-Roman world and to place Christianity on the world stage. Thus, he opens Luke-Acts with a distinctively Hellenistic literary preface, and ends his work with Paul in Rome. Further, Luke uses the tradition of the "noble death" to construct a Passion Narrative that would appeal to the Greco-Roman world. Distinctively among the Gospels, his account presents Jesus' passion as a type of martyrdom, so that his hearers would come to see the death of Jesus as an object of both admiration and emulation.

Luke writes in a way that will draw the crowds to the beauty of Jesus' death. (In this regard, the Lucan Passion parallels his birth story, which so beautifully portrays the Nativity, as opposed to the darker story of Matthew).

A Noble Tradition

The noble death tradition 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 religion gave them only dim and shadowy hopes for the afterlife, they knew that a heroic battlefield death could win them eternal fame. As Achilles declares in the *Illiad*, “If I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans, my return home is gone, but my glory is everlasting.”

For the Athenians, a noble death was understood as a type of public event, a theater for the display of virtue. It was both a final test of virtue (an *agon*) and a means of teaching others how to die. A noble death merited praise and admiration, and was marked by courage in facing death unflinchingly and willingly, by giving one’s life in obedience to the laws of the state, and by dying victoriously, serenely, altruistically (bringing salvation to others), and piously.

Athenian eulogists offered special praise for those who died courageously and willingly. Lysias wrote, “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.”

The ancients also recognized that for a death to be considered noble, it must be met in obedience to the laws of one’s country. Even when wrongly accused of crime, Socrates maintained in the *Crito*, “The Law must be obeyed.” He thus refused to escape his own execution, considering such disobedience socially destructive and thus ignoble.

The noble death was also victorious. As Aristotle put it in his *Rhetoric*, victory is “praiseworthy,” and accordingly, “a courageous man ought not allow himself to be beaten.” Yet a fallen soldier remains victorious if he dies with spirit unbowed. So said Demosthenes in the *Funeral Speech*: “When a battle takes place . . . one side is beaten and the other victorious; but I should not hesitate to assert that in my judgment the men who die at the post of duty on either side do not share the defeat but are both alike victors.”

A noble death was one faced serenely, without fear or protest or attempts to evade it. Socrates, according to *Phaedo*, took the cup of hemlock “quite cheerfully . . . [with] not a tremble, not a change in color or looks,” drinking it “quite easy and contented.” A few seconds later he rebuked his followers for crying, telling them “I’ve heard that one ought to make an end in decent silence.” Plutarch similarly notes that people present at the death of Phocion were amazed at his “calmness and grandeur of spirit.”

The noble man also strives to live and die altruistically, for the sake of others. In death, he confers benefits, including salvation. In death, he is a benefactor. Lysias praised soldiers who “came to the support of the people and fought for our salvation.” The orator of Plato’s *Menexenus* similarly praised those who “purchased the salvation of the living by their deaths.”

The ancients regarded piety before God (*eusebeia*) among the highest virtues, and the truly noble death was a pious death. Socrates understood his death as a necessity sent from God and accepted it, saying, “This is where God leads us.” In praising Themistocles’s death, Plutarch tells us that “he put a fitting end to his life” by making a “sacrifice to the gods.” As we will see, the Maccabean martyrs likewise were ready to die rather than transgress Torah and the divine will.

In all things a noble death was marked by virtue. Lysias praised fallen soldiers who “prized virtue above all else,” and Demosthenes praised the fallen as “supremely just.” Socrates believed the wise man ought “to live and die in the practice of righteousness and all other virtue,” and Plato’s *Apology* and *Phaedo* show him as a just man unjustly condemned to drink the cup of judgment, dying nobly.

When given an opportunity to retaliate against those who had unjustly imprisoned him, Socrates asked, “Well then, is it right to requite evil with evil?” Facing imminent death, he remained courageous: “I think a man who has really spent his life in philosophy is naturally of good courage when he is to die.” Such was the manner of Socrates’ death that Plato ends the *Phaedo* with a description of him as “the best and wisest and most righteous.” The philosopher’s death is the righteous culmination of a righteous life.

Socrates’ demise, not surprisingly, served for the ancients as the noble death par excellence. Centuries later, Roman philosophers such as Plutarch, Seneca, and Cicero continued to present the death of Socrates as a model for admiration and emulation. Soldiers die for their country, but Socrates died “for the sake of his philosophy,” wrote Plutarch.

The Maccabean Martyrs

Jewish literature had its noble death tradition as well. Second 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, for the Maccabean martyrs are sacrificed for refusing to break the Levitical law, and 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 Mac. 1.9](#)). The leader of the Maccabean martyrs, Eleazar, is in many ways portrayed as a type of Socrates, an old man who dies for the sake of his virtue and philosophy. Like Greco-Roman war heroes, the Maccabean martyrs are praised for their “courage and perseverance” in the face of death ([4 Mac. 1.11](#)).

Borrowing from the martial imagery of the 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 Mac. 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 of which they were the issue. Of that contest virtue was the umpire; and its score was for constancy. Victory was incorruptibility in a life of long duration. Eleazar was the prime contestant; but the mother of the seven sons entered the competition, and the brothers too vied for the prize. The tyrant was the adversary, and the world and humanity were the spectators. Reverence for God was the winner, and crowned her own athletes. Who did not marvel at the athletes of divine legislation, who were not astonished by them? ([4 Mac. 17.11-16](#))

The Maccabean literature depicts martyrdom as a type of theater. Eleazar, by his death, is said to have “won the admiration not only of all humankind, but even of their very torturers” ([4 Mac. 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 apologist drawing upon the Greco-Roman noble death tradition to depict their heroes as worthy of admiration and emulation.

The Scandalous Cross

The early Christians, too, were fixated on death. Or at least with the death of one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels have often been described as passion narratives with long introductions.

And the passion narratives find their theological and literary climax in the 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. Its distinguishing feature was the shame of dying that way.

In the Greco-Roman world, the most precious commodity was honor. The ancients deemed it better to be put to death than to be put to shame. They also thought that crucifixion was the most shameful of all deaths: the very antithesis of noble death. Crucifixion thus symbolized all that was criminal, servile, lowly, and ignoble.

Crucifixion was in fact a public liturgy of degradation. During the trial, the accused would be publicly and verbally abused, and then flogged and tortured, resulting in shameful bodily disfigurement. Criminals would typically carry their crosses to the site of their own execution. Crosses were placed in busy places to ensure a good crowd. In his defense of Rabirius, 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.”

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's shame ([Heb. 12:2](#)).

For a window into the early Christian difficulty in introducing a crucified Christ to the Greco-Roman world, we may turn to a conversation between the second-century father Origen and his pagan interlocutor Celsus.

Throughout the treatise *Against Celsus*, Origen endeavors to defend Jesus' "seemingly infamous death." Though Jesus seemed to die "in a most shameful way," he argues that Jesus died nobly, precisely according to the standards of the Greco-Roman noble death. Jesus was a just and virtuous man who died courageously, willingly, and for the sake of others. He begins by speaking of Jesus' "courage" in meeting "great danger" and repeatedly argues that Jesus' death benefited others, that he died "for the sake of the human race," "to ensure the salvation of men." Contrary to the notion that he was a criminal, Jesus was a "just man, dying a voluntary death for the common good." In winning the admiration of the world, he won a great "victory." Contrary to the accusations of Celsus, Jesus did not flee death like a coward, nor was he taken prisoner against his will.

Celsus' Rebuttal

The apologist, however, does not always get the better of the argument. Celsus compares the noble serenity of Socrates with the distress of Jesus. He 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?'"

Instead of defending or explaining Jesus' grief 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." Of course, the Gospel of Matthew says precisely this. Jesus did, in fact, lament, and his soul was sorrowful, even unto death.

Nevertheless, as Origen defended Christianity, he seems to have relied almost exclusively on the Gospel of Matthew (typical of the early church fathers), with some references to John. Matthew's Passion Narrative, however, would have proved problematic for those trying to introduce Jesus to the Greco-Roman world, for it violated so many of the tenets of the noble death tradition.

The ancients praised people who faced death unflinchingly and willingly, yet Matthew tells us that as Jesus approached death, he was "greatly troubled and distressed," praying three times that his cup would be taken from him ([Matt. 26:37-44](#)). They expected obedience to the law, and yet Jesus' own disciples exhibited revolutionary tendencies, even taking up the sword to defend him.

The ancients praised those who died victoriously, but Jesus outwardly appears 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 (27:14). Noble men faced death with serenity, and yet at the hour of his death, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (27:46). Socrates’ followers remained with him until the bitter end. Yet, by Matthew’s account, Jesus was betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and abandoned by all.

Athenian warriors, Socrates, and the Maccabean martyrs all merited the praise of those who watched them die. Not so Jesus in the first Gospel. As Matthew writes, “Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads” (27:39). Even those crucified alongside Jesus “heaped insults upon him” (27:44). Unless the reader understood Matthean irony, and few pagan readers would have, he would see Jesus’ death as ignoble and not give the Gospel a hearing.

A Public Example

One wonders why Origen did not more fully employ the Gospel of Luke in his defense of Jesus’ passion, since Luke structured his account to answer these objections. First, in the noble death tradition, death was understood as a type of public event, a theater for the display of virtue. The death of the noble person merited praise and admiration. So Luke aimed to portray his hero as a person who could be wondered at and admired.

Let us consider the role that 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” ([Luke 23:35](#)). As Arthur Just perceptively notes in his commentary on Luke, “The text gives the impression that they are struck silent by the spectacle before them.” Luke then summarizes the crowd’s reaction this way: “When all the people who had gathered to witness this spectacle saw what 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, he uses the language of public spectacle, for he realizes that the death of Jesus will stand as a public event to be judged by the world. He encourages the world, as it were, to beat their breasts in sorrow and repentance at the sight of a good man dying.

Second, the noble death tradition also was a means of teaching people how to die. So Luke writes his Gospel as a type of manual for discipleship. After the arrest of Jesus in the garden, Matthew records, “Then all the disciples forsook him and fled” ([Matt. 26:56](#)), but Luke omits the phrase, for in the Lucan world, Jesus leads and his disciples faithfully follow.

In Luke Jesus calls upon faithful disciples to take up their crosses daily and

In Luke, Jesus calls upon his twelve disciples to take up their crosses daily, and he prepares them by telling them that they should expect to be seized and persecuted, which “will result for you in a witness.” Thus, in the book of Acts, Peter and Paul go willingly to jail rather than disobey God’s will, and James and Stephen follow Jesus unto death. For Christ has shown the way as the first martyr and therefore as a noble object for emulation by those who wish to die nobly.

Let us now consider some of the special features of the Lucan passion that pertain to the noble death tradition and Luke’s own martyriological presentation of Jesus’ passion.

The Olivet Prayer

For a special window into the Lucan 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. Luke takes great pains to portray Jesus in conformity with the noble death tradition, as a courageous leader who is engaged in a noble struggle and faces death willingly, serenely, and piously.

Consider how the story is framed in both Gospels. In Matthew, Jesus, upon entering the garden, is said to be “sorrowful and troubled” (26:37). He says of himself, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death” (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.

Four features of Luke’s account are especially noteworthy. First, he writes that “Jesus went according to custom” to the Mount of Olives (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, he attended the feast of Passover annually, “according to custom.” He prayed at his baptism (3:21), at the calling of the twelve (6:12), and at his transfiguration (9:28). He made a practice of “withdrawing into lonely places to pray” (5:16) and spent whole nights praying on a mountain (6:12). After he entered Jerusalem for the last time, “each evening he went out to spend the night on the mountain, the one called Olives” (21:37).

Thus, contrary to what detractors like Celsus would say, Jesus’ prayer was not an act of desperation, but an act of piety. As Frederick Danker aptly summarized in *Jesus and the New Age*, “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.” He was simply carrying out his customary piety.

Second, Luke notes the fact that, as Jesus entered the Mount of Olives, “his disciples followed him” (22:39). This seemingly throwaway phrase, not found in Matthew, is fraught with meaning. Even as he faces death, Jesus remains in control. He remains a noble leader. This hints at the fact that his disciples

will indeed follow him, even unto death.

Third, Jesus' very posture is revealing. Matthew records that he "fell on his face and prayed" (26:39), describing one who is overwhelmed by his circumstances. Luke says, picturesquely, that Jesus "withdrew about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed" (22:41). This is the posture, not of the desperate, but of the pious. It is a lovely picture of Jesus at prayer.

Fourth, while Matthew records that Jesus prays three times, which Celsus pointed to as evidence of Jesus' unwillingness to die, Luke 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" (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."

Heroic Contest

The next part of the Lucan narrative also 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 to the ground" (22:43–44). The interpretation of the story of the angel and the agony is admittedly divided. Some contend that these verses do not fit the Lucan picture of Jesus as serene and confident in the hour of death.

Yet this depends how we translate *agonia*. For the term *agonia* may refer either to internal anguish, associated with fear, or to the agony of athletic contest. We are reminded of Luke's contemporary Paul, who, drawing upon Greco-Roman athletic imagery, exhorted Timothy to "fight the good fight" ([1 Tim. 1:18](#)). We also recall that Jesus urged 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 Lucan desert temptation narrative ends with this ominous note: "When the devil had finished every trial, 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 inclusion of Jesus' admonition: "Pray that you will not fall into trial" (22:39–46).

The trial is, in fact, a contest between Jesus and Satan. It is the type of *agon* that 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, 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 Mac. 7.8](#)).

Thus, Luke portrays Jesus as dying a noble death in the Greco-Roman sense: as dying courageously, lawfully, willingly, serenely, and piously in a noble struggle.

No Victim

In addition to the ones presented in the scene of Jesus in the Garden, Luke offers other motifs from the noble death tradition in the rest of his Passion Narrative.

First, he portrays Jesus’ death as a victorious death. Luke shows Jesus to be in control of the situation. For example, let us consider his description of Jesus’ arrest. Matthew tells us that when Judas approached Jesus, he spoke first, saying, “Hail Master,” and then kissed him (26:49). The ancients would have understood that Judas was in control of the situation, and Jesus was the passive victim.

Luke tells the story differently. He records that as Judas was drawing near to kiss him, Jesus spoke up, saying, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (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).

Second, Luke shows that Jesus died altruistically, for others. He repeatedly speaks about Jesus as the Savior (2:11) who offers salvation (6:9; 7:50; 8:36; etc.), and he emphasizes this theme in his Passion Narrative. For instance, Jesus’ death as a benefit for others is 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 that his blood is shed “for you” (22:19–20). This “for you” is the language of benefaction, associated with noble death. According to Luke, Jesus is the true benefactor, who dies for the sake of others (see [Acts 10:38–39](#)).

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). Only Luke records this incident, emphasizing the fact that, even in death, Jesus benefits others, and thus dies a noble death.

A Pious Death

Third, Luke emphasizes that Jesus died piously, in accord with the divine will. His 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; 24:44–46). Death comes as a result of the divine will and of 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.

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 known that this cry of dereliction comes from Psalm 22, which ends on a note of divine vindication. But the Greco-Roman reader would 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 of 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.

And 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 man was *dikaios*.” 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](#)). But the words of the centurion also make special sense in terms of noble death.

Luke would have his hearers know that in spite of the cross’s 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, 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 who yet 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 also have recalled that, upon dying, Socrates was called “the most righteous man.”

Was this Luke’s subtle way of saying to the Greco-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”?

The Saving Cross

It was fashionable, not long ago, to say that Luke had no “theology of the cross.” He omits, for instance, Matthew and Mark’s reference to the cross as the ransom for sin ([Matt. 20:28](#); [Mark 10:45](#)).

Yet Luke, as we have seen, 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 a martyrdom that invites the Greco-Roman world to see Jesus’ death as an object of wonder and beauty.

At the same time, Luke’s Gospel offers the church an example to emulate. We are invited by Luke to take up the cross, whether the cross of martyrdom or the cross of suffering for the sake of Christ. Having heard the Lucan Passion, and having seen Jesus as the willing and obedient man who dies to offer us salvation, we are persuaded to read the Gospel of Matthew and see there the deeper theology of atonement that he offers.

It has long been said that Matthew is the “most powerful book ever written” and that Luke is “the most beautiful book ever written.” To this, the Passion Narrative of Luke bears witness.

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