

Theological Education in Africa: Why Does It Matter?

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1. ACTEA

When a history of evangelical theological education in modern Africa comes to be written, it will doubtless take as a defining moment the founding in 1976 of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa, ACTEA. That would not be the only defining moment, but easily it has proved to be among the most consequential events in the last half century. For it was with the emergence of ACTEA that evangelical theological education in Africa first gained that sense of common identity, that sense of community, of shared values and purpose, that has so bonded and energized the movement ... to a degree that we almost take for granted today.

The ACTEA community today represents a formal family of 150+ institutions in more than 30 countries, and its informal constituency is of course much larger than that. While not every single institution of evangelical theological education in Africa is formally linked with ACTEA, it would be difficult in our day to find any *major* evangelical post-secondary institution on the continent that is not ACTEA-related. Indeed many of our most important institutions have been active participants in the ACTEA community for two and three decades.

I take it as emblematic of the depth of ACTEA presence on our continent, and its constructive partnership for good, that last week the distinguished Theological College of Central Africa (TCCA) in Ndola, Zambia, underwent its third ACTEA accreditation visitation. Its first was back in 1985 and the second was in 1996. It happens that I was present on the visiting team in both those earlier events. And now it has had its third decadal visitation. This is not only in its own way a historic achievement, both for TCCA and for ACTEA, but it represents something very, very good, very healthful, for all of us, this sustaining continental collaboration for theological education, and for God's good purpose in and for Africa, that the ACTEA movement represents. It is certainly an honour to our gathering here this week that we have present with us Joe Simfukwe, who serves both as Principal of TCCA, and at the same time as ACTEA's continental Director.

2. AIM and SIM

If we seek to take the measure of this phenomenon of which we are a part, evangelical theological education in Africa, I also take it as symbolic of something deeper and consequential that this event we are engaged in this week here in Johannesburg is sponsored by these two international missions, AIM and SIM, each with now well over a century of deep, costly, committed engagement in the work of the Lord across this continent (together with AEF which merged into SIM several years ago). Just as these two international bodies stand in the background of this event that has brought us together for common good, so each of these two bodies has stood, in the background, behind so much of what has been achieved for good in evangelical theological education in Africa during the past half century and more. We salute them in the Lord for their servant posture, demonstrated over the years, as in this present gathering. Not only have these two missions, and AEF, been in the forefront of founding and sustaining eminent theological schools across the continent, but each has played and continues to play a crucial sustaining role in the ACTEA movement from which we all benefit.

From the first days of ACTEA, SIM has been providing the movement with core staffing that has helped service the inner structures and operations, and it still does so today. What a privilege, what an appropriate thing to do, that we should here pause to salute SIM's Scott Cunningham, who has served so diligently behind the scenes in ACTEA since 1993, and this year is transitioning to a new global role with OCI. God bless you, Scott. Thank you, from all of us. And don't forget us. OCI is well-resourced, and we are still family. So don't forget African family values!

And it was AIM's two flagship theological colleges, Scott Theological College in Kenya, and the Institute Supérieur in Bunia, Congo (for which institution AIM was a principal sponsor), it was these two that helped form the crucial nucleus of ACTEA founding institutions, lending their own status and credibility to ACTEA in its earliest fledging years. It is these two institutions that have continued steadily ever since to

supply the movement with exemplary support and leadership. It is not surprising in the least that ACTEA's current Chair is Dr Jacob Kibor, principal of Scott Theological College in Kenya. Nor that his immediate predecessor, Dr Titus Kivunzi, was one of ACTEA's principal leaders for a generation.

In acknowledging the critical role of AIM and SIM to the continental movement that we represent here today, one would err not to mention as well the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, which Scott Theological College has managed to publish for a quarter century, providing all of us across the continent with a distinguished forum for dialogue on issues of theology and ministry in Africa. Nor dare we forget to mention in further evidence the magisterial achievement of the *Africa Bible Commentary*, published last year, a project for which SIM was a principal sponsor.

And finally in this assembly we have present fresh evidence of AIM and SIM's long-term partnership support to evangelical theological education in Africa, in the persons of Keith Ferdinando and Steve Hardy, each having already made their mark in African theological education for some years, ... and now each helping coordinate the involvement of their historic missions in Africa, AIM and SIM, in ongoing support of theological education. May the Lord prosper your hand, brothers, as you go forward.

3. Theological schools as backbone

Turning now to the question that focuses our reflection today, namely: *Theological education in Africa: why does it matter?*, may I suggest for your consideration a fundamental proposition, namely that *theological schools form the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa*. I propose that this is the case far more than most evangelical church leadership on the continent is aware, more than the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) may have been conscious, more than mission and para-church leaders and strategists here and overseas take into account, perhaps more true than even we ourselves are aware. And I believe it is not a recent development; I believe that *theological schools have formed the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa* for much of the past half century.

I was deeply struck by a statement that the noted international scholar Andrew Walls made last year at the ICETE Consultation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which a number of you attended. Walls used a impressive metaphor to express the critical role that theological schools play in global evangelicalism. I find his metaphor perhaps nowhere more applicable than in Africa. He said that theological schools of today function for evangelical Christianity much like the monasteries did for Christianity in medieval Europe. Just as the great monastic centres spotted across Europe held things together for the Christian movement through those centuries of chronic disruption and confusion, could it be that today in Africa our theological schools are playing a similar role? Amidst all the heady vibrancy and growth of Africa's Christian communities, but also amidst all the debilitations and disorders of this continent, the theological schools have remained linked together as beacons of steadfastness, and hope, and constructive engagement. It has been these schools, and their stream of graduates moving out into leadership roles across the continent, that have anchored, and sustained, and equipped, through circumstances not so dissimilar from those of the medieval monasteries, with survival ever threatened, but nevertheless surviving and conserving and rejuvenating. What a dynamic, heartening symbol!

It may be that African evangelicalism under-estimates the degree to which our schools function as crucial bonding matter and resourcing for the cohesion and vitality of the larger community. But let us not then take ourselves, our particular roles, for granted. They do matter. We do matter. In the Lord, for Africa. It is that on which I wish to reflect with you in more detail here today.

4. My involvement

The year normally mentioned for the founding of ACTEA is 1976, as I have done today. That would make ACTEA 30 years old last year. All of us know that a continent-wide service network remaining still active throughout Africa more than thirty years later is something to be noticed ... and even to be celebrated. Actually the founding date for ACTEA could just as reasonably be placed in 1975 rather than in 1976. It was in a meeting of the AEA Theological Commission in Limuru, Kenya, in November 1975 that the decision was taken, under the energetic leadership of Byang Kato, to found what has become ACTEA. We use the date 1976 because, following Kato's sudden untimely death only weeks after that 1975 Limuru meeting, it was then in March 1976 that the AEA Executive Committee formally actioned Kato's proposal to undertake formation of what came to be known as ACTEA.

It was in that previous year 1975 that Byang Kato visited ECWA Theological Seminary in Igbaja, Nigeria, where I was a lecturer. At that time Igbaja was one of the premier evangelical theological schools on the continent. Kato was an alumnus, and former lecturer; and the now well-known evangelical leaders Tokunboh Adeyemo and Yusufu Turaki had just graduated. My wife and I first came to Igbaja in 1968, and in 1975 we had just resumed a place on the faculty after I had completed my doctoral studies at Cambridge in England. Kato took me aside and asked me to accept an assignment to form an association for evangelical theological schools throughout the continent. At that point I respectfully declined. I suppose I wasn't used to thinking continentally, as Kato was; I was fully focused on serving at that one very worthy institution in Nigeria. Aggressive initiator that he was, Kato took that response in stride, and simply went over my head to my mission directors and had me assigned to the task. That is where it all started for ACTEA. Knowing as I do now how very hard it is to form, much less sustain, continent-wide movements in Africa, it was amazing how everything fell together so quickly. But in short-order that is what happened. People were ready for such services, such a movement, such community, eager for it, ready to put shoulders to the wheel. And here we are today, standing in that heritage, and by God's grace still part of that movement.

Those were heady days, not least for me. I had grown up in West Africa, in Liberia where my parents were missionaries. But up to the time of Kato's invitation in 1975 my experience of Africa had been West Africa. With the launching of ACTEA I made my first trip across to Kenya in 1978, and then in 1979 to Cameroon, Congo/Zaire, Burundi, Rwanda, Malawi, and to Zambia, to TCCA in fact. I remember being driven up from Lusaka to Ndola by Tim Kopp, at that time principal of TCCA (BCCA). Later, in 1982, I managed to get to South Africa for the first time, here to Jo'burg, where I was hosted by the Baptist Theological College and visited Johannesburg Bible Institute, then to Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and on to Cape Town as guest of the Bible Institute and what has now become Cornerstone. But by then I had also been co-opted by the World Evangelical Alliance into the formation of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), linking ACTEA with similar continental movements globally, which eventually took me quite beyond the ACTEA project and Africa, ... which is another story.

5. Kato

Why was Kato so keen to get started an association for the evangelical theological schools of Africa? Of all the pressing needs of the African evangelical community, which was then still in such an embryonic state, why did he think that theological education mattered so much? In point of fact at that 1975 Limuru meeting when he pushed through the idea of ACTEA, he also pushed through the grand vision of founding two graduate schools, one for francophone Africa and another for anglophone Africa, what eventually became FATEB and NEGST, bright jewels today of the African evangelical community's cooperative endeavours. So why were these sorts of initiatives so much on Kato's mind? I think this warrants some re-visiting now so many years later as we ourselves take fresh stock of our own commitments and dreams, and our calling before the Lord on this continent.

As you know so well, among the most extraordinary and fundamental characteristics of modern African Christianity has been its explosive growth. Recently an award-winning cover story in *Newsweek Magazine*, on "The Changing Face of the Church", stated that in Africa the Christian faith "is spreading faster than at any time or place in the last two thousand years." The measure of that growth is statistically vast and long-term. This can be highlighted by three familiar but nevertheless remarkable statistics: (1) that for the entire past century the African Christian community has averaged an annual growth rate twice that of the continent's general annual population increase. (2) that already the majority of Africans call themselves Christian, even when including northern Africa in the calculation; and (3) that statistically there are now more professing Christians in Africa than in North America. Just last week an insightful article in *TIME Magazine* stated that "Christianity, especially Evangelicalism, is growing faster in Africa than anywhere else on the planet."

This explosive growth clearly feeds the enviable vitality of the African church. At the same time this growth has generated what has been widely regarded as among the most basic challenges facing African Christianity today. Put simply, the rate of intake has persistently outstripped the capacities of the African church for orderly assimilation. We are growing faster than we have been able to manage properly. At all levels the church has been unable to generate sufficient trained leadership to disciple the influx of would-be adherents. In consequence it has found itself in many areas overwhelmed by massive numbers of participants with very little perception of the implications of genuine Christian commitment. The result has been an exuberant foliage linked to what is commonly perceived to be a dangerously shallow rootage.

The repeated urgent call of Africa's Christian leadership in such circumstances has therefore been for attention above all else to church leadership development. Most of our theological schools represented here today arose because of this sense of critical need. As churches have multiplied, and multiplied again, the nurture of effective leadership for such rapidly expanding communities has become a challenge of primal significance. And nowhere within the African evangelical community was this more articulately expressed than by Byang Kato. It is he who first called the evangelical community in Africa to this awareness, clarified its implications, and gave practical substance to its implementation.

6. Kato's adjunct concerns

It is important to notice that Kato combined this vision for the strategic role of theological education for Africa with two other foundational concerns. One of these two was his profound commitment to the vision of African Christianity being truly African. He expressed repeated gratitude to those who had brought the Gospel to Africa in costly response to God's call. But he also repeatedly emphasized the need for African Christianity to be both truly biblical and truly African. The challenge, as he saw it, was how to be genuinely in the world—in his African world—while also being not merely of that world, how to change the clothing without changing the content, how to serve the genuine gospel in an African pot, how to adjust the accent without adjusting the truth.

It is inherent in the character of Christian advance that it always arrives from outside, that it always arrives anywhere, not just in Africa, unavoidably as *international post*, with a *foreign postmark*. Nevertheless it is also inherent in the character of Christianity that wherever it arrives it is meant to take indigenous root, to begin to use *local postage*, to have a *local postmark*. As John Mbiti said: "It belongs to the very nature of Christianity to be subject to localization. Otherwise its universality becomes meaningless." The biblical mandate to universalisation, to bringing the faith everywhere, is therefore a mandate to universal localization, ... or, put otherwise, to contextualisation. So far as I can discover, it would seem that Kato was the very first person to introduce publicly to the global evangelical world the word 'contextualization'. Today that word is everywhere used, even perhaps over-used. But it was still a barely minted neologism, not yet in the dictionaries, when Kato featured the word and the concept in his plenary address at the historic Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 1974.

In Kato's perspective, one principal hindrance to the development of African Christianity towards firm rootage and stable maturity, has been the pervasive feeling that it is foreign, that somehow Christianity is but another aspect of the cultural and ideological imperialism of the western world. African Christians have long shared a heart-hunger to be at home in their faith, not feeling like awkward guests in someone else's home, not feeling that they must always live off imports. They long for the faith to become indigenously acclimated, to have the taste and look and feel and sound of something authentically of God in Africa, so that it may thereby become sustainably effective for God's good purpose in and for and through Africa. Kato courageously embraced and articulated just this commitment.

The second foundational concern that Kato combined with his vision for theological education was for sound biblical grounding and effective theological engagement for the evangelical community. He knew that if we fail, in Paul's words, deliberately to become all things to all men, then the Christian faith will not gain appropriate traction. Yet if, to avoid that risk, we *over-adjust*, we *over-acclimate*, of course what takes root (as Kato pointed out) may very well *not* be true Christian faith. What may take root can all too easily be indigenous tares—indigenous weeds—rather than gospel wheat—as has happened again and again in the history of the Christian faith elsewhere, and is so evident in western lands today. Kato knew this and gave repeated warning to this effect. Hence the title of his book: *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*.

So it is that along with his sense of the strategic significance of theological education, and his emphasis on appropriate cultural contextualization, Kato combined a profound concern to awaken the African church to its theological responsibilities, to be in the world but not of the world, holding fast to God's Word while holding it forth to a needy continent. Therefore if we want to understand the impact of Kato's vision, and its continuing relevance today, we may wish to tease out these three strands, reflect on them, and perhaps reanimate them in our commitments as we go forward in our generation, our new century, for God's good purpose in and for and through Africa, namely: a commitment to cultural contextualization, a commitment to biblical faithfulness and theological engagement, and both of these to be energised by fundamental strategic initiative in theological education.

In Kato's view there was no greater calling in his day than that we should pray and work, with all the energy available to us, to see the equipping of pastors and teachers for the church, who are themselves biblically and theologically mature, not tossed to and fro, disciplined and able to disciple. This was at the heart of Kato's strategic vision and message: *that theological education represented the central most urgent need for Christianity on the continent*. That assessment remains valid for today. Kato's vision would seem to be a timely word, a still valid vibrant challenge, even now as we stand in the opening years of the 21st century.

7. Trends

Now let me shift to focus on the present and future for theological education in Africa, in light of Kato's perspective. That is to say, if theological education so matters in Africa, then how have things fared for evangelical theological education since the days of Kato? At least in rough overview, where are we now thirty plus years on? How are we doing?

When I accepted responsibility to get ACTEA launched back in the 1970s, very soon I undertook a research project to find out just what existed in theological education on the continent. Subsequently I wrote two articles based on the findings. Some of you will be familiar with those articles, or at least with their titles: *New Light on Theological Education in Africa*, and *More Light on Theological Education in Africa*. I was hoping by those two publications to stimulate, to provoke, ongoing research in such an exciting field of inquiry. It has been amazing to me since then how little that provocation has had effect. Basic research on evangelical theological education in Africa remains very much still in its infancy.

Nevertheless that early research uncovered certain notable trends that I believe continue to be evident and characteristic today. I believe there are also persisting challenges, already evident in the 1970s, that continue to face us today as we move forward into the 21st Century. My comments in this respect will be impressionistic, but hopefully they are also informed impressions.

I see at least three notable trends in the decades since Kato, namely (1) the proliferation of theological schools, (2) the Africanisation of staffing, and (3) the persisting academic upgrading of programmes.

(1) *Proliferation*. As for proliferation, throughout the period under review the number of theological schools in Africa has everywhere mushroomed. The increase in numbers all across the continent has long since exceeded, indeed escaped, all documentation. When I began my inquiries, the most complete listing then available referenced 189 theological schools in Africa. By the time we published the *ACTEA Directory* in the latter 1980s, we had increased the documentation nearly four-fold to 742. When efforts at revision of that publication lapsed in the 1990s, over 1200 institutions had been identified. This persisting trend is owing doubtless not least to the astonishing growth and vibrancy of the African Christian community throughout these years. And yet this proliferation of theological training institutions still struggles to keep up with the need. Extrapolating from what data is available, one estimation is that if every person presently in any sort of leadership training programme in Africa were to be sent into pastoral ministry, and each put in charge of congregations of 600 members, then each such person would have to pastor 10 such congregations to cover the numbers of professing believers in Africa today.

(2) *Africanisation*. A second trend in African theological education, for which we may rejoice, has been the very evident Africanisation of administrative and teaching staff. When ACTEA first started it was not so. Everywhere the effort was urgent to provide advanced training for key individuals in order to meet this pressing challenge. We stand today well down the track in that noble, and continuing, effort. But already for some years now virtually every leading ACTEA-related school has been African-led, and with the majority of teaching staff also African. While there is still progress to make on this front, overall this has been a notable attainment in the ongoing development of African evangelical theological education. It would be interesting to have someone to develop the statistical warrant for what I am here stating as fact.

(3) *Upgrading*. A third major trend has been a persisting, even dramatic, pattern of academic upgrading. In ACTEA's opening years the impression was that schools needing ACTEA's services would mostly be functioning at the secondary level, and ACTEA's initial plans were designed accordingly. This calculation proved mistaken. In fact, except in selected areas of the continent, the core schools benefiting from ACTEA services are almost exclusively post-secondary, and today many have moved on to include post-graduate programmes. The rising educational level of the African Christian community has doubtless been a principal contributing cause. And because the leaders of African society, business, and government have been increasingly highly educated, the church has sensed a need to provide more church leadership equipped to the very highest academic levels.

8. Challenges

One could suggest other notable trends, but let me turn instead now to continuing challenges in the present and for the future. What do I take to be the principal challenges still facing us as theological educators? Again I will be impressionistic.

(1) *Beyond pastoral formation.* First I would say that evangelical theological education in Africa needs to reach, much more than it presently does, *beyond* its characteristic focus on *pastoral* formation. It should certainly cater for training pastors, perhaps principally so. But it should be catering as well for other specialized leadership roles required by the church. As the *ICETE Manifesto* puts it:

To provide for pastoral formation is not enough. We must also respond creatively ... to the church's leadership needs in areas such as Christian education, youth work, evangelism, journalism and communications, TEE, counselling, denominational and parachurch administration, seminary and Bible school staffing, community development, and social outreach. (Article 3)

Overall this is not yet a characteristic strength of our movement. We need to broaden the range of programme specialisations so as to relate more responsibly to the full range of leadership needs within the African church. If we are servants of the church, as we are meant to be, then those academic and vocational specializations important to the church leadership needs of the African evangelical community should be more proactively provided by us, additional to and beyond standard pastoral education. We should begin to provide for advanced-level leadership specializations in such fields as Islamics, urban ministry, community development, cross-cultural mission, and organisational administration. In this area of need I suspect the patterns have hardly shifted since the days of Kato.

(2) *Beyond preparatory education.* Secondly, evangelical theological education in Africa needs to reach *beyond* its characteristic offering of one-time preparatory education. Again it has hardly shifted in this respect since the days of Kato. Our efforts are focused almost entirely on getting people ready for their life-time roles, in time-delimited programmes. Properly we should be focused instead on providing church leaders with multi-faceted means for life-long growth, for life-long professional development. This would include foundational preparatory training for our students, as almost all of our theological institutions do. But it would also include modes for educative upgrading that continue to be available throughout our students' entire leadership careers. Our theological schools should be adding to their basic preparatory programmes a range of in-service training institutes and continuing education programmes for leaders already in the field, including regular workshops and refresher courses, to help pastors and church leaders better integrate theological reflection with effective ministry in the African context. In this respect we are thus far still working from a defectively truncated script.

(3) *Addressing the intellectual challenge.* Thirdly, I suggest that in the world of African evangelicalism we are faced with a profound intellectual challenge that is yet to be sufficiently addressed. We have been good at so many things for Kingdom values in Africa, but with respect to intellectual responsibilities, not so, not yet. John Stott has spoken often in Africa of the essential biblical summons for Christians to be mature *in mind*, for a mindful Christianity, a faith that is grounded and effective because it is biblically rooted and theologically engaged. That mattered also to Kato, hugely, but African evangelicalism is not there yet.

The principal *intellectual* challenge for Christianity in modern Africa is not in dealing with rampant individualism, as in the west. Certainly it is not a need to address the ravages that come with affluence, as is so common for believers in the west. Nor are we being swamped and diverted by post-modernity, or by aggressive secularism, yet. We have other basic intellectual drives on the African continent, other habits of the heart, other habits of the mind. Using the so available, so up-to-date western evangelical textbooks in our theological colleges, accessing the superb educational facilities of evangelical communities overseas for our advanced training, we hardly have begun to tune in to the distinctive contemporary intellectual realities of our own continent, to modern Africa's intellectual life.

Make no mistake, we have been intellectually active. African evangelicalism has admirably equipped itself for scholarly engagement with the biblical text—witness the just-released *Africa Bible Commentary*. African evangelical theologians have also been addressing with sensitivity the consequential issues relating to Africa's traditional life and culture. But modern Africa is not traditional Africa. And modern Africa's intellectual life has remained in particular a largely uncharted territory for us. That part of our African context we do not know, and have yet to effectively engage.

The intellectual trends that now dominate and determine the western world are well known. And we can thank God for the Francis Schaeffer or Leslie Newbigen or Ravi Zacharias, who have understood and interpreted the times for western believers, who have aided God's people in the west in discerning how best to maintain a godly biblical mindset and witness amidst the often enticing and deceptive intellectual cross-currents of their modern world. But where is the Schaeffer or Newbigen or Zacharias for our own world, for modern Africa? Are our programmes, our schools, providing suitable incubation for such individuals to emerge? Here we and our students live in modern Africa, amidst habits of the mind not the same as in the west, but which certainly, as much as in the west, as anywhere and at any time for Christians, can be habits of the mind that are not always compatible with a thought-life taken captive to Jesus Christ ... habits of the heart that can produce, too readily, competing altars of the mind.

We and our students, to our credit, have been devoted to mastery of the biblical text. We train our students in the practicalities of ministering in the African church context. With them we seek to address the implications of traditional Africa's pervasive presence in contemporary African life. But we have hardly begun in equipping our students for ministry in the modern African *intellectual* context. Indeed we ourselves are hardly acquainted with that context. Our dominant theological discourse has become tuned to traditional Africa, one might say to 19th Century Africa, but not to modern 21st Century Africa's intellectual life.

I am saying that if Kato were to return today and take assessment of where we are at, he would likely want to say, even as he did say three decades ago, that African evangelical Christianity faces an intellectual challenge, a theological responsibility, that remains scarcely recognized much less taken up. So the African university communities, and the educated elite of Africa, are hardly addressed by the gospel in its richness and depth and relevance. And African Christians functioning in the professional world of modern Africa can often live dichotomized intellectual and spiritual lives, devoted to Christ in their personal life and witness, but functioning by alien interpretive commitments in public life, because (a) African Christianity tries to live without theology, as both Mbiti and Kato famously stated; (b) exuberant Christianity distrusts theological and intellectual life; (c) mission-minded Christianity is rightly eager to reach the unreached; (d) the desperate needs of the continent are rightly driving us all towards greater social responsibility. But all this can come with a dangerous risk, a hazardous side-effect, namely that in African Christianity every thought is generally speaking not yet being brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. The anchors are loose; the rudder is ill-attended; and we are not in a tideless sea.

Hence a principal challenge to evangelical theological educators in Africa today would be to develop a vibrant, winsome theological life, effectively engaged with the intellectual realities of modern Africa. This in turn would require developing the supportive infrastructures, additional to theological schools, by which such a mindful life can be sustained and flourish throughout African evangelicalism, so that the blessings of Christ's Lordship may be fully experienced in our midst.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if biblical Christianity in Africa is to survive and flourish for God's good purpose in and for Africa, if biblical Christianity is to speak in our day with a distinctive voice, rather than as but a weak echo, a mere sub-set, of the dominating ideologies of our modern African context, then it must continue to prioritise the formation of leadership that is both profoundly committed to biblical foundations, and at the same time tuned to and engaged with the dynamic realities of its present context. Only by providing urgently for the formation of such disciplined and discipling leadership will the church in Africa be able to meet the critical needs and also the remarkable opportunities thrust upon it by its rapid growth, in serving its generation after the will of God in this great continent in the coming decades of the 21st Century.

That is the call before us, the call upon our lives as theological educators. That is why your own personal individual engagement has mattered and continues to matter, the sacrifices that you have made, the difficult choices, the costly service over the years, surviving through unwelcome personal disruptions and losses and conflicts. That is why theological education matters, for God's good purpose in Africa. To my mind in this day, in this hour, on this continent, there is really no higher calling.

Paul Bowers has taught in theological education in Africa since 1968, in Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. He has also been involved with the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) since its inception in 1976, with the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) since its inception in 1980, with the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (AJET) since its inception in 1982, and with the specialist review journal *BookNotes for Africa* since its inception in 1996. He presently serves as Deputy Director of ICETE. Bowers holds a PhD in biblical studies from Cambridge University in England.