



These reflections are inspired and draw upon the 20,000 word essay *I, Coronavirus. Mother, Monster, Activist* by Bayo Akomolafe

Part One.

A year ago I wrote these words at the end of some reflections about Sanctuary.

In these times of crisis and turbulence it seems that there is a crying need for sanctuary to return to its holy, sacred roots. We need small communities hidden in plain sight, offering safety, a breathing space of silence, a concentration of praxis and prayer, a place to touch deep into Wisdom's treasury. Community is the natural outgrowth of placing presence and spirit at the center of sanctuary. In fact community becomes sanctuary. It is invisible to the outer world but findable for those who smell the

sweet scents of praxis and worship. Sanctuary— a nature preserve— invites the wildness of spirit so currents of joy, creativity and beauty can bloom in the darkest of times

These words now seem tame in the light of a pandemic and the systemic collapse that we are witnessing in real time. Is sanctuary just a place of escape, a flight from danger; a place of refuge among spiritual friends; a place for deepening and growing; a place of safety; a place to hide, hibernate and rest? Or is it something else?



And then this landed in my inbox: "*May our roads be rough, and the disturbance our sanctuaries*" (1).

These words have none of the reassurance of my sense of sanctuary a year ago. How can disturbance be the site for sanctuary? There is no denying that we are in real time unraveling. And disturbance is the new normal. Time is being squeezed into the day, into this moment. We sense we will never go back to the former normal, and the future normal is beyond imagination. In any case many of us do not want return to normal; that normal had become deathlike and numbing. The pre-covid normal was a life on the surface of privilege and comfort.

"*May our roads be rough*". These are bumpy roads, roads not covered over by asphalt and cement. These

are roads with potholes, crossroads with no sign posts, roads without maps. We are in such times. Each day brings new disasters, new spirals, new violence, ever deepening confusing, mind numbing chaos. Can it really get worse? The answer seems yes.

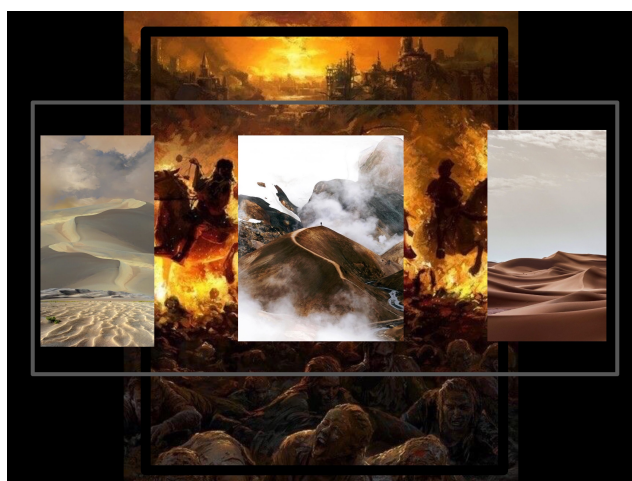
So what is sanctuary when we can only meet on zoom. Perhaps this is not a place of escape, but a dive into the cracks that are opening up beneath our feet. There is no room for wishful thinking, no new age nirvana, no escape from the dangers of breakdown. Escape is impossible. We are becoming fugitives to use Bayo Akomolafe word. We are becoming fugitives heading into the exile of disturbance. I wonder if this is what is needed to shake us free from the matrix of security, cosiness, and consumption, the enclosure of privilege. What kind of manna will we eat?

Bayo Akomolafe suggests that:

“sanctuaries are not places where we are set straight; sanctuaries are places we are broken down. Sanctuaries are not sites of solutions. They are practices that help us see that the way we see the problem we want to address is often part of the problem. Sanctuaries are not committed to reinforcing rectitude, as much as they are invested in touching inclinations and the intersectionalities of our bodies. Most importantly, sanctuaries are assemblages or reconfigurations of the dynamic cross-cutting relationships between us and our children, us and our ancestors, and us and the other-than-human agencies in and around us.” (2)

So as contemplatives, how does this vision shape our praxis, our prayer, our communion? I sense we don't know yet.

What I do know is we must find each other! We cannot bear the rough road of disturbance alone. We need living sanctuary, deep in the cracks, capable of riding the waves of chaos. This is not a workshop for self improvement, nor extended retreat time. This is the gradual, week by week sustained practice of presence; the exploration of the shadow lands; the rediscovery of the tap root of ancient wisdom; the cultivation of resilience and steadfastness; the breaking open of the heart into the tears of vulnerability and love; and it is the wisdom and courage to engage the chaos in each our particular ways. Sanctuary emerges in the moment of now. She is alive and holds us all.



- (1) *I, Coronavirus. Mother, Monster, Activist* by Bayo Akomolafe. (2) *Making Sanctuary: Hope, Companionship, Race and Emergence in the Anthropocene*. Keynote Speech by Bayo Akomolafe at Seeking Connections across Generations, Spiritual Directors, Seattle, march 15, 2019