

Resistance gives life. We would often rather that it didn't, that life was all milk and honey without the labour of getting it, without the resistance the world naturally, and supernaturally offers. This could turn the world into just another laborious place, where we have to earn our keep, earn our worth, earn our love: a world in which we are measured by the success of our labours, but as well as offering resistance life comes to us also as gift, unearned, unexpected and undeserved. There's a tension in this idea too and in our resistance to it - it calls for faith, trust and often not doing, or rather an "active passivity" in which prayer and waiting and hope are called for, and suffering. If you are willing to suffer Iain McGilchrist once more this is what he has to say on suffering – or rather more obliquely on the way the world is constituted by resistance

“Scientists involved in the Biosphere 2 project, which created the largest enclosed ecological system on earth, were puzzled by the fact that trees within the project repeatedly failed to achieve maturity before they fell over. Later, they realised that trees needed wind in order to grow strong. Exposure to winds causes the growth of “stress wood” which is the core of the trees strength and integrity...”

(The Matter with Things Vol 2 p827)

I'm reminded of the great storm of 1987 when often whole woods were felled by the wind except for the trees on the edges which had "learnt" to grow strong as they ironically acted as a wind shield for the others. The word "resilience" also comes to mind, that is the ability (of a person or animal) to withstand or recover quickly from difficult circumstances as the Oxford Dictionary of English puts it, from "resile" with connotations of flexibility and the willingness to change and adapt. So rather than simply seeing Jesus as already the winner in his desert combat with the devil I think we can be permitted a more dynamic view where Jesus too is learning to grow strong as the wind of the Spirit meets the necessary resistance of the world as it is, there to test us and help us too to grow strong – appointed, just as the devil, by God. So the world in its opposition isn't necessarily "bad" for us – any more than that "bad" person who comes to our door, or those "bad" parts within us that irritate us because they tell us so clearly of our imperfection. Get rid of them entirely and we may be in danger of falling over too soon, like those trees inside the wood or the biosphere which never reached maturity. So Jesus is being trained not only to resist the devil but to stand firm in the wind of the spirit, that is to be tempted in every way that we are in order to stand on our own two feet before God in the power of the Spirit – that "active passivity" or work of co- operation or co- creation which will eventually bring us to full maturity. I've put it like this to highlight that the Spirit isn't a gift that simply does everything for us but is working on us too in all our resistance, in all our imperfection, making us strong in ways that may seem at first counter productive, leading us into deserts we'd rather not go.

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