The nature and the character of any system of education are very largely determined by the aims and purposes of education as envisaged by those responsible for the educational system. If the educator regards as the supreme aim of education the turning out of individuals able to endure hardship and suffering with fortitude, the course of education he will prescribe will be Spartan in type or will bear some resemblance to what happens in initiation schools in some parts of Africa. Such a system of education might in fact leave large areas of life with their necessary knowledge, skill and values completely untouched, but the educator concerned will be satisfied with the endurance shown by the products of his system. If the educator regards the cultivation of the arts - music, drama, poetry, etc. as the highest objective, he will construct the school curriculum accordingly and might equally produce a lopsided individual whose general education in some respects leaves much to be desired. This control of the type of education given by the aims contemplated by those responsible for it affects every society. The education of the African child has been no exception in this regard.

In primitive African society, the tribal authorities determined for the African child the course of his education, which emphasised respect for elders, loyalty to family, clan and tribal tradition, knowledge of the natural environment with its local fauna and flora, tribal lore, and the simple skills associated with a subsistence economy. The aim of education was to produce a loyal tribesman able to participate fully in the different facets of tribal life.

With the coming of the Christian Church to Africa, the education of a considerable proportion of African children was largely taken over by the Missions. Those who did not come under missionary influence were of course not affected by this new system. The primary aim of education then became evangelisation. The African child and, in some cases, also the adult convert, was taught to read and write, not merely because such knowledge was good in itself, but mainly because the possession of these tools of learning made possible a more effective and more lasting way of conveying
the Gospel message, than having to rely solely on communication by word of mouth. Incidentally, the introduction of reading and writing as methods of instruction was contrary to the African method of instruction by word of mouth. The eye and the hand became more important than the ear as tools of learning. Admittedly, the education process could not be confined merely to reading and writing and included other forms of learning as well, but whatever was added to the curriculum had to be consistent with and not antithetical to the main purpose for which the Mission School stood, namely, the inculcation of Christian virtues and the promotion of a Christian way of life, both for the individual and for the community. With this aim in view and with their limited resources, the Missions developed fairly extensive systems of education with, in not a few cases, institutions of excellent quality. For the purposes which they had in mind, it was not necessary for Missions to do much more than to develop systems of primary education with a few post primary institutions of education, primarily to provide teachers for their primary schools. It is not surprising therefore to find that in most countries in Africa secondary education did not begin until quite recently while university education in Africa came later still and did not constitute to any great extent a part of the Church systems of education. It is worthy of note that great Christian Universities such as were developed by the Churches in some parts of Asia are conspicuous by their absence in Africa.

When the Colonial Governments began to take an interest in African education, they brought with them a different slant on the aim of education. They approved of the emphasis in Mission education on moral instruction and character building, but some of them were inclined to think that Mission education was too bookish and so they laid stress upon teaching Africans the dignity of manual labour and were prepared to subsidise various forms of industrial training. They also wanted personnel for the lower ranks of the civil and administrative services. With grants-in-aid from Colonial governments, the Missions were able to expand their school system to the extent that the missionary was latterly more often preoccupied with the managements of the schools under his control than with his evangelistic task.
Gradually in some countries, governments began to regard the education of the African child as a national responsibility and so to begin the process of building government schools or taking over some schools from Mission control. This process had not yet run its course when the movement for freedom and independence in Africa began to result in the formation of new States.

Without exception, the independent States of Africa have adopted the principle that the national government must assume primary responsibility for education. In this connection, they have in varying degrees begun to assume control of all schools, including schools founded and previously controlled by voluntary agencies, such as the Churches and Missions. But more important, they have begun to lay down what they conceive to be the primary aim of national policy as far as education is concerned. Education for nation-building has become the supreme desideratum.

Beginning in 1961, the African States have held a number of conferences in which they have discussed their plans for the building up of national systems of education. At Addis Ababa in May 1961, an outline for a twenty year plan of development for primary education was drawn up. At Tananarive in July, 1962 secondary education was dealt with, while in September 1962, the problem of higher education was taken up. Besides, the African States have set up a Conference of African Ministers of Education which meets periodically to review educational developments in their respective countries. Various programmes such as the secondary school teacher training colleges in 13 centres, the literacy programmes, the educational planning programme at Tangier, Morocco, the school building construction programme at Khartoum, Sudan, the training of technicians for Missions at Jos, Nigeria, etc. have been set in motion, with the assistance of UNESCO which has 400 experts from nine nationalities participating in educational programmes in Africa.

In the midst of all this activity, is it possible to discern, however dimly, what the African States desire to include in their education for nationhood?

In the first place, they seem to be anxious to fill the gaps to be found in the educational system built up during the Colonial period. The Missions, later supported by Colonial governments, developed primary school systems which whatever their merits,
were only able to cater for a limited number of the children of school-going age. This percentage varies from country to country. Now the African States recognize that every child has a right to be educated and so they are anxious to convert their primary education from being a privilege for a few, to being a right for every child. They are stretching their resources to the limit in order to achieve this objective. It is hoped that by 1980, primary education shall be universal, compulsory and free in the whole of Africa.

An even more serious gap is to be found in the field of secondary education. It is only since the twenties that secondary education has received any serious attention anywhere in Africa and the slow rate of progress in this field can be gauged from the fact that it is estimated that by between 1961 and 1970 the independent countries of Africa will require 200,000 secondary school teachers. Hence the crash programmes of secondary school teacher-training colleges which have been established at 13 centres in Africa. This is a field in which the churches with their experience of teacher-training are specially fitted to make a significant contribution. It is from the graduates of the secondary school that the African nations hope to find the qualified personnel they require for their civil and administrative services. According to the Addis Ababa Plan, it is hoped that by 1980, 30% of the children who complete primary school will go on to secondary education.

A third area in which the African education system requires to be strengthened is in the field of higher education. In this connection, plans have been made for the development of thirty-five universities and eleven medical schools, while the expatriate personnel required in this area is estimated at 7,000.

Account must also be taken of the types of education which were either non-existent or relatively undeveloped under the Colonial systems of education. Vocational education is far below the requirements of the rapidly developing economies of the new States. Agricultural training in countries in which the vast majority of the people still live on the land has hardly begun in most parts of Africa. Various forms of out-of-school education - adult education for both men and women, pre-school education, etc. - must receive attention if the citizens of African nations are to play an effective and intelligent role in the building up of their nationhood.
But not only are African nations building up the structure of their educational systems, but they are also concerning themselves with the kind of education which must be given to their children. A great deal is being said and written about the necessity for gearing the education of the African child to the real needs of his country. As was said at Addis Ababa:

"African educational authorities should revise and reform the content of education in the areas of the curricula, textbooks and methods, so as to take account of African environment, child development, cultural heritage, and the demands of technological progress and economic development, especially industrialisation."

Gone are the days when Africans were satisfied to learn all about the capitals, the capes, the peninsulas of Europe and America, while they remained ignorant of the names of the river flowing through their village or the mountain beneath which the village was situated. Knowledge of African history must now have equal place with ancient or modern European or American history. The African child must be taught to take a pride in his own background, as well as in the rich traditions of other parts of the world. All this is what is described as Africanising the curriculum in the African school, which must not be understood to imply any lowering of the standard of education. African education must provide "men and women equipped with skills that will enable them to participate fully and usefully in the economic and social development of their continent".

But Africanisation is applied not only to the content of education, but also to those who teach in African schools. For many years to come African nations will not be able to provide all the teachers in their schools and colleges and they will therefore have to rely on expatriate personnel, but as rapidly as is consistent with the maintenance of commonly accepted standards, African States will want to replace expatriate personnel with their own nationals, so as to give their schools the African image in keeping with the self-determination they have achieved.

Finally, what was said about universities at the Tananarive Conference of 1962 applies, mutatis mutandis, to all aspects of education for nationhood, namely, that:
"For full and complete development and enrichment of the individual, (higher) education institutions in Africa should become responsible for placing emphasis on moral and spiritual values, developing a sense of social and civic responsibility, as well as appreciation for beauty and art, music and ethics. They should endeavour to develop an awareness of local problems and aspirations, cultivate the ability to analyse and seek solutions to problems, and help realize national aspirations. Such identification of the individual with the greater course of society will evoke a loyalty and dedication to Africa and its people and will strengthen the bands that bind them to the larger human society".