God’s Providence and the Providence of Crucifixion

When Jesus’s own people demanded His crucifixion, they used their own enemy’s weapon. Crucifixion was a Roman execution reserved for noncitizens, as well as deserters and traitors, were held to have forfeited their citizenship. If Jesus was not going to lead a military uprising to free Judaea from Roman rule, He could suffer a Roman execution for deserting His people.

Yet crucifixion was not Roman in origin. Few things are. Crucifixion came from the same people as the alphabet: the Phoenicians, otherwise known as Canaanites. During the Punic Wars, the Romans fought the Phoenicians’ western cousins, the Carthaginians, from whom they took this technology. If a Carthaginian general lost a battle, he was summoned before the council of the Adirim, found guilty of dereliction of duty, and crucified. During the Second Punic War, one such general poisoned himself to avoid this—better to die of poison than of slow suffocation in public humiliation.

These were the same people who sacrificed their children to Moloch, the same people from whom God told the Israelites to keep themselves separate when He brought them into the Promised Land. He warned His people that if they followed the Canaanites’ ways, they would break their covenant with God. They did not keep themselves separate; they broke the covenant in the most radical way possible: they called for His death by means of an execution of Canaanite origin. And this is what we do every time we choose to fight with our enemy’s weapon instead of with love: we demand our freedom yet enslave ourselves.

Yet God brought our salvation out of our disobedience and hypocrisy. He did not desert His people; He followed them even into Sheol to give them citizenship in Heaven. He was not a defeated general; He won the ultimate victory for all of us, for eternity. And He did not forget His duty or break His covenant; He made a new covenant in His own blood.

Did God bring Judaea into the fides of Rome for this purpose? Did God lead Rome into war with Carthage so that they might acquire the tool of our salvation? Did God lead the Phoenicians out of Canaan into Carthage, as He led the Israelites out of Egypt into Canaan? I don’t know. But whether through His perfect or permissive will, He worked with us through history even before we knew Him, in order that we might someday know Him. Now that we do, how much more must we allow Him to work with us, to be a worldwide blessing, and not to fight with the weapons of those who do not yet know Him. Happy Easter! He is risen, alleluia!