

Future Ready, Mission Faithful

Theological Education in Africa

Chapter 1 Excerpt

Volume Editors

**Danson Ottawa and Joshua Robert Barron
with Ruth Barron**

Series Editor

Joshua Robert Barron



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1

Rooted, Relevant, Resilient

ACTEA's Catalytic Role in Advancing Quality Theological Education in Africa

David Tarus

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)

“The battle on the mission field will be theological within the next decade.”

Byang Kato, Urbana Missions Conference, 1970¹

Introduction

This chapter highlights the strategic role of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) – formerly known as the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa – in championing excellence in theological education across sub-Saharan Africa over the past fifty years. Rooted in the founding vision of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) – now the Association of Evangelicals in Africa

1. Kato, “The National Church: Do They Want Us?,” 168. The chapters in *Christ the Liberator* had been presented at the Urbana Missions Conference in 1970.

(AEA)² – ACTEA has evolved into a dynamic catalyst for theological institutions committed to serving the church and transforming society.

This chapter unfolds in three parts. First, it traces the **roots** of ACTEA in the vision and work of the AEA. These roots have borne **fruit** in the form of strengthened institutions and transformed leaders, while ACTEA's expanding influence across the continent represents the growing **branches** of a movement committed to excellence in theological education. Second, this chapter argues that excellence in theological education is not a luxury but a necessity – especially in African contexts, where the church often functions as the primary agent of hope, leadership, and development and depends heavily on the quality of theological formation. It thus explores ACTEA's framework for excellence, which is anchored in five key domains – Administration, Teaching Staff, Facilities, Educational Programs, and Students – as a catalyst for quality enhancement. Third, the chapter reflects on the future of theological education in Africa, calling for Spirit-led innovation, adaptive learning models, and a renewed commitment to form leaders who are biblically grounded, contextually aware, and missionally driven. The gist of the chapter is that theological institutions must uphold standards of excellence across all areas of their ministry in order to effectively empower the church to fulfill its transformative role in society. This is a missional commitment.

The ACTEA Story in Brief

The Roots

The story of ACTEA is rooted in the broader story of the AEAM (now AEA). These roots trace back to February 1966, when 192 evangelical leaders representing churches and mission societies from twenty-three African nations gathered in Limuru, Kenya. That historic meeting gave rise to AEAM – a continental body born from a shared burden to guard the integrity of God's word amid growing threats of syncretism, universalism, and liberal theology, especially regarding the perceived reception of African traditional religions by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its African arm, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).³

2. AEA's name change was due to the recognition that Madagascar is part of Africa. This change was effected at the 6th General Assembly of AEAM in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1993.

3. Breman, "Association of Evangelicals in Africa," 6–7; Pleuddemann, "Coming Crisis in Africa," 1; van Veelen, "Remembering Byang Kato," 87. Also see Breman, "A Bird's Eye View of A.E.A."; and Kapteina, "The Formation of African Evangelical Theology."

A Christian layman from Swaziland proposed a motion to establish an evangelical association for Africa, and this was unanimously adopted. Rev. Kenneth Downing of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) was appointed as AEAM's first general secretary and tasked with nurturing this new movement.⁴ From these roots also sprouted a vital branch that focused on theological education: the Association of Evangelical Bible Institutes and Colleges of Africa and Madagascar (AEBICAM). Born in the same Limuru gathering, AEBICAM carried a clear mandate – championing theological education by extension, accreditation for Bible colleges and theological institutes, and organizing leadership seminars across the continent.⁵ Though AEBICAM was largely inactive for the ten years of its existence, the seeds of quality theological education had been planted and would later germinate and grow through the efforts of the Theological Commission of the AEAM (founded in 1973) and ACTEA, founded three years later.

AEAM convened its inaugural General Assembly in February 1969, meeting once again in Limuru, where delegates were inspired by Byang Kato from northern Nigeria, a towering figure in African evangelicalism and “the first evangelical African theologian to earn a doctoral degree in theology.”⁶ Speaking on the theme “The Youth and the African Church,” Kato urged the church to offer young people “something to remember” – the life-giving word that produces saving faith and transforms lives.⁷ Just weeks earlier, from 25–31 January, Kato had delivered a landmark presentation at the Christian Education Strategy Conference. His influence was palpable throughout the General Assembly. He emphasized that “Christian education [was] the number one thing which the church in Africa needs.”⁸ Unapologetically, he challenged the church in the West to invest in Africa’s leadership development. Speaking on “the price tag” of leadership formation, he said, “I put forward the suggestion that for every missionary sent to Africa by churches in the West, those churches undertake the training of at least one African for the church in Africa.”⁹

During the February 1973 General Assembly, the African evangelical church took decisive steps toward a more structured theological and educa-

4. *Christian Education Strategy Conference*, Back Cover.

5. *Christian Education Strategy Conference*, Back Cover; see also “Study Group’s Proposals Adopted by the Strategy Conference,” 5.

6. Ferdinando, “The Legacy of Byang Kato,” 4.

7. Kato, “The Youth in the African Church,” 1; Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 66.

8. Kato, “Needs and Problems,” 13.

9. Kato, “Turning Point,” 7.

tional future. Two permanent commissions were established to anchor this vision: a **Christian Education Commission** and a **Theological Commission**. The latter assumed the responsibilities formerly held by AEBICAM and was entrusted with the strategic task of establishing graduate-level theological institutions – one for Francophone Africa and another for Anglophone Africa. It was at this Assembly that Byang Kato was elected AEAM’s first African general secretary, succeeding Kenneth Downing, who had resigned three years earlier. AEAM had remained under the interim leadership of Eric Maillefer, its Administrative Secretary.

By that time, Kato had already distinguished himself as a bold, gifted, and prolific evangelical scholar. Still in his thirties, he had written extensively – both scholarly and popular works – for the benefit of the African church and actively engaged in leading African theologians of the day, including John Mbiti, J. K. Agbeti, Bolaji Idowu, and Harry Sawyerr.¹⁰ His seminal book, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975), emerged as a defining evangelical response to theological liberalism¹¹ and syncretism. But this bold evangelical critique of esteemed African theologians came at a cost. As Keith Ferdinando notes, “By his opposition to the AACC and theologians like Mbiti and Idowu, Kato was taking on the African ecclesiastical and theological establishment. He disagreed in print with those whose academic credentials were already established, risking opprobrium and ridicule.”¹² Yet Kato remained steadfast, deeply convinced that faithfulness to the gospel was a missional commitment requiring clarity, courage, and biblical faithfulness.

Kato was not just a continental figure but earned global recognition. In 1970, he addressed thousands of university students at the Urbana Student Missions Conference in the United States. In July 1974, he led the African delegation to the historic Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Switzerland. There, as one of the few Majority World voices on the main stage – alongside Latin American leaders C. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar – Kato’s presence was both symbolic and prophetic. He represented a rising Africa, ready to shape the future of global Christianity. He was later appointed to the Lausanne Continuation Committee and served as Vice President and Chair of

10. Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 78–79.

11. For Kato, a theological liberal is “a person who . . . does not accept the absolute nature of the Bible” and who accepts the assumptions of “Higher Criticism,” resulting in an inability to “come to an orthodox understanding of salvation, evangelism, and other basic doctrines of the Word of God.” Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 141, 144. Those “basic doctrines” include such fundamental Christian claims as the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus.

12. Ferdinando, “The Legacy of Byang Kato,” 6.

the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship – now the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Kato's visionary leadership laid the theological and structural foundation for what would later become ACTEA. Though ACTEA was formally established after his death, the groundwork had already been laid by AEBICAM and, later, by Kato's leadership of AEAM. Before his untimely passing, Kato appointed Paul Bowers to spearhead the realization of an accreditation agency for AEAM. Bowers became ACTEA's first Director in 1976. In 1978, he catalyzed discussions leading to the founding of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) in March 1980, serving as its first General Secretary.¹³ Thus, ACTEA is both a founding member of ICETE and the catalyst for its formation.

From 21–26 November 1975, just weeks before his passing, Kato convened a significant theological consultation in Nairobi under the AEA Theological Commission. This consultation brought together delegates from thirteen theological institutions across Francophone and Anglophone Africa, along with European observers.¹⁴ It was during this gathering that Kato offered his vision for the evangelical church in Africa, anchored on four key pillars:

1. Evangelical theological education from grassroots to advanced levels;
2. Regulation and harmonization of theological training through a dedicated quality assurance agency;
3. Production of theological and ecclesial resources for the church in Africa;
4. Specialized ministries for children and youth.¹⁵

For Kato, these were not optional aspirations – they were vital roots to secure the church's future. The participants discussed the establishment of graduate-level theological institutions – one in Bangui (Central African Republic) for Francophone Africa and another in Nairobi (Kenya) for Anglophone Africa. Kato played a critical role in shaping these plans, believing they were necessary for a church grounded in biblical truth and equipped to meet Africa's unique challenges.¹⁶

13. Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 65; see also Paul Bowers, "Theological Education in Africa," 10.

14. Robinson, "Limuru 1973 to Bangui 1976," 27–28.

15. Kato, "Turning Point," 6–7; my summary.

16. Kato, "Turning Point"; Kato, "The Problem of Theological Education in Africa."

Tragically, on 19 December 1975, Kato drowned in Mombasa at the age of thirty-nine. Though his life was cut short, his legacy lives on in the continued work of ACTEA, AEA and its branches and fruits, globally in ICETE, and in the countless African theologians and leaders he inspired.

Branches and Fruits

In response to Kato's sudden passing, the AEAM's Executive Committee convened a crisis meeting from 15–19 March 1976 to discern the way forward. At that gathering, representatives from evangelical alliances and mission agencies resolved to carry on Kato's legacy. This pivotal moment gave rise to several enduring institutions within the AEA family: the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), established immediately in March 1976, with Dr. Paul Bowers, an American missionary serving in Nigeria, as its first Director; the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui* (FATEB) in the Central African Republic, officially launched in October 1977 after years of preparatory dialogue; the Christian Learning Materials Centre (CLMC), founded in Nairobi in 1981 to address the need for biblically sound teaching resources, especially for children; and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) – now Africa International University (AIU) – which opened its doors in 1983 to nurture advanced theological scholarship on African soil. Each of these institutions became a branch of the “tree” AEA had planted and which Kato had “watered” for three years. FATEB and NEGST became premier graduate schools, shaping generations of African scholars, pastors, educators, and leaders. CLMC emerged as a vital hub for the production and distribution of Christian literature, especially for children and youth.

ACTEA launched its accreditation standards for postsecondary programs during a meeting of theological institutions and council members held in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, from 26 to 27 July 1977. At that time, several institutions were already seeking accreditation and support from the newly established agency. The second ACTEA Council meeting, held in Miango, Nigeria, from 16 to 18 October 1978, resulted in several groundbreaking resolutions. These included the adoption of ACTEA's Francophone name, *Conseil pour l'Homologation des Établissements Théologiques en Afrique* (COHETA), and the endorsement of a letter to the WEA Theological Commission urging the formation of a global alliance of accrediting associations. The letter was also copied to the Asian and American accrediting bodies. Additionally, ACTEA was mandated to offer “supplementary services” alongside its accreditation function. Thus, from its inception, ACTEA embedded accreditation within a

broader commitment to institutional strengthening – offering not only accreditation services but also strategic support to help theological schools across Africa grow in capacity, credibility, and contextual relevance. This vision was further affirmed at the ACTEA Council meeting held in Chongoni, Malawi, from 29 August to 1 September 1981, which approved ACTEA's constitution. At this meeting, the Council also reaffirmed ACTEA's evangelical identity as central to its mission, requiring all schools seeking accreditation to affirm the AEA Statement of Faith. It was also resolved that members of the ACTEA Council would be appointed by the AEA Theological Commission.¹⁷

ACTEA served the continent with minimal resources, facilities, and personnel. Bowers observes, “When ACTEA was launched in 1976 there were no personal computers, no printers, no photocopiers, no fax, no email, no web, no mobile phones, no text-messaging. All documents were typed by hand on manual typewriters. . . . All documents were reproduced by mimeograph.”¹⁸ Yet like a resilient tree in harsh conditions, it continued to grow, faithfully committed to its mission. Its administrative base remained wherever its Director resided – South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, or even the United States – demonstrating remarkable adaptability but also exposing the limitations of not having a fixed center of operations. But that changed in 2013.

In February 2013, the ACTEA Council convened, following the passing of its Chair, Dr. Douglas Carew, in November 2012. During this meeting, recognizing the need for rootedness and operational stability, the Council resolved to establish a permanent office in Nairobi, Kenya – the home of its parent body, the AEA. This strategic decision marked a significant turning point in ACTEA's journey.

Florence Kamau was appointed as a part-time staff member in April 2013, with a mandate to initiate the setup process. Her responsibilities included transferring documents, files, and other vital ACTEA resources from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, to Nairobi. Over eight hundred kilograms of materials were successfully shipped as part of this relocation effort. In addition, Florence was involved in establishing the Nairobi office, procuring furniture, and supporting administrative tasks under the leadership of Joe Simfukwe from Zambia, as ACTEA worked toward appointing a full-time Executive Director. At the time, she was still serving as an administrator at Africa International University (AIU). Emmanuel Chemengich was appointed ACTEA's first full-

17. Bowers, “Theological Education in Africa,” 5–6, 8, 11.

18. Bowers, “Theological Education in Africa,” 14.

time Executive Director in January 2014, and Florence Kamau transitioned to full-time service with ACTEA in March of the same year.

Over the years, ACTEA has been privileged to be guided by influential and respected leaders. Those who have served in leadership roles – either as Executive Director or Administrator – include Paul Bowers, George Foxall, Tite Tiénou, Scott Cunningham, Roger Kemp, Lazarus Seruyange, Rich Stuebing, Phillippe Emedi, Joe Simfukwe, Emmanuel Chemengich (alongside his Executive Assistant, Florence Kamau), and, currently, David Tarus, who leads a growing team of staff. The ACTEA Council has similarly benefited from the leadership of esteemed Chairs, including Tite Tiénou, Cornelius Olowola, Jacob Kibor, Douglas Carew, Desta Heliso, Ezekiel Emiola Nihinlola, and, currently, Florence Muindi, who serves as Board Chair. The general secretaries of the AEA have consistently played a pivotal role in ACTEA's governance – initially, as ex officio members and, more recently, as serving as voting members of the ACTEA Board and as Presidents of the ACTEA General Assembly. This role of President of the General Assembly is currently held by the AEA General Secretary, Master Oboletswe Matlhaope from Botswana. His predecessors, Tokunboh Adeyemo and Aiah Foday-Khabenje, also served faithfully as members of the ACTEA Council.

In 2014, ACTEA secured its first official office space – a modest corner within the AEA's old wooden premises. Though small, this marked a significant milestone in establishing a physical and administrative base. In 2017, ACTEA moved to a slightly larger facility – an outbuilding on the campus of Africa International University (AIU). While these incremental transitions represented progress, the space was inadequate for ACTEA's growing vision and operational demands. Meanwhile, under the visionary leadership of Aiah Foday-Khabenje, the AEA pursued its own path toward sustainability and institutional stability. In a bold step of faith, the AEA launched a project to construct the AEA Plaza – a modern nine-story facility designed to support its ministries and secure its long-term future. Construction began in 2015 and culminated in the joyful dedication of the completed building in April 2019.

Early in the process, Aiah Foday-Khabenje – then serving as both AEA General Secretary and a member of the ACTEA Council – extended an invitation to ACTEA to purchase office space within the new AEA Plaza, which was then undergoing construction. Recognizing the strategic significance of this opportunity, the ACTEA Council, at its meeting in Addis Ababa in 2015, unanimously endorsed the proposal. This decision was viewed not merely as an investment in physical infrastructure but as the first step in the realization of ACTEA's sustainability.



AEA Plaza, Valley Road, Nairobi

By God's grace, ACTEA secured the initial deposit for 5,082 square feet of office space, with the remainder of the payment originally due by February 2020. However, since the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a prudent adjustment, ACTEA downsized its allocation to 1,860 square feet. By February 2022, the new offices were fully completed and operational. The space reflects ACTEA's growing stature and professional outlook. It includes five modern offices, a smart boardroom equipped for virtual meetings and training sessions, an archival room that preserves ACTEA's historical records, an open-plan workstation, and a small break room offering hospitality to staff and guests. This new home, rooted within the broader vision of the AEA, stands as a tangible fruit of many years of sowing, watering, and trusting in God's provision.

Indeed, if Byang Kato were alive today, one can only imagine the joy and gratitude he would feel seeing how far ACTEA has come. Entering ACTEA's new offices, standing in the new boardroom, overlooking the skyline of Nairobi, and reflecting on the fruits of decades of faithful labor, he would no doubt give thanks for the flourishing of a vision that began with deep roots in Limuru. But I imagine he would not stop there. His eyes would likely look beyond the horizon – not just at what has been achieved but at what still lies ahead. He would see the future unfolding in the form of new generations of African theologians, stronger institutions, deeper discipleship, and a global church enriched by Africa's contribution as the center of gravity of the Christian faith.



ACTEA's offices at AEA Plaza, Valley Road, Nairobi

A key catalyst in ACTEA's recent growth was the launch of the ACTEA Strategic Plan (2022–2027), which clarified and deepened the organization's mission while repositioning it to engage more broadly with the church and society across Africa. This expanded mandate required a reimagining of ACTEA's vision and mission, a restructuring of its governance model, a revamping of its brand, and a strategic strengthening of staff capacity and organizational roles. Recognizing these needs, I led a phased recruitment of specialized personnel across critical functions – including administration, finance, advancement (i.e. institutional sustainability and fundraising), communications, and accreditation. This strategic staff expansion has yielded tangible results: ACTEA's operational efficiency has improved significantly, its geographical footprint has grown, and it now leads targeted initiatives such as ACTEA for Women¹⁹

19. ACTEA for Women is an initiative of ACTEA with “aims to support both established female theologians and emerging female theologians in ways they could not access or create otherwise. Our vision for African women in theological education is to see their stories of lament become stories of leadership. It is to see stories marked by frustration and exclusion become redeemed as powerful starting points for new collaborations, innovations, and actions that hold the potential to transform the institutions and cultures that, intentionally or unintentionally, have

and theological research efforts, notably through its academic journal, *African Christian Theology*.

ACTEA adopted a new governance model that significantly advanced the realization of its mission. Approved by the ACTEA Council, the model introduced a thirteen-member Board accountable to the Council. Since its formation in 2022, the Board – currently chaired by Dr. Florence Muindi – has brought together a distinguished and diverse team of leaders from across the continent and the diaspora (the UK and the USA). With professional expertise spanning medicine, theology, finance, law, education, business, and international development, these individuals are propelling ACTEA’s mission with renewed vigor and strategic clarity.

ACTEA’s capacity-enhancement events are strategic platforms for networking, collaboration, and growth. These gatherings bring together leaders and faculty from across the continent for dialogue and shared learning. The need is great, as evidenced by this story:

My name is Nzuki, and I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I serve as a pastor at a local church in the western part of the DRC. Last week, I began a long journey by road from my home country to Nairobi, Kenya, with the hope of arriving in time to participate in the ACTEA Francophone training and the inaugural ACTEA General Assembly. My local church was willing to raise funds to purchase an air ticket for my travel; however, due to ongoing civil unrest, this was not possible. The economic situation in my country is extremely unstable, and most of our congregants are struggling to make ends meet. Still, I felt a strong call from the Lord to serve the Church faithfully. Encouraged by the prayers and support of my congregation, I set out on this journey. I am grateful to God for bringing me safely to Nairobi. However, the little money I had has been entirely used for travel expenses, and what remains can only cover my return trip home. It is with great

not had room for their voices. Our vision is to see women flourish and reach their God-given potential in African theological institutions to the benefit of the African Church.” See “About ACTEA for women,” n.d., <https://acteaweb.org/actea-for-women/about-actea-for-women/>.

Editors’ Note: For more details, see also the “ACTEA for Women” section in chapter nine of this volume, “Toward Equitable Theological Education: Strides and Hurdles for Female Faculty in Africa” by Verena Schafroth and Sophia Chirongoma.

humility that I request you to kindly consider waiving my conference fee and allow me to participate in the General Assembly.²⁰

ACTEA honored Nzuki's request and covered all his expenses. One delegate from Nigeria wrote on the feedback form, "Pray for me, that I may be able to apply the lessons and strategies learned during this General Assembly as I lead the theological institution in Nigeria where God has entrusted me as Principal." A delegate from Zimbabwe, responding to a post-event interview, remarked, "The ACTEA General Assembly has rekindled in me, as a theological institution leader, a renewed zeal to lead TCZ in conducting market research that will inform the development of relevant, market-driven curricula – responsive to both the needs of the Church and the community." Another leader noted, "Do not allow this initiative to bring African theologians together to grow cold. Fuel it by all means possible." Another delegate reflected, "I appreciated that the ACTEA General Assembly was inclusive. I am a French speaker and do not understand much English, yet I felt fully included."



ACTEA Accreditation Visit to Scott Theological College, 8–11 July 1979. Scott was the first institution to secure ACTEA accreditation at the postsecondary level.

ACTEA's Catalytic Role in Fostering Excellence in Theological Education

ACTEA approaches accreditation from the perspective of peer review and collaboration. It does not view accreditation as policing theological institutions

20. Dr. Nzuki submitted this testimony on his feedback form for ACTEA's inaugural General Assembly, 24–29 September 2023, Nairobi.

but, rather, as institutions walking alongside ACTEA and each other to ensure quality and renewal to support the church's mission. This familial orientation has been part of the ACTEA story since its beginnings. Paul Bowers, the first ACTEA Director, observes that, right from the start, ACTEA sought to cultivate a spirit of collegiality and collaboration in quality assurance. Thus, ACTEA was seen as “not just an initiative toward an assortment of institutions, but an initiative from within a community of schools operating as a family, and hence something of a family project.”²¹ ACTEA was and shall remain “a valued extended family.”²² This approach is truly biblical and truly African, and ACTEA hopes that seminaries will take this spirit of collegiality seriously.

Let us now turn to the five critical areas of focus in ACTEA accreditation, as outlined in the *ACTEA Standards (2022)*, a document available in English, French, and Portuguese.²³

Five Areas of Excellence

Excellence in Administration

ACTEA supports theological institutions in Africa by promoting high standards of quality administration as a foundation for impactful theological education. Institutions are guided to develop and maintain clearly articulated vision statements, strategic plans, and educational objectives that align with their mission to serve the church. These objectives should address academic, spiritual, character, and vocational formation and be embraced by both staff and students. ACTEA emphasizes strong governance structures, requiring well-defined roles, policies, and procedures that support effective oversight and management. This includes a diverse and mission-committed governing body, clear lines of authority, and responsible administrative practices that reflect the values and context of the institution.

In addition, ACTEA helps institutions establish sound financial management and sustainability plans. This includes budgeting practices aligned with strategic goals, external audits, and an increasing reliance on locally generated support. Institutions are also expected to maintain stability through continuity in leadership, healthy staff retention, and consistent enrollment in theological programs. ACTEA encourages regular and comprehensive institutional reviews involving all stakeholders – students, graduates, and churches – to

21. Email to the author, 9 August 2021.

22. Bowers, “Working Together,” 2.

23. ACTEA, *ACTEA Standards (2022)*.

ensure ongoing relevance and improvement. In all these areas, ACTEA's guidance ensures that administrative excellence supports the broader goal of producing well-formed leaders for the church and society.

Excellence in Teaching Staff

ACTEA supports theological institutions in Africa by ensuring that their teaching staff meet high standards in number, qualifications, and professional development, thereby contributing to academic excellence. Institutions are guided to maintain adequate staff-to-student ratios – typically one teacher per twenty students at postsecondary and postgraduate levels – and to ensure core full-time faculty for each field of study at the doctoral level. Teaching staff must possess accredited qualifications appropriate to the level of instruction, with postsecondary and postgraduate faculty typically holding postgraduate degrees and doctoral faculty required to have earned doctorates and to have a record of scholarly publication. Institutions are also expected to provide orientation to the African context for all staff, especially those from outside the continent.

Beyond qualifications, ACTEA emphasizes faculty commitment to Christian character, institutional mission, student engagement, and church life. Institutions must clearly communicate expectations regarding teaching, mentorship, and professional growth, with a typical workload capped at forty hours per week. African staff should constitute the majority of faculty, and institutions are encouraged to reflect appropriate gender and ethnic diversity. Fair compensation, regular review of salaries, and plans for faculty development – such as advanced studies, workshops, and participation in initiatives like the ICETE Academy – are essential. Doctoral faculty must also engage in ongoing research and professional contributions. These standards ensure that ACTEA-accredited institutions foster a high-quality academic environment grounded in contextual relevance.

Excellence in Facilities

ACTEA requires that the physical facilities of a theological institution – including its buildings, layout, furnishings, and access to information technology – be adequate for the level of theological education offered, accessible to persons with disabilities, and appropriate to the local context. These facilities should be well-maintained and secure, supporting the mission and smooth operation of the institution. Library resources must align with the academic level of the programs offered. The holdings must prioritize quality over quantity, repre-

senting both academic breadth and contextual concentration, with *Africana*²⁴ titles comprising 8–10 percent of the total collection. Institutions must also ensure convenient access to digital resources and sustainable arrangements for students in hybrid, distance, or nonresidential programs.

Library funding should support steady growth and effective operations, with institutions allocating at least 5 percent of their annual operational budget to library acquisitions at the postsecondary and postgraduate levels, and at least 7 percent at the doctoral level. Administration of the library must follow recognized procedures, with adequately trained staff and integration of current information technology. Doctoral-level institutions are expected to employ a librarian with both a postgraduate qualification in library science and a recognized theological degree. Libraries must safeguard holdings against damage and theft and ensure appropriate study spaces, including individual areas for doctoral students. Access to computing facilities and user support for both students and faculty is essential to effective theological research and learning.

ACTEA has observed a disconnect between many institutions' missions and their facilities, with some failing to maintain or make full use of their resources. It is crucial that schools assess their facilities through the lens of their mission, ensuring that these align with the institution's goals. Stewardship is key; institutions must responsibly manage their resources to avoid overextending or underutilizing them. A well-developed strategic plan – including a master plan, maintenance plan, and budget – is essential for ensuring that facilities sustainably and effectively support the mission. Thoughtful building projects and ongoing care of facilities and resources will demonstrate responsible stewardship and strengthen the institution's long-term impact.

Excellence in Educational Programs

Theological education programs – including nonresidential, modular, hybrid, and distance-learning formats – should integrate both curricular and extra-

24. As defined by the editors of *African Christian Theology* in the journal's policy manual, "*Africana* means 'having to do with Africa,' and refers to materials (e.g., artefacts, handicrafts, books, documents) which are related to, or which originated in, African culture and/or history and/or languages; 'African' here includes both the continent of Africa and the Black Atlantic – *Africana* is inclusive both of the peoples and traditions of Africa and of those of African descent. In terms of academic scholarship, an *Africana* work is knowledgeable of and pertinent to African cultures, contexts, and languages. It might be written by a non-African, but includes African perspectives. Similarly, some work by Africans is completely written from a Minority World (i.e., the 'West' or 'Global North') perspective and does not engage with African contextual realities: such work is not part of *Africana* scholarship. Engagement with, or application to, African contexts is crucial." Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa, *African Christian Theology Policy Manual*, 3–4.

curricular activities, promoting holistic student development. Activities such as worship, community life, work, sports, social engagements, and practical Christian service should be intentionally designed to further the institution's theological education objectives. Additionally, institutions are encouraged to develop cocurricular enrichment programs such as lectureships, workshops, and field trips to enhance students' learning experiences. Postgraduate and doctoral programs, particularly in vocational training, must maintain rigorous standards and integrate practical experience to prepare students for ministry roles, paying special attention to their academic, spiritual, character, and vocational growth.

The curriculum should be meticulously planned to meet the unique needs of the Christian community the institution serves. The course materials selected must be contextually relevant, and classroom interaction should encourage students to connect their studies with their cultural, church, and community contexts. The overall curriculum design must ensure that students receive a comprehensive education that covers biblical, theological, historical, practical, and general knowledge areas, without significant omissions or overlaps. Institutions are encouraged to develop clear educational objectives for each program and course, aligning with both academic and spiritual goals. All programs, including doctoral programs, should include practical vocational experience – such as internships – to equip students with the skills needed in their future roles.

Institutions must demonstrate their capacity to support postgraduate and doctoral programs with qualified staff and extensive library resources. To maintain high standards, all postgraduate and doctoral programs should have rigorous admission processes, clear graduation requirements, and structured assessment methods, ensuring that students are fully prepared for leadership roles in the church, the broader Christian community, or secular spheres.

Excellence in Student Services

ACTEA's standards for student services emphasize providing an environment that supports both the academic and personal development of students. In terms of services and housing, institutions are expected to ensure that student accommodation meets basic standards of comfort and safety. Where housing is provided, it should reasonably correspond to that of similar institutions within the country in terms of size, furnishings, and sanitary facilities. The living spaces, grounds, and other facilities must be well-maintained, clean, and regularly inspected to ensure they remain in good condition. Food services provided by the institution should adhere to local hygiene standards and offer

nutritious meals that align with local customs. Institutions must also guarantee that health services are readily accessible to students – especially those residing on campus – to support their well-being during their studies.

With regard to counseling and discipline, institutions must establish organized systems to support students’ personal, spiritual, and ministry formation. Each student should have regular access to designated mentors or staff for guidance. Institutions offering nonresidential, modular, hybrid, or distance programs must also ensure that mentoring is accessible even for students not on campus. The institution should prioritize regular mentoring, which nurtures students’ holistic development. Regarding discipline, ACTEA expects institutions to have written procedures and regulations governing student behavior, ensuring that disciplinary actions are carried out transparently and fairly. Such actions should result from group discussions, involving student representatives whenever possible, and proper records should be maintained. Where necessary, the student’s church or sponsoring body should be consulted, and students should be provided with clear avenues for appealing disciplinary decisions. By maintaining these standards, ACTEA seeks to foster a balanced, supportive, and accountable community life that encourages students’ academic excellence, personal growth, and preparation for ministry roles.

Mission Faithful and Future Ready

I conclude with a few recommendations, especially as we consider what’s next for theological education. These focus on *mission faithfulness* and *future-readiness*.

Mission Faithful

Theological education today stands at a pivotal crossroads. In an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, it must not merely adapt but lead – grounded in a clear, compelling, and theologically faithful sense of mission. Mission is not a peripheral task; it is foundational to the advancement and future-readiness of theological institutions.

At the heart of this imperative is the recognition that theological education exists for something far greater than itself. It is called to participate in the **grand mission of God** – a mission as expansive as God’s own nature, encompassing personal transformation, social renewal, and cosmic reconciliation. This understanding aligns with David Bosch’s profound insight that mission is not primarily the church’s initiative but flows from the very being of the

Triune God.²⁵ As Christopher Wright reminds us, “Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God’s mission.”²⁶ In the same spirit, John Stott affirms, “Mission arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours.”²⁷ The church, and by extension the seminary, does not possess its own mission but participates in the *missio Dei*.

Jesus’s own words in John 17:18 – “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” – reveal that seminaries, like the church, are *sent* into the world to serve God’s redemptive mission. A seminary, therefore, is not merely an academic institution but a **missional community**. It must understand that its calling is not just to educate but to equip men and women for faithful service within God’s unfolding redemptive story. Theological education, rightly understood, strengthens the church to engage God’s mission with clarity, courage, and relevance.²⁸ To fulfill this mandate, institutions must continuously ask themselves:

- What does it mean for us to be *sent* into the world as Jesus was *sent*?
- What is God calling our seminary to do in this particular context?
- Do our programs, structures, and activities align with God’s mission? Or are we simply preserving traditions?
- Are we willing to embrace more faithful and contextually appropriate ways of fulfilling our calling?
- What would it take to make these changes? Do we have the courage and conviction to pursue them?

Such self-examination is essential for remaining faithful, relevant, and transformative. But none of this is possible without **mission clarity**. When the mission becomes vague, secondary, or compromised, institutions risk falling into **mission drift** – a phenomenon Israel Kombaté describes as “a Christian faith-based organization drifting away from its founding mission, its reason for existing, and its Christian identity.”²⁹ This drift can be unconscious or deliberate; either way, it results in a tragic misalignment with God’s purposes.

Mission must not be reduced to a statement on paper. It must become the **driving force** behind all aspects of theological education – from student formation to faculty development, pedagogy to strategic planning, governance

25. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

26. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 24.

27. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, 335.

28. *The Cape Town Commitment*, 106–7.

29. Kombaté, *Dealing with Mission Drift*, 5–6.

to community engagement. The seminary's **prophetic voice** in the church and society hinges on the integrity of its mission. Moreover, mission must be deeply rooted in **organizational theology**, which Stephen Judd, John Swinton, and Kara Martin define as the overlap between the ethos of an institution and its Christian identity and impact.³⁰ They assert that faithfulness is expressed in a contextual and biblically grounded theological framework that shapes not only *what* we do but *how* and *why* we do it. In this light, excellence in theological education must not be pursued for prestige or performance but as a **theological imperative**. Andreas Köstenberger reminds us that “our pursuit of excellence must . . . be christological in nature – grounded in Christian discipleship, in active, committed followership of the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives in this world.”³¹ Excellence is not just about standards; it is about faithfulness to God’s call.

Thus, to be **future ready**, theological institutions must recommit to **mission clarity** – a clarity that is theologically grounded, contextually relevant, and courageously prophetic. Only then can they remain true to their calling to serve the church and participate in God’s grand and glorious mission in the world.

Future Ready

The future of the church and the transformation of African societies are inextricably linked to the quality and future-readiness of theological education. In many parts of Africa, the church is not only a spiritual haven but also a significant driver of social transformation – mentoring leaders, shaping values, and offering practical support in education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. Where state institutions falter, the church often fills the gap. Such impact is sustainable only when undergirded by theologically and contextually grounded leadership. To ensure this, theological education must shift from static models to dynamic, adaptable systems that anticipate future challenges and opportunities. It must form men and women not only for today’s church but also for the evolving demands of ministry in rapidly changing contexts. As Marilyn Naidoo rightly observes, “The Church in Africa remains heavily dependent upon its ministers for its vision and inspiration.” Therefore, how leaders are recruited, formed, and deployed is critical to the church’s future relevance.³²

Theological institutions must embrace innovation and rethink formation beyond mere academic achievement. The future demands an integrative

30. Judd, Swinton, and Martin, *Keeping the Faith*, xiii.

31. Köstenberger, *Excellence*, 51.

32. Naidoo, “Introduction,” 1.

approach – intellectual, spiritual, moral, and missional. Being future-ready means that theological institutions must reimagine their role – not as custodians of inherited systems but as laboratories for innovation. Programs must be contextually grounded, responsive to the needs of both the church and society, and shaped by a vision of impact. Curricula must be designed not just to transfer knowledge but to foster character, competence, and cultural intelligence. Imported curricula that fail to engage local realities must give way to indigenous, transformative education that prepares leaders to serve with discernment and relevance. Steve Hardy effectively captures the vision of future-ready excellence:

Great fruit is the best indication of excellence in theological education. The graduates of excellent programs preach better, evangelize better, administrate better, and live better in that their lives faithfully imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. Their learning prepared them well for the ministries to which God has called them.³³

Future-ready theological institutions understand excellence not as tradition-bound perfection but as Spirit-led innovation. They cultivate leaders who are resilient, adaptable, and equipped to navigate the complexities of both ecclesial and societal landscapes. These institutions remain in constant dialogue with their context – listening, learning, and engaging their communities through research, service, and prophetic witness. Their success is measured not by the number of degrees conferred but by the transformation they foster in students, in the church, and across society. As the African Church stands at the crossroads of deep need and great potential, the shape of theological education will determine whether it continues to lead with vision or is rendered irrelevant by the pace of change.

In an era marked by relentless shifts, theological education must evolve or risk obsolescence. Charles R. Swindoll, in *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, warns against traditionalism, describing it as “an attitude that resists change, adaptation, or alteration” and “being suspicious of the new, the up-to-date, the different.”³⁴ Instead, he calls for a posture of openness – a willingness to embrace the unpredictable while remaining anchored in the enduring truth of the word of God. This spirit of thoughtful innovation is not optional; it is both essential and crucial. It is the lifeblood of future-ready theological education. Tokunboh Adeyemo, former General Secretary of the AEA, echoes this call for

33. Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education*, 83.

34. Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, 163.

renewal in theological education. He urges a shift from rigidity to flexibility, from legalism to spiritual freedom, and from tradition-bound models to contextually appropriate pedagogy. His vision points to a future where theological education is communal, Spirit-led, and transformational.³⁵

This prophetic call is timely. Theological education globally – and particularly in Africa – is at a crossroads. In a presentation at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Eku, Nigeria,³⁶ I posed several critical questions:

- Can theological institutions innovate without compromising excellence?
- Are they willing to adopt culturally relevant approaches that reflect their mission and values?
- How can they ensure quality while adapting to nontraditional models?

These questions are not theoretical – they are existential. Traditional seminary models are under increasing pressure, not just in Africa but worldwide. Matt Ayars, in his *Christianity Today* article “The Future Is Campus-Free,” observes the trend of many US seminaries downsizing due to financial stress but also embracing distance education as a missional opportunity – making theological education more affordable, accessible, and scalable.³⁷

Steve Hardy envisions a future where theological training is decentralized and resource-oriented, with seminaries serving as hubs that support diverse and dispersed learning communities.³⁸ Kevin Smith of the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) concurs, emphasizing that online education is poised to become the dominant mode of theological instruction across Africa due to its accessibility and effectiveness.³⁹ Similarly, Mark Nichols observes that Online Theological Distance Education (OTDE) is rapidly emerging as a primary delivery model.⁴⁰

Within this evolving educational landscape, Competency-Based Theological Education (CBTE) and Micro-Credentials are gaining significant momentum globally. Rooted in the broader framework of Competency-Based Education (CBE), CBTE emphasizes clearly defined learning outcomes and

35. Tokunboh, “The Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education,” 12.

36. Published as Tarus, “Non-Traditional Theological Education.”

37. Ayars, “The Future is Campus-Free,” 32–33.

38. Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education*, 121.

39. Smith, “E-Learning for Africa,” 150.

40. Nichols, “The Akadameia as Paradigm for Online Community,” 5.

ministry-relevant competencies. It is student-centered, contextually grounded, and designed to cultivate practical skills for effective ministry. Micro-credentials, meanwhile, represent a formal expression of education – at both tertiary and non-tertiary levels – as they are subject to external review and result in stand-alone, recognized qualifications. ACTEA has actively engaged in global conversations around these models and is working to harmonize its standards to reflect these emerging educational paradigms.

The case for future readiness is also pragmatic. Institutions face under-enrollment, underused facilities, low lecturer remuneration, and limited church support. Meanwhile, students prefer flexible, hybrid, or online programs that allow them to remain close to family and work. The future belongs to institutions that prepare **bi-vocational leaders** and equip students for both ministry and the marketplace.

Financial sustainability is another key driver of change. Emmanuel Bellon, in *Leading Financial Sustainability in Theological Institutions: The African Perspective*, portrays the bleak condition of many theological institutions. Yet he sees hope in contextually relevant innovations.⁴¹ David Burke, Richard Brown, and Qaisar Julius argue that widening access to education can simultaneously enhance financial viability and expand ministry impact.⁴² Thus, new approaches to theological education may enhance financial viability, serve as excellent tools for marketing the institution, and provide opportunities for the institution to exercise its prophetic voice on issues of relevance to the community.

Steve Hardy outlines models for both informal and formal expansion in order to scale up theological education:

There are four basic ways in which we can extend our training programs. We begin by serving our graduates and their colleagues to encourage them in their ministries. We will also extend ourselves as we serve Bible schools and training programs where our graduates work and from which we receive students; as we respond to the needs of the evangelical community around us; and as we offer our curriculum in a variety of ways and locations.⁴³

41. Bellon, *Leading Financial Sustainability in Theological Institutions*, 3.

42. Burke, Brown, and Julius, “Challenges Facing Contemporary Theological Education,” 23.

43. Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education*, 163.

Hardy provides possible formal ways of creatively extending our institutions to serve the church and community in different contexts. He suggests seven models.⁴⁴

1. Extension study centers. These could be offered in local churches, new campuses, and through partnerships with various organizations.
2. Part-time study for credit. Institutions may provide various part-time study options: studies through evening, weekend, or holiday courses.
3. Intensive modular courses. These could be offered primarily to those already in ministry, allowing them to benefit from visiting lecturers and subject experts.
4. Degree-level education by extension.
5. Research centers. Institutions could offer well-equipped research centers, primarily for students (for example, postgraduate students) but also for faculty members.
6. Correspondence or independent study. Entire degree programs could be offered by correspondence. The University of South Africa (UNISA) uses this model. Initially, correspondence study was offered through mailing print materials; today, it is conducted online via the Internet or using interactive CDs, flash drives, and so on.
7. Internet or virtual seminaries that use interactive technologies and multimedia.

While extending their theological offerings in innovative ways, seminaries must remain committed to excellence. Fortunately, institutions are not alone in this quest. A wealth of valuable resources is available, including contextually rich publications from Langham Literature and the Langham Global Library, featuring the ACTEA, ICETE, and ASET series, among others. ACTEA has developed Standards for Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODEL) to ensure quality in online programs, while also fostering partnerships with organizations such as Scholar Leaders International, which provides services like the BiblioTech online platform. Theological Book Network, Christianbook International Outreach (CIO), and African Christian Textbooks (ACTS) provide books and other resources. ICETE offers cutting-edge global standards and

44. Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education*, 170–74.

an online platform – the ICETE Academy – for theological educators, while Tearfund collaborates with ACTEA to integrate integral mission into theological curricula. MESA Global supports institutions through training in teaching and other key areas. These and many other collaborative efforts signal a new direction: the future of theological education in Africa is **networked, innovative, and quality-driven**.

In conclusion, future-readiness requires institutions to (1) **embrace innovation** while maintaining the highest levels of quality; (2) **design flexible, context-relevant programs** for diverse learners, including bi-vocational ministers; (3) **leverage partnerships** to enhance resource access, relevance, and sustainability; and (4) **focus on transformation** rather than just information – producing leaders who can disciple others.

This can happen only when institutions are able to resist the mediocrity of rigid traditionalism and embrace Spirit-empowered innovation. When institutions do this, they become dynamic agents of transformation. Africa is pleading with the church to offer a theological education that makes a real difference in society. Such an education is not accidental; it calls for innovation, questioning, being questioned, and experimenting by the power of the Spirit while intentionally returning to our communities. As the Cameroonian sociologist and theologian Jean-Marc Éla wrote almost forty years ago, this means engaging “our people, becoming their companions in life and their travelling partners.”⁴⁵ When seminaries do this, they accompany the church in the fulfillment of God’s mission.

Conclusion

Theological institutions in Africa play a pivotal role in preparing men and women for effective ministry within the local church and the broader community. This immense responsibility demands a deep commitment to upholding high standards of quality. For fifty years, ACTEA has been deeply rooted and unapologetic in its evangelical faith, relevant in its focus on contextually faithful theological education, and resilient in the face of numerous challenges. ACTEA has consistently overcome overwhelming obstacles to serve theological schools across Africa. Today, it stands as a testament to the power of steadfast vision and commitment. Over time, ACTEA has not only developed and revamped its standards, it has also established an office in Nairobi, expanded its reach to the Francophone and Lusophone regions, enhanced its staff capacity, and recruited

45. Éla, *My Faith as an African*, 63, 182.

a competent and dedicated board. These efforts have been accompanied by a continual focus on ensuring long-term sustainability.

With a vision of being missionally faithful and future-ready, ACTEA hopes that theological institutions across Africa will continue to flourish. Since the health of the church and the transformation of communities are directly tied to the quality of theological education, maintaining the highest standards is not just a goal but a responsibility. As the apostle Paul reminds us, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col 3:23), emphasizing the divine purpose behind every effort in theological education and the lasting impact it can have on society.

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47. This is a revised version of Ferdinando’s “The Legacy of Byang Kato,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no. 4 (2004): 174–79.

48. Editors’ note: This took place at either the twelfth interim meeting of the Association of Professors of Mission (APM) or at the inaugural annual conference of the American Society of Missiology (ASM), both of which took place concurrently at Concordia Seminary.

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