

What Roles Can Religions Play - with Shanon

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SPEAKERS

Pax Ressler, Nicole Diroff, Shanon Shah, Ben Yosua-Davis, Peterson Toscano



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:00

Hi, I'm Ben, co host of the Climate Changed podcast. Our show features deep conversations with thought leaders, wisdom keepers and teachers about the most important questions facing us today. These conversations deeply enrich me and I hope they're enriching you too. I'm also hoping that they're just the beginning of the conversation for you, a conversation that I hope you're continuing with family, friends, neighbors and colleagues. To help you carry the conversation beyond your podcast feed, we're now producing full discussion guides for each episode of the Climate Changed podcast. You can now access detailed show notes, a full transcript and a specially designed discussion guide for each episode in Season One and Two. Visit thebtscenter.org and under the Resources tab, click on the Climate Changed podcast. That website again is thebtscenter.org. Thank you for keeping the conversation going about what it means to live, love, and lead in a climate-changed world. You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world.



Nicole Diroff 01:18

Hosted by me, Nicole Diroff



Ben Yosua-Davis 01:20

and me Ben Yosua-Davis. Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.



Nicole Diroff 01:27

The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center.





Ben Yosua-Davis 01:36

Wherever you are listening to us, and whatever you are doing while you listen, welcome to this episode of the Climate Changed podcast.



Nicole Diroff 01:44

This is actually our last episode of Season Two. As part of it, I'm thrilled to share with you a conversation I had with Shanon Shah. I think he might win the award for the guest from the furthest distance. He lives in London.



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:00

You know, I was thinking about that Nicole and I don't know, Ray Buckley, who I spoke to earlier this season lives in Alaska. And that's pretty darn far from Maine too.



Nicole Diroff 02:10

Good point. Well, I'm so glad this podcast has included voices from both near and far. As you will hear Shanon holds many identities that are sometimes hard to juggle in faith spaces or environmental spaces. I'm glad he brought so many of them into the conversation we shared.



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:31

Also in this episode, you will hear an original song that was written and performed by Pax Ressler.



Nicole Diroff 02:36

And as always, we will provide you with meaningful tangible next steps at the end of the show.



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:42

So Nicole, I wanted to ask, what was an experience that took you out of your home cultural context? And what did it teach you?



Nicole Diroff 02:52

I like this question Ben at the beginning of an episode where we bring in someone from the Muslim community to be in conversation with us. My interfaith understanding work and continued commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion means that I have found right around the corner experiences that expose me to other perspectives and other cultures. I currently serve on the DEI committee "diversity equity inclusion committee" for my school district

and recently had a conversation with another mother who serves on that committee who is from India. And she shared a brief story of her child being bullied on the playground, because of the color of his skin. And what really struck me was the way in which she talked about how she had prepared him for that. And the way in which actually he was able to respond with much of that preparation in mind. But it really struck me because that was not a conversation I ever had with my son about how to be ready, when this is likely going to happen to you. So it just exposes for me how different peoples' experiences are even when they're my neighbors. We like to share a grounding towards the beginning of each of our episodes. For this episode, it is a pleasure for me to share a song created by Pax Ressler called The Soil.

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Pax Ressler 04:22

The soil holds the past, shows us where we've been. The soil unfolds our history and knows where we begin. The soil nurtures life, it grows all that we need. The soil unfurls a mystery and sows the sacred seed. God let it grow in me, send down your rain and light and with your help we'll be the soil to bring the world to life. bring us to life The soil knows what will come. It's known it all along. The soil can hear the distant hum of restoration song. The soil contains our hope. It pushes out green shoots. The soil proclaims the is growing deeper roots. God let them grow in me, send down your rain and light and with your help we'll be the soil to bring the world to life. God let them grow in me. Send down your rain and light. And with your help we'll be soil to bring the world to life. bring us to life bring us to life bring us to life

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Nicole Diroff 07:36

Thank you Pax for that song that reminds us that the soil holds both our past and our future. The soil holds roots and seeds. Pax is a Philadelphia based artist working at the intersection of arts and advocacy. I got to know Pax when I was worshipping at Tabernacle United Church where they serve as music director. You can find a link to the sheet music and a downloadable mp3 for The Soil in our show notes. And now I'm happy to share the conversation I had with Shanon Shah. Shanon balanced careers and human rights advocacy, journalism, and theater in his native Malaysia before relocating to London in 2010. He holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from King's College London, and is a fellow of the London-based Muslim Institute, where he is Senior Deputy Editor of its flagship quarterly publication, Critical Muslim. Shanon also is the Director of Faith for Climate, a UK based organization that inspires and equips faith communities in their work on climate change. I hope you enjoy listening to our conversation. I know that you actually hold many hats and many identities in the world. And I just want to invite you to share some of those that you think might be relevant as we talk about collective honesty and collective hope. What would you like me to know about you in your own words?

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Shanon Shah 09:33

Wow, I'm gonna take a moment now. Let me think about where I'm gonna start. I am Muslim, practicing Muslim well, not not a perfectly practicing Muslim. I won't claim perfection in any thing that I do, but you know, I try. I'm also a gay man. I identify as queer as well. I am in a very loving civil partnership with an openly gay Anglican priest, who also does lots of climate activism within the Church of England and LGBTQI activism, we share our spiritual lives together a lot. I am also an immigrant to the UK, I was born and raised in Malaysia. I'm also

kind of a geek, I've got a doctorate in the sociology of religion. So when I talk about religion, it's kind of its personal practice, but it's also kind of geeky of influence. Yeah. I look at religion as an object of study as well.

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Nicole Diroff 10:40

Shanon, I just really want to affirm in the ways that I've gotten to know you, the way in which you show up as your full self, and with identities that definitely help contextualize all of the other messages that you are sharing. So thank you for being your full self in the world. And in this conversation with me.

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Shanon Shah 11:03

And I really appreciate the space. I'm so glad to be here. And that feeling of welcome is real. We're continents apart. But I definitely feel the connection and the welcome. And I really appreciate it. So thank you.

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Nicole Diroff 11:19

I wanted to start by asking you to describe the world that you feel Faith for Climate is working for the world that Faith for Climate is fighting for?

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Shanon Shah 11:33

I think this is such a great question. I love it. Because this is where I think there's a real value of coming from a faith tradition where there is a framework. And there is a vision that comes before you that you internalize and becomes your own. At the start of Ramadan, I came across this prayer from the Prophet Mohammed that I hadn't come across before and I realized it's because I am from a Sunni tradition of Islam. And I saw this prayer from a friend of mine on social media, and she's a Shia and she was posting this because she said this is the prophet's prayer for Ramadan. Part of her tradition as a Shia and I had never encountered it. And I'd like to read that that prayer, actually, yeah. Because I think that that goes to your question. It says, Oh, God, give bliss to the people of the graves, enrich, every poor person, provide for every hungry person, clothe every naked person, help every debtor pay his or her debts, relieve every distressed person, return every exiled person, free every slave and prisoner. Oh, God, correct every wrong in the affairs of those who believe and cure every sick person, cure all of our deficiencies with your prosperity, and transform our bad state, to the beauty of your state. And that is the prayer and there is no mention of climate or environments in it. That's right. But every single thing that's in it, I think applies to a faith inspired vision of a world. that is climate changed. But where we're also applying, I don't know, whatever imagery you want the kingdom of heaven. I mean, let's let's go with that as well. Right? So yeah,

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Nicole Diroff 13:37

When you were describing that, that's what came to mind is kind of the kingdom, which sometimes I use the word kingdom and take out the G that Jesus speaks about. And so that is

sometimes I use the word kingdom and take out the G, that Jesus speaks about. And so that is the world that those of us who are people of particular faith traditions hold in mind when we're doing this work in this advocacy, it actually isn't necessarily a response to biodiversity loss or the amount of carbon in the air. It is still this sustained vision of community and life together. Yeah, that's beautiful.

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Shanon Shah 14:14

Thank you. And when I find beautiful about what you said is, I really liked that change in kingdom to kindom. Because one of the reasons why this prayer that my friend shared it resonated with me so much was it made me think of something, you know, my partner's church on Ash Wednesday, there was an Ash Wednesday service, there was a reading then and this is the reading we have now as well in the Compline service in the Church of England. It's from the book of Isaiah, chapter 58. Really, I mean, you know this now but I'm going to read it as well because I think it's so nice to juxtapose them and play and this is what my partner I read every night as well. "Is not this the fast that I choose To loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is there not to share your bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" And there's that word, your own kin. I love that. I love that.

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Nicole Diroff 15:27

I love it. Thank you, Shanon. That's really, really beautiful. And so much of what I wanted to talk with you about today, we are doing a season of the Climate Changed podcast that is focusing on collective honesty, and collective hope, in these times. And I was wondering along those lines of honesty, if you might share something with us that from your perspective and climate work, is the thing that's not being talked about enough.

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Shanon Shah 16:06

Though the word that's always that's always missing for me is power. Because I think it is often the people who are most who have the least power in the worlds now who have done the least to cause this crisis that are suffering the most. And it is the people with the most power who have historically caused this crisis, who are not using that power, to change, to transform. And that's a big thing for me.

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Nicole Diroff 16:41

Thank you. I want to say amen to that. That's a really important conversation. And I think we're not having enough. I appreciate that. One of the topics I was hoping we might dive into today is something that The BTS Center has been exploring in conversation with a woman named Debra Rienstra, who is an author of a book called Refugia Faith. And she is an English professor at Calvin College. We actually just did a big event with Debra recently and her writing has been a place of real intrigue for us. For Debra, she introduces refugia in biological terms. And in biological terms, refugia are places of shelter, where life endures in times of crisis, for example,

in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption, or a forest fire, and from these small sanctuaries, biological sanctuaries, life re-emerges. So Debra, has been inviting people of faith to be people of refugia. And The BTS Center has really been captivated by this idea, asking, How can spiritual leaders in a climate-changed world create safe places of flourishing, micro countercultures, where communities gain strength and spiritual capacity to face the challenges of a climate-changed world? What has your experience been of faith communities as pockets of micro counterculture? Or pockets of spiritual refugia? As Debra uses those words?

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Shanon Shah 18:54

Wow, I'm, I'm getting goosebumps with that. And I have so much to say, Okay, well, but I'll start with your question. Like my own experiences or observations of that. The thing that comes most immediately to mind is, I first came into post at Faith for the Climate in early 2020. So this was around the time of the beginning of the COVID pandemic. I literally got this job, like, I don't know, three or four weeks before, before lock down in the UK, we all had to go online. That was the year that we thought that the UN climate talks COP 26 were going to happen that year in 2020, in Glasgow in Scotland, and then the talks got postponed because of COVID. And I was just meant to be here for six months. I was just like, I was just gonna work here one day a week. That's what the funding was for just to get faith groups together and have a statement for COP 26, but because it got postponed and the work became more urgent, we came into more funding, we applied for more funding, and we expanded what we wanted to do for COP 26. And as UK faith groups, and I really have to credit the Quakers in Britain, because they were saying, as faith groups, let's really let's go for broke. Let's go for climate justice. Let's talk about this issue of power. COP 26 is going to be held in this country that is a historic polluter. The Industrial Revolution went hand in hand with British colonialism that extracted and exploited and oppressed so many parts of the world, which are now suffering from climate breakdown. And here we are having a COP in this country that has this moral and historic baggage, right. So they were saying the Quakers was saying to the rest of us, you know, we have a Church of England, Catholic Church and Jewish groups and Muslim groups and so on. So they were saying, let's talk about loss and damage. And the rest of us were like, what, what are you what is this what is loss and damage? And basically, they were saying, Look, this is this is basically reparations, right? We can't call it reparations for legal technicalities. This is not how it works. But as as religious groups, we know about the concept of repair. We know what it means to repent, we know what it is to have fallen, and then looked at ourselves and realize I have to do better, I have to do better by this people that I've wronged and myself and by the Divine. So let's go for loss and damage. Let's let's do this, right? Yeah, I knew nothing about this. I'd just come into post, I was just coming to grips with what the UN system was, I thought I was gonna run an organization where people were doing different things like, I know, some protests against fossil fuels. Some tree planting, you know, I just thought, yeah, that's what I'm doing. And then suddenly was the COP 26 conference, and we're doing loss and damage, right. So I had, yes, I had to educate myself about this. And then one day, I had to speak to a group of churches during Lent I think during Ramadan. And I had to explain to them what loss and damage was, you know, this thing about vision? What do you want the world to be? One of them said, but how do we go through this this story? It's so despairing when we think about climate, you know, there's so much despair, and how do we do this as churches, and I was kind of, I was kind of flippant, I say, Hello, we are going into Holy Week now. This is when your savior gets tried and condemned and crucified, right? What are you telling me? You don't know what despair is? He gets crucified. But then there is the resurrection. And then how does the resurrection happen? I mean, one of the gospels that tells us that it's Mary Magdalene, who waits there weeping, everyone thinks the world has come to an end. But there he is coming out

of the tomb, and she sees her Risen Lord, it's just her and him. This moment that's so vulnerable and intimate, but it's a rebirth, the tomb becomes a womb, right? So I will say to them, like, you, this is what it's about. This is where you get it. So you are churches in England. This is part of the story. I remember a bishop saying to me, Amen, brother, it's Ramadan, and you are Muslim, and you are preaching the gospel to us. And also like, yeah, thank you.

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Nicole Diroff 23:38

Thank you, the gifts of faith communities really came out in the story you just told. So as compared to organizing tree planting, which is a great thing to do. There was a way in which there was an awareness that faith communities bring history and rituals towards honest repentance and movement towards repair, that perhaps others at that COP gathering may not have that history or ritual to offer. And so going deep with that is very powerful. Stepping back for a moment, you said that this concept of refugia sort of brought you in a number of different directions. And I want to create space for that beyond the story that you shared. One of Debra's arguments is that God loves refugia. Yeah. God loves these small, countercultural pockets of spiritual fortitude. She points to many places in Christian scripture where that is the case. And I wonder as we are having conversation across traditions, if there's a Muslim perspective on that concept that God loves, refugia, that has come to mind for you.

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Shanon Shah 25:15

Just because of the way I live my life now and the partnership that I have, I see the Abrahamic traditions as continuous. When I think about things like holy week can the crucifixion and the resurrection. And I think it's the time of the year now as well, because it's, it's Ramadan. And this is the month where Muslims traditionally believed that the Quran was revealed. I mean, there's some debate about what that means. Does that mean the actual recension of it to the Prophet Muhammad in real time in that cave that he wasn't meditating in? Or is it the sending down of this cosmic word through the layers of Heaven is not a story that's ever been reconciled in the Muslim tradition. I will focus on the human side of the story, when when Mohammed does receive the revelation from the angel Gabriel, I don't think it's an accident that that's kind of an annunciation story, because this is Gabriel, come to Mohammed saying, this is the word you are going to bear it. It's not through a womb, Mohammed is a male prophet. So the word comes out through this scripture, right? The Quran. And it's such an overwhelming experience that and then think about it, this happens in a cave. He's meditating in the cave, and this idea of caves and tombs as kind of wound like spaces, you know, this, this refugia here, if you'd like, right? But but this happens, and Mohammed has to recite these verses, but then he's terrified. He's so vulnerable. When we talk about religions, and power, like, do you think that you derive power from conquest? Or do you think that you derive power from vulnerability, and I like the story of Islam, because then this is Mohammed, the vulnerable prophet who thinks he's going out of his mind. And he thinks I can't do this, like what what has just been put on me. And what he does is he goes back home, and he leaps in the arms of his wife, Khadija, who is 15 years older than him, you know, she's the more mature one, she's got the job, she's got the wealth, but they have this really loving and tender relationship, the only thing he knows to do is just just embrace her and weep. And what she says to him is effectively, I believe you, I believe you, I see you. I know, I know, you're not crazy. And then

from there, she becomes the first believer, she's effectively the first Muslim, right? And you think about this whole tradition as developed out of the story of vulnerability. Yeah, I think that's the analogy that I was thinking of when you were talking about refugia.

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Nicole Diroff 28:02

Thank you. As we dive into this concept of refugia, Debra Rienstra is writing from a Christian perspective, she is someone who identifies as white in the world. Some of the questions we've been bringing to this concept, are actually around power. For some faith communities, they may choose to think of themselves as refugia and that's sort of a choice they can make. But for many, that's not a choice. And you have have a history, immigrant history, Muslim in the United Kingdom, gay identified person within the Muslim community where refugia may not be a choice.

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Shanon Shah 28:48

The sociologist and me likes going into types Oh, you know do you get power from conquest, or you get power from vulnerability and what I realized as soon as I said that was well, with so many of our faith traditions, conquest has always been dressed up in a language of justice and compassion. Oh, you know, we love you, therefore, we're going to colonize you, right? So I was like, Oh, well, you know, so I think is helpful to still have those types in our head, even though historically we know that, you know, religious institutions have behaved in a particular way, you know, whatever institutions they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, but it's like we see that all the time in the entanglements of religion and imperialism and religion and colonialism. Maybe it's the shift in context, because when I was growing up in Malaysia, like as a Muslim, I am mixed race my family is you know, of kind of immigrant origin right my dad's side of the family comes from the Indian subcontinent. My mom's side comes from China, but I was born in Malaysia and so were they. But because I'm Muslim in a country that is majority Muslim and with Islam is the official religion. I find myself in a particular position of power there, I'm middle class, I'm male, I'm able bodied, I'm university educated. So, in Malaysia, yes, I am gay and I am at risk with with that side of my identity, but in so many other ways, I am in such a privileged position there. And then coming to the UK, my context is different, right? You know that the shifting social location that we have and how that affects how we play with power, how we come, how we become subjects of power or how we become agents of power is something I constantly think about.

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Nicole Diroff 30:39

Shanon, I am wondering if I might share with you a quote from author I've been engaging with and see if we might break this down together a little bit. So, this quote comes from a book called *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* and it's written by Amitav Ghosh. So Amitav Ghosh says, "If a significant breakthrough is to be achieved, if the securitization and corporatization of climate change is to be prevented, than already existing communities, and mass organizations will have to be in the forefront of the struggle. And of such organizations, those with religious affiliations possess the ability to mobilize people in far greater numbers than any other. Moreover, religious worldviews are not subjected to the limitations that have made climate change such a challenge for our existing institutions of

governance. They transcend nation states, and they all acknowledge intergenerational long term responsibilities. They do not partake of economic ways of thinking, and are therefore capable of imagining nonlinear change. Catastrophe, in other words, in ways that are perhaps closed to the forms of reason deployed by contemporary nation states." I just want to see how you interpret Amitav Ghosh saying that we want to prevent the securitization and corporatization of climate change. What do you hear in that?

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Shanon Shah 32:30

Being from minority ethnic and religious community in the West, you can sometimes imagine climate change as a security threat to the quote unquote civilized world, because it's going to create all these refugees, they're gonna flood your borders, and we have to turn them away. But why are those people refugees in the first place? Why do they have to seek passage and risk life and limb to find safety in you know, nobody wants to do that? Right? Yes. And that really disturbs me, it's kind of not very intellectually rigorous to do that, to do this, but I'm speaking personally, it kind of sounds like it can shade into fascism, right? Just send them all away, you know, we don't care that they can die, we need to we need to look after our own. That's like the worst kind of view of kinship. And that's what I'm getting for. And a lot of this, I think, I like that he's linked it with corporatization because I definitely think these false solutions are rooted in a very predatory forms of capitalism.

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Nicole Diroff 33:39

Yes. And then he makes this move of if nation states and corporations can't reason their way out of this, because they're in structures that don't allow for the sort of understandings we need. He points to religion as a place of possibility.

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Shanon Shah 33:59

I want to come to that through some caveats. The caveats may make it sound like I disagree with him, and I don't, but I just want to lay out the caveats that I have, because when he talks about this, it makes me think that, that the best of the sorts of religious movements that he's referring to are they can have like, really utopian views of the world. And I don't mean that in the bad way. I like utopias, you know, like the kingdom of heaven. What is that? That is a utopia. So I like that. But as a Muslim and as a gay Muslim, I'm also aware that there have been so many movements that are looking for utopias, but in a really dark and twisted way. Yes, I'm borrowing from the words of another Indian writer. I think he's, yeah, American, like Indian American Arjun Appadurai. He's, he's an anthropologist. So he talks he talks about light utopias and dark utopias and the dark utopias or things like ISIS or Al Qaeda, the trend to set up visible Islamic State through violent means through terrorism. And they are universal. They transcend the nation state too, you know, they transcend conventional economic thinking as well. You know me saying this doesn't make me an Islam hater. I'm saying this as a Muslim like it's a it's a self accountability for me to recognize this. They grow from the seeds of what's in Islam as well, right? It gets distorted. And it goes in that twisted direction like this is all part and parcel of this picture. There are these movements. And then there are the states that have been born of these movements as well and thinking of countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia that emerged in the modern era, like the Iran and Saudi Arabia that we know now were born of these kinds of

utopian social movements as well. But nobody can look at Iran and Saudi Arabia, and I think this has gone well. No, it hasn't. This is terrible, right. What I find really profound about Amitav Ghosh's quote, is the word intergenerational. It's also when I'm with friends who are like skeptical of religion or skeptical of climate change, you know, they have kind of doomsday scenarios about the world. And they're like, Oh, isn't it terrible? All the stuff that's happening? And religion? Isn't it such a horrible thing? It's a force for violence in division and like, okay, yes, yes. I'm not denying your reality but for me, what is the most interesting question is, why do liberationist or holistic or progressive strands of religion like whatever you want to call that? That side of things? Why have they always existed? And why do they always possess why in every generation do we always find a Francis of Assisi, or or Martin Luther King, or a Gandhi, or a Malcolm X? Like, this is not a coincidence or a naming a lot of men know a Mother Teresa, a Sister Helen Prejean, do you know what I mean? Like it this is this is something that's always there. And it might be small movements, they might be put down really violently by corporate or military or State forces, but they endure and like Maya Angelou says, they rise we rise all the time. In Iran now there is a movement, woman life freedom in Saudi Arabia, there are all these dissidents in jail, and they're still trying to find this. And that's interesting, and that's intergenerational. And that's the kind of stuff I live for that that informs my work and my being

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Nicole Diroff 37:41

Thank you, Shanon. I wish you many blessings on the really good and important work you are doing in the UK and the really good and important relationships you yourself are holding with so many across the globe.

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Shanon Shah 37:55

Thank you, Nicole, I just sending you a huge hug across zoom across the continents, I hope you feel it.



Ben Yosua-Davis 38:23

So Nicole one of the things that really struck me when I was listening to your conversation with Shanon is when you really asked him, What is the vision for Faith for Climate, what is the world that they're fighting for? And then he offered this prayer from his tradition that doesn't name climate at all. It talks about clothing and the naked relieving debt, returning the exiled, freeing slaves and prisoners, feeding the hungry. and I was just struck by the breadth of that vision. It is so much broader than solar panels and policy. The solar panels and policy certainly could be a part of that vision. But he is really kind of pushing to go past how do we keep this whole thing going to what does it mean to transform the way we relate to one another as a society? This for me echoes this question that I find I've been asking a lot which is, is what we're fighting for, to kind of maintain in perpetuity, this consumeristic, anxiety ridden impressive world that we're in, like is that really the goal of the climate movement is build enough solar panels that we can continue to live a consumerist materialist lifestyle that if you read any of the stats, we're all pretty miserable doing it? No, right. This is this, by the way is most definitely a rhetorical question. Yes, yes. We're all doing this for the sake of Amazon and eBay and more shows on Netflix.

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Nicole Diroff 39:51

The answer to your question is no.



Ben Yosua-Davis 39:54

Right? But you know, I notice how often like in anxiety we try to reach back to find a normal, even when we know that normal is bad, this is actually something that happens in like family systems a lot in a family system begins to change. Like, for instance, if there's someone in the family who the role is like, they're the screw up, and they get their lives together, the thing that happens is the rest of the family actually often won't support them in that transformation, because it's going to change their normal, even if they know at some intellectual level that this transformation is a good one. I think this is also true kind of at a global level as well. This is one of the critiques I've read a lot about sustainability language and sustainability language is really in right now. To the point that I think we're starting to reach the juncture where we don't even know what the word means anymore. When oil companies use sustainability language in their public pronouncements, I think we're at the point that maybe the word doesn't have a lot of meaning anymore. The question I was always asking is like, what are we trying to sustain? Are we aiming to sustain the world we're in? Or are we aiming for transformation, which means that some things actually can't and shouldn't be sustained, but instead should pass away so that something new can emerge? Yeah.

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Nicole Diroff 41:10

Yeah, Shanon brings forward the metaphor from our tradition, Ben, the the metaphor of crucifixion and death. This is not an easy death, that our Christian tradition is framed around, it's a crucifixion. And then the possibility of new life that emerges in the resurrection, Shanon lifts up that metaphor for us. I've been part of conversations that have been using metaphors like composting, or hospicing, the way in which we need to move from a real death of something into the hope of something new, the hope of something actually really different. You're right, this is going to be really hard. And it's not just kind of continuing business as usual, but in a slightly new way. I do think there are times where people will say that Scripture doesn't talk about climate change. And so, you know, what are we supposed to do with that? What Shanon highlighted for us, says that scripture and practices of our tradition has everything to say about how we might relate to one another, which is what really needs to be transformed right now.



Ben Yosua-Davis 42:26

That's one of the things that I loved about what he shared a little later on his whole story about basically preaching the gospel to this group of Anglicans, who are saying, well, how do we deal with all this despair? And he says, Hello, we are going into the Holy Week and talks about this beautiful image of how the tomb becomes a womb. What I kept hearing is kind of, to the, you know, these these critiques about what role can religion play the Yes, oftentimes, those critiques are true, the complicity is real, there are bad things that have gotten really deep roots in our practice that we have to work really hard to excavate. So there's the Yes, and then, but look at this wonderful resource about death and resurrection. Or look at these beautiful things

that are a part of lineage. Then he talks about this kind of aligning with these forces for liberation that have always been present out on the edges of every organized religion. And I have a feeling probably at the edges of most oppressive institutions throughout human history.

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Nicole Diroff 43:29

I really did want to be in conversation with Shanon because of his Muslim identity, I've found over and over again, in inter religious work, that often is my my friends of other traditions, that will lift up something that's so true about my own perspective that somehow I never saw. You know, we started with sharing times in which we've been exposed to difference and that's helped us see things differently. It really helps also to be in conversation with those who are different to just get that lens back on ourselves. I loved the way Shanon highlighted that for that group of Christians that he was talking to, and for us.



Ben Yosua-Davis 44:14

I was thinking about the important ways that these dialogues serve as as mirrors. Or at least I think that's the way it's often supposed to work. When we are relating to people across religious or cultural or even socio economic difference. It offers a mirror which allows us to take a better look at our complicity, but also at our gifts and our strengths. I really loved how we've been talking about like Shanon, and unquoted, more Christian scripture, there may be any other guests we've had on for this entire within this entire season, which is not a criticism of any of our other guests. But it's this beautiful invitation that I think he offered you and offers me and offers all of us who are listening to actually get ourselves back into the soil of our lineage and find some of those resources.

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Nicole Diroff 45:02

It might be a rather fair critique of progressive Christianity, that we rarely talk about scripture or Jesus, who we are following or the ways in which we have a deep and actually really strong why, for what we're about. I can think about attending the United Church of Christ General Synod meetings, which is my denomination, when things are coming forward, they come forward with a theological rationale, and then a set of action steps. And we're so tempted to go right to the action steps, like people literally might take the piece of paper and flip over to the backside, and not even read the theological rationale and go right to the action steps. And this, I think, is what we need to change because we actually need the theological rationale right now really strongly in our society, as we work to be people deeply rooted and committed to the sort of communities we want to live in both human and more than human.



Ben Yosua-Davis 46:06

Part of this dialogue across this difference can offer us as a chance to re enter into some of these questions like the one I've been talking about, what does it mean to live a good life? We have as kind of people in positions of dominance, exported this version of what a good life looks like that we've often backed up with a lot of money. If you look at a lot of the way the development discourse has evolved over the years, one place that we need to be sensitive to

with all this is that for people operating in other contexts and other places of the world, where there is meaningful poverty and suffering and violence and oppression, what they may be looking for in this moment may be quite different than where we are, as people who are taking up this ridiculously disproportionate share of the world's resources to sponsor this lifestyle, which is profoundly unsustainable. One of the things we always have to remember is that really when we talk about change, and by we I mean, privileged folks operating largely in western context, and perhaps most particularly in American context, since America is the number one consuming nation in the world, but nothing you can do to get around this. The sort of changes we need to make and the way we're relating to one another and the way we're relating to the more than human community, and the ways we understand lifestyle, are going to be very, very different at times than what it looks like in other places around the world. Part of what it's about is redressing some of these imbalances. Because for people who still need clean water, telling them to tighten their belts in the name of a sustainable future for our planet, not only is it not going to go over well, it's profoundly unjust. It's another form of colonialism. This is where we get to some of the conversation against power and power imbalances, and that there's actually not one story, at least not yet, because of how dramatic these power imbalances are.

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Nicole Diroff 47:59

You and I have talked at times about how the death that we may be approaching the death of something is actually a death of something that has been really terrible and harmful for many, many humans, and many, many species other than humans. There's a desperate longing for really huge change, for me the vision for that is this kingdom idea that Shanon and I tossed around. But there's a way in which we need to acknowledge, I think, as you named the we, those of us with privilege from Western settings, it may not be ours to lead the way on this. This is not ours to fix, actually, it's ours to potentially find a way to to honor the death that needs to happen and look for the signs of life on the other side.



Ben Yosua-Davis 48:55

And I think to remember that for what us in this culture, may cause very legitimate real grief, those same things may be a sign for rejoicing in other human communities and in other non human communities. I think about a psalm, I'm going to take a risk, and a quote a piece of scripture in the spirit of Shanon. And I remember reading a psalm recently that talked about the trees of the forest, and the rivers rejoicing at the coming of God. And the reason God was coming was to judge the earth and his peoples. I found myself getting really uncomfortable thinking maybe there are things that I'm going to experience as a privileged white Westerner as judgement that other people are going to experience as justice. Other non human communities are going to experience as justice.

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Nicole Diroff 49:47

When I think about that line from scripture, and the trees, I actually imagine trees that are being clear cut right now, the way in which there's likely a desperate longing by those beings for a real shift in power.





Ben Yosua-Davis 50:06

Mm hmm. This all to me comes back to this, the understanding of the centrality of community. In this season, we have talked about some really difficult things. There are times we'll get to the end of the episode go, Wow, this, this was kind of a downer. Because we've talked about suffering. We've talked about the limits of power and control. But one of the things I've noticed is, all of our guests have come back to community. That in the end, if there is a place where we can root our hope, where we can find a new sense of agency, it's in community — community with one another, and by one another, I just don't mean other humans. Actually, cultivating this community requires craft and intention, and persistence. That is worthy work for us in whatever context we find ourselves.



Nicole Diroff 51:02

I've been surfacing more and more the way in which the work that I was doing in interfaith understanding is in some ways exactly the work that I need to be doing now within the context of a really significant climate crisis, really finding ways in which diverse communities which are reflective of our ecosystems can be committed to one another, and committed to particular places on the land on this planet over the long haul. I think I'd want to just share with our listeners, some of the work that I did at Interfaith Philadelphia. We worked to develop a passport to understanding, we identified five steps that anyone can take to move towards a place of understanding relationship. I come back to these all the time in my own life. The five pieces we named were, number one, be curious. Number two, venture out, experience something other than what you're used to. Number three, and I think sometimes Christians forget to do this actually, welcome in, we learned so much about ourselves when we welcome others in. Number four, stand tall, find your identity and find some pride in that identity. And last, but not least, and perhaps most important, is to stand with. So as you stand tall in your own identity, know that your belonging is in really communities that are bigger than people just like yourself. In fact, people of many diverse backgrounds, and more than human kin that have so much to teach us. So find ways to stand with each of those other beings. It feels so critical to me to be forming those sorts of communities in this time.



Ben Yosua-Davis 53:12

Nicole, that sounds like a wonderful next step. And I've been thinking about as the season ends, and we consider what people might want to do next. That's been one of our commitments is to not leave people hanging, but give them a way that they can get their hands dirty, what they might want to do, based on what they've heard in this episode, or the journey they've been on us with over the course of this season. I'm curious if you have a next step offer.



Nicole Diroff 53:38

In addition to visiting Interfaith Philadelphia's website and exploring their passport to understanding think really deeply as Shanon encourages us to about power, and the way in which religion might be our best way into conversations about loss and damage and repentance and repair. Shanon really challenges us to think about our pocketbooks, our investments and the money behind it all.

S

Shanon Shah 54:11

So I'll go back to how we first got connected through another amazing friend that we have Abby, shout out to Abby. I don't know when people are hearing this, but I know that the movement that Abby works for Greenfaith has a lot of things in store this year, and we at Faith for the Climate. We're kind of like the UK founder and partner of Greenfaith. And we're really looking at where the money is this year. So who are all the people financing climate collapse and not admitting to it and not doing anything about it and not just the fossil fuel companies, but the banks and asset managers and insurers. Lets as people of faith, talk about the money and rethink what we do with the money I think that is the next step.

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Nicole Diroff 55:01

Greenfaith.org a really important place to check out. And especially as people of faith, bring this perspective on repentance and repair, and let's bring money into conversation.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 55:16**

Another big step is one that you could engage in if you're interested in casting a broader vision for your own legacy and future, especially in this moment where the future might seem so unsettled. Check out this wonderful resource called An Epistolary Practice of Play for the Seventh Generation, which was a resource developed by Ophelia Hu Kinny for The BTS Center's Leadership Commons. In it, you'll find a four week small group resource that will invite you to reflect on how your descendants seven generations from now might experience the predicaments we're wrestling with at this moment, and what wisdom you might want to offer them and also therefore, yourself as well.

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Nicole Diroff 55:57

Our Podcast Producer, Peterson Toscano has an idea for a next step as well, based on a commitment he made following Season One of Climate Changed. Peterson, what's your idea?

P


Peterson Toscano 56:11

Thank you Ben and Nicole. It's true. I've become a Red Cross volunteer, I am on the disaster action team. And I also do some outreach in the community to help people prepare for disasters to make sure that they have smoke alarms that are working and in place, I was surprised at the many many resources and opportunities that exist. In addition to responding to large disasters, Red Cross volunteers provide many services locally. For instance, they provide support and resources for people who experience a disaster like a house fire. In addition to being on a Disaster Action Team, there are a variety of volunteer opportunities available that may interest you. The Red Cross is currently looking for volunteers to serve as blood donor ambassadors, you do not need any medical training. These volunteers engage donors by greeting, registering, answering questions and providing information. They also support blood

donors through the recovery process at the refreshments table. Basically, if you're good at hospitality, and you don't faint at the sight of blood, this one is good for you. If you are a mental health professional, the Red Cross is looking for disaster and mental health volunteers. And if you are a trained clergy or a lay minister, the Red Cross is also looking for spiritual care volunteers. Visit the Red Cross website to learn about these and the many other volunteer opportunities, visit redcross.com. That's redcross.com.

 Nicole Diroff 57:52


Thank you so much for joining us today for this episode. And throughout Season Two of the Climate Changed podcast.

 Ben Yosua-Davis 58:00

We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation. We would also welcome any suggestions you have for the show.

 Nicole Diroff 58:07

Feel free to email us at podcast@thebtscenter.org. That's podcast@thebtscenter.org.

 Ben Yosua-Davis 58:16

Our podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine.

 Nicole Diroff 58:22

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