

Notes and News

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'Conflict and Harmony between Traditional and Western Education in Africa'

As noted in the July issue of *Africa*, this Conference took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on 28, 29, and 30 March 1973. About seventy scholars participated.

The Conference discovered that there are three broad 'strands' or traditions in African education—the indigenous, the Islamic, and the 'Western' or modern. The indigenous and the Western traditions both display considerable variations according to the tribe, society, or geographical location in which they occur and the Western tradition, particularly, should be seen as a dynamic and constantly changing process of adaptation, not as a static, exotic implant.

The Islamic tradition, on the other hand, although it too has adapted to African conditions to a considerable extent, displays greater homogeneity and the Conference was impressed by the similarity of Islamic curricula, teaching methods, and the aspirations of pupils, parents, and teachers in all Islamic areas of Africa, east and west. Islamic education is also characterized by great vigour and has, in an exceptional degree, the power of creating social cohesion. Muslim populations throughout Africa aspire to an education system that will preserve their Islamic traditions while at the same time preparing them for life in the present-day world. Similarly, non-Muslim Africans desire to preserve their own cultural heritage within a modern system of education. How to achieve this with respect to both these 'pre-Western' traditions is one of the great dilemmas facing educationists in Africa. Efforts towards this end were not lacking during the colonial past but they fell short of full success, particularly as regards the preservation of the Islamic tradition in areas of Africa where Arabic is not the spoken language. The solution now lies not in 'parallelism' but in integration. But this must be two-way—that is, the Western tradition must adapt as well as the other two. The way to further this process is through curriculum research and development, so as to provide greater choice of teaching materials and better understanding of teaching methods for the indigenous and Islamic traditions. The desired end is that schools should have a greater range of choice in building up courses which draw on all three traditions.

The Conference paid special attention to the complex problems of women's education in Islamic areas of Africa. It concluded that while many Muslim girls experienced great satisfaction and fulfilment from Western education, it would be perilous if this should lead to a too abrupt abandoning of their traditional way of life.

Educational planning in Africa was also considered. Here there was, naturally, much diversity of opinion. But a general consensus did emerge as to the desirability of greater teacher participation in educational planning and most participants seemed to agree on the need for curriculum development, as part of the over-all planning process, to promote the integration referred to above.

The Conference papers, edited jointly by Professor Godfrey N. Brown, of Keele, and Dr. Mervyn Hiskett, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, are being prepared for publication.

(Communicated by Dr. Mervyn Hiskett)