

THE FUTURE OF ACTEA

Dr Tite Tiénou Chairman of ACTEA

[An address given during the first meeting of the ACTEA Consortium of Theological Colleges, 29 May 1990, at Limuru, Kenya, immediately preceding the first ACTEA All-Africa Conference of Theological Educators.]

1. Vision and Purposes

ACTEA's Original Vision

We are now in the fifteenth year of the existence of ACTEA, the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa. The original vision born in the heart and mind of Byang Kato was formalised into action by the Executive Committee of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) at its meetings in March 1976. This decision marked the creation of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). Kato's desire to see an evangelical accrediting service available for theological education in Africa was consistent with his vision of promoting quality theological education in the continent. I want to underline the fact that theological education in Kato's mind, and may I also add humbly, in my own mind, included not only the academic but also the spiritual and the formation of character.

ACTEA's Purposes

What exactly is ACTEA? Over the years ACTEA has been praised, criticised, quartered and vilified. Since ACTEA means many things to many people, it may not be superfluous to review the purposes as stated in ACTEA's governing document. We must understand the following purposes of ACTEA in relation to the above-mentioned vision of Kato. The constitution of ACTEA states that ACTEA exists:

- (1) to assist evangelical theological education in Africa;
 - (2) to promote the improvement of theological education in Africa;
 - (3) to provide accreditation services for theological education in Africa;
 - (4) to provide, or promote the provision of, linkage and support services for theological education in Africa; and
 - (5) to gather, analyse and publish information about theological education in Africa.
- Emmanuel Ayee, a former staff member of AEAM, in a celebrated article entitled *An AEAM Success Story* said this:

ACTEA's central purpose is to assist evangelical theological schools throughout Africa in their quest for excellence and renewal. ACTEA seeks to achieve this purpose (i) by serving as a medium for contact and cooperation among these schools and (ii) by providing various supportive services to them.

Common Misperceptions about ACTEA

The fivefold statement of purpose above shows clearly that accreditation is only part of the much

broader mission of ACTEA. In spite of this, however, many misperceptions about ACTEA continue to be propagated. The name Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa suggests that ACTEA is principally about accreditation. We who coined the name should be willing to accept that it is actually a misnomer so far as ACTEA's stated functions are concerned.

In a study on ACTEA published in 1985 under the West Africa Leadership Evangelical Education Project, it was said that ACTEA is about the business of establishing the credibility of graduates from accredited schools. I must take exception to that. I do not think that ACTEA is in the business of saying that if you graduated from such and such a theological school, therefore you are credible because that school is accredited by ACTEA. ACTEA is not in the business of distributing credibility to graduates. Credibility must be earned by the graduates as they perform their Christian ministries. That is my own understanding. Of course ACTEA is involved with accreditation. That is clear. We want to think that your school meets certain standards and we also like to think that these standards have some credibility about them. But ACTEA will not certify that a person can do everything because he or she has graduated from a particular school that happens to be accredited by ACTEA.

Other misperceptions about ACTEA include beliefs that (1) ACTEA functions as the academic police; (2) ACTEA is a guarantor of entrance into overseas seminaries and universities for graduates of ACTEA accredited schools; (3) ACTEA is a foreign operation because there is the long arm of missionaries behind it (as though Africans themselves have not been interested in accreditation!); and (4) schools can use ACTEA but schools may not contribute to ACTEA. We need to dispel all the above perceptions about ACTEA for what they are: erroneous notions.

2. A Catalyst for Cooperation

I myself see the greatest strength of ACTEA in the fact that it can be a catalyst for cooperation and excellence in theological education in our continent. If there is one word that summarises for me what the future of ACTEA is, it is the word cooperation cooperation among all of us for assuring excellence in theological education in our continent.

If I were a principal of a theological institution somewhere in our continent I would join ACTEA as soon as possible. That would be my first step. It assures me a linkage with other schools of like-mind throughout the continent. I would also avail my school of all the services of ACTEA, such as the wonderful Library Development Programme, which will make our library funds go a long way further, and the ACTEA International Lectureship series which will familiarise our students and staff with important evangelical leaders. I would also take advantage of the help offered in the ACTEA Tools and Studies series, and in the ACTEA Directory of Theological Schools in Africa. These services open my school's community to the wider world of theological education in Africa. There is nothing worse than tunnel-vision in a school. Many schools suffer because they think only of themselves and cannot think beyond their town and certainly not beyond their country nor, worse still, beyond their denomination. We are all evangelicals. Of course we have distinctives but in God's vineyard we have more things in common than we have differences.

I would go even further. We in our schools need to make the assistance offered by ACTEA work effectively for the good of our schools. So I would organise faculty discussion sessions on specific issues of the Tools and Studies series, such as those raised in Number 7 entitled

Comparative Survey of Curricula Used in Theological Colleges in Africa. This gives me a window on the world beyond the horizons of where I happen to be. I would also use the data given in the ACTEA Directory as a possible resource for helping me find visiting lecturers from within the continent. You cannot ask your students to broaden their horizons if you are not in the business of broadening your own horizons. This would begin the process of cooperation and, who knows, you might find some schools in proximity to you with which to establish some joint friendships. In brief, in my estimation ACTEA's major contribution is to provide a framework for continental networking and collaboration among us as evangelical theological educators.

3. ACTEA'S Achievements

First Phase: 1976-1985

The achievements of ACTEA can be divided roughly into two periods, the first decade (1976-1985) and the present decade (since 1985). The first ten years of ACTEA were devoted to becoming established and getting accepted, as is to be expected of any young movement. ACTEA needed to achieve credibility, and it has done remarkably well in this. For instance North American schools and London Bible College in Britain now accept ACTEA accredited degrees. Also by God's grace ACTEA was instrumental in the creation of the International Council of Accrediting Agencies, which links us to similar bodies around the world. We were founding members of ICAA back in 1980. Almost 200 schools in Africa have taken the necessary steps to join ACTEA. This is a testimony to the fact that we have achieved credibility. We have also sought to provide the substance which deserves credibility. We established accreditation services, the Library Development Programme, the International Lectureship, the Tools and Studies series, and produced the Directory which gives more information about theological schools in Africa than any other publication currently available. All this was accomplished during the first ten years.

Second Phase: 1986 onwards

Since 1985 in the second phase of ACTEA we have given particular attention not only to being accepted but also to achieving integration in the services we offer and to becoming a movement owned by the constituency we serve. In that sense we have sought to focus our attention on bonding our constituency. That is why I rejoice that so many schools that are part of ACTEA are represented at this conference. Without the participation of theological schools ACTEA would not be what it is, which explains why this is an important event. We have also tried recently to develop body-life among our member schools by extending support services and introducing new networks like the prayer network. When I arrived in Nairobi this week the ACTEA Administrator handed me a letter from the principal of a school in Liberia saying, We have used the prayer network sheet and prayed specifically for the requests from the participating schools. This kind of involvement with one another will help us break through all kinds of barriers and be able to focus on the single purpose of serving theological education in Africa. This ACTEA ALL-AFRICA CONFERENCE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS itself is part of the means of bonding our constituency and creating body-life.

4. The Challenge before ACTEA

In ACTEA BULLETIN 20, which celebrated the tenth anniversary of ACTEA, I wrote the following greeting:

As grateful as we are for what God has done, we dare not lose sight of the challenge as we look to the future. In the second decade of ACTEA's existence, I would like to see a change in how it is perceived. ACTEA should cease to be seen as an all-powerful external monitoring body. It must instead come to be seen, and welcomed, as a constructive internal catalyst, fully owned by our churches in Africa and by their individual theological colleges. In its second decade ACTEA will make a greater contribution to the cause of Christ in Africa if we succeed in this challenge.

I have not changed my mind on that. There is a lot of work to be done in this particular area. The challenge then before us is that ACTEA functions not only **for** you, the theological colleges on the continent, but **by** you. We must find the structures and the services to make this a reality. The existence of the ACTEA Consortium of Theological Colleges is a step in the right direction. We need to work together more effectively so that ACTEA can become a servant and a catalyst to you as we focus together in our God-given mandate to provide the church in Africa with equipped, scholarly servant leadership, so that the Gospel will be rooted in our continent and we will become mature for the glory of God and the accomplishment of his purposes in Africa and beyond Africa to the rest of the world. That is the challenge which lies before us.

5. How Can ACTEA Schools Help Meet this Challenge?

We have achieved a great deal since 1975 when the initial meeting was held here in Kenya, under Dr Kato's direction, to lay the groundwork for the founding of ACTEA. The challenge before us is to evolve into a considerable movement answerable to its constituency and especially to the theological institutions and the churches. What can you do? What is your part? What is our part in ACTEA?

Let me take the liberty of sharing my basic worry about ACTEA. My basic worry is that ACTEA may not survive once its present leaders move on. If some of us were to leave ACTEA, and if it is not fully owned by you, ACTEA may cease to function. This means that you, the theological colleges, have a major role to play in the future of ACTEA, in what can or should happen to ACTEA. We need to develop a clear appreciation of and responsiveness to the full range of needs of theological schools. We need to recognise that accreditation is only one of these needs, and therefore only one aspect of ACTEA's assigned purpose as in fact is the case in other accrediting associations around the world. To achieve ACTEA's full purpose and full potential all of our schools must be actively involved. If you are actively involved it means commitment of time, personnel and, yes, money from school. Now I know all of you have personnel, while only some of you have much money. We are asking you for what you can do, not for what you cannot do. If you have personnel, you may consider freeing a staff member to give a small portion of his or her time to be involved in an ACTEA project. For instance, this conference was accomplished in great measure by the involvement of people from theological colleges in Kenya who gave freely of their time and talents to make it happen. This is the model we need to follow.

For ACTEA to go ahead your school must become involved in the particular way that you can help. We must be willing to share our people to service ACTEA. If schools on a continent-wide basis are willing to do that, ACTEA's future is assured. If you are not willing to be involved, then my worry will have proved legitimate and ACTEA's future will not be assured. None of us who serve in ACTEA are eternal. Some people will retire soon either by finishing their term of

service in Africa or having to leave the continent for various other reasons. We need a lot more of your input to carry things on and to make more things happen. What you can do is that you must devise ways in your own schools to support ACTEA so that it can survive meaningfully and remain viable in the next ten years and beyond, as God prospers you so that ACTEA may prosper in servicing theological education in Africa.

11/91