

Episode 14: The sacred Black feminine | A conversation with Christena Cleveland

The author of *God is a Black Woman* went in search of the Black Madonnas.

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Christena Cleveland's *God is a Black Woman* weaves personal pilgrimage and societal reckoning to dismantle the cultural “whitemalegod” and uncover the sacred black feminine--and hope, healing, and liberation. In this episode, Cleveland defines mysticism as a “connection with one’s inner spiritual authority,” and names the ways in which mysticism has failed to be intersectional, and therefore cannot necessarily be considered activism:

“I hesitate to connect mysticism with activism without a huge asterisk because the vast majority of people who call themselves mystics are really just helping White people connect with some sense of peace, and they’re not in solidarity with, like, Black trans women, and they’re not trying to think about ‘well what does mysticism look like in this context.’ And they’re not working against the systems of capitalism that keep people working 80-hours a week just to put food on their table. They’re not working for any of the things that would create some space for other people to connect .”

Christena Cleveland Ph.D. is a social psychologist, public theologian, author, and activist. She is the founder and director of the [Center for Justice + Renewal](#) as well as its sister organization, [Sacred Folk](#), which creates resources to stimulate people’s spiritual imaginations and support their journeys toward liberation.

A weaver of Black liberation and the sacred feminine, Cleveland integrates psychology, theology, storytelling, and art to stimulate our spiritual imaginations. [God is a Black Woman \(HarperOne\)](#), her third book, details her 400-mile walking pilgrimage across central France in search of ancient Black Madonna statues, and examines the relationship among race, gender, and cultural perceptions of the Divine.