

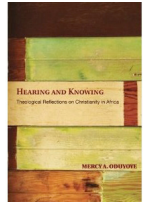
# Opportunities to Affect: In Reading Groups

By: Melissa Browning

## Hearing and Knowing: Reflections on Christianity in Africa

Mercy Oduyoye

### For Group Reflection and Discussion



In *Hearing and Knowing: Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye gives an in-depth look at the church and theology in Africa. She encourages African churches to work toward an inclusive vision where both men and women lead and serve in the church and in the world.

### Introduction

Mercy Amba Oduyoye is one of the first women theologians to publish in Africa. Oduyoye founded the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, a vibrant group of women theologians who are writing some of the most important theological literature in Africa today. The group focuses on themes important to women, such as the African HIV/AIDS epidemic and other issues related to the flourishing of women and all peoples in Africa. You can learn more about the Circle on the Internet at <http://www.thecirclecawt.org>.

Mercy Oduyoye grew up in Ghana's days of colonialism. Her father was a Methodist minister, but Oduyoye was conflicted because, at the time, missionary Christianity asked her people to abandon too much of their culture when converting to Christianity. In this book Oduyoye focuses on themes within African Christianity that have been derived from African culture.

### Part 1. Christianity in Africa: Past and Present

1. As people called to be on mission, what can we learn from the history of missions in Africa that Oduyoye presents in the first two chapters of the book?
2. Do you think Oduyoye is correct in saying that movements such as colonialism shaped Christianity in Africa?
3. Oduyoye argues that salvation in the modern missions movement has been given "too narrow a definition" (p. 39). Do you agree? How do you define *salvation*?

4. Oduyoye tells us that "the cry for salvation/liberation in Africa is primarily a cry for health and wholeness." How can this idea shape the way we do missions?
5. Do you think reading or learning about Christianity in other places can reshape or nuance our faith? If so, in what ways?
6. In talking about indigenized theology, Oduyoye emphasizes the importance of African people remembering their pasts in order to look toward their futures (p. 54). How can this apply to cross-cultural theology and missions? What "pasts" do we need to remember in order to build a future together that resembles the kingdom of God?
7. What is the relation between the gospel and culture? Should the gospel only inform culture, or can culture inform the gospel? Is it a one-way relationship or a two-way relationship?

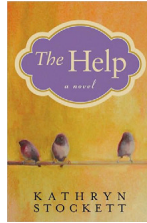
### Part 2. Themes in African Theology

1. While the formal period of colonialism is over in Africa, many theologians, such as Oduyoye, would argue that unfair systems of trade and commerce still impact African peoples in negative ways. In light of this, how can Christian theology provide a space for further liberation and human flourishing for African peoples?
2. What new insights can the global church gain by understanding the Exodus story from the perspective of those who are poor and oppressed today?
3. Oduyoye argues, "A theology divorced from ethical demands would have little relevance in Africa" (p. 96). In reflecting on this, do you think theology in the U.S. is connected to or divorced from ethical demands? How might a tighter integration between theology and ethics help us rethink our faith?

4. Oduyoye says that Jesus has “asked us not to accept pain fatalistically, but with the power given us to put an end to it” (p. 106). How can this idea help us respond better to issues like HIV/AIDS or hunger, which are present throughout Africa?
5. How can the African concepts of covenant and community (ch. 9) provide a model for the church in the West to follow?
6. In chapter 10, Oduyoye talks about the importance of women’s experience in theology and faith. Do you agree with her view? Why or why not?
7. After reading Oduyoye’s chapter on feminism, would you consider yourself a feminist?
8. Often when we hear about Africa, we read about wars, famine, orphans, and disease. How can reading a book like this on African theology give us a broader perspective on life in the African context? How can it shape our understanding of the continent? How can it shape our call to mission?

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# next month:



*The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett, follows the lives of Minny and Aibileen, two African-American maids living and working in the South during the 1960s. The novel provides a place to discuss race and the history of racism in the United States.