

Though excellently produced, the book shows haste in proof-reading and there are too many mistakes: the page references in the text have been left blank; Dr. John Rycroft should be Mr. D. K. Rycroft; Fr. Jones was at S. Mark's (not S. Augustine's) College (p. 187); in footnote 48 on p. 62, the "preceding page" are wrong; on p. 142, the fifth bar of the English Hymnal tune should have three crotchets, A, B flat and C; p. 169, "and was young Alexander" for "and *also* . . ."; and there are more.

A few infelicities appear in the translation: p. 73—"the main worship service": the notes of a xylophone are wooden slats not wooden "pegs" (p. 69); p. 157 and 137, "melism(s)" for *melisma(ta)*; and on p. 193, the "Improvers" for Good Friday (Latin—*Improperia*) should of course be called the "Reproaches".

But it would be quite unjust to end on this critical note. The whole mission field in Africa is indebted to Dr. Weman. The book is a notable achievement; it fairly breathes the African atmosphere and it abounds in arresting and apt quotations. "There is no country in the world"—he quotes from E. A. Asamoah—"which can claim that its national customs and festivals were originally Christian. In the course of centuries Christian contents have been put into what were originally pagan customs which have now been adopted by Christianity. What is needed is to transform the pagan contents with Christian ideas. In the same way, you cannot prohibit African drumming or dancing without disturbing the soul's life. But you can give a new outlook and content to drumming and dancing through Christian influence". And that is the sum of the matter.

A. M. JONES.

Review reprinted by kind permission of the Editor of "*Books for Africa*", Vol. 31, No. 3, October, 1961. Christian Literature Council, 2 Eaton Gate, London. S.W.1., England.

MUNTU: AN OUTLINE OF NEO-AFRICAN CULTURE, by Janheinz Jahn. Translated by Marjorie Greene. Faber and Faber, London, 1961. Ill. 30s.

In recent years the world has become more and more conscious of the great and increasing contribution to literature and the arts which has derived and continues to derive from "black" Africa, either directly, or indirectly by way of the Caribbean countries and South America. In literature the movement has, at the moment, its most articulate expression in the writings of the *Présence Africaine* group in Paris, mainly of west African provenance, though there also exists a substantial and important body of writings by African authors from other parts of the continent and from the West Indies. In painting, sculpture and, especially music, Africa has long significantly influenced the West. This "neo-African culture", especially in literature, is booming, and it is to be hoped that it will continue to do so and at the same time to grow and develop. What is characteristic of it is that it is something new, to be identified neither with the traditional art forms of Africa nor with the new Western culture which has so radically affected the old Africa, nor even with any simple mixture of these. Nevertheless, it owes its distinctive character to traditional African concepts and values, and these have for the most part been but little understood or appreciated by Europeans.

The task which Mr. Jahn sets himself in this well-informed, perceptive and occasionally obscure book is the highly ambitious one of determining whether there exists something which can be called a specifically "African" culture, and if so, what its distinctive features are. The problem is a valid one, though it needs very much more precise formulation, and up to a point Mr. Jahn's approach to it is the right one. He does not attempt any sort of formal, "external" classification of the various art forms on the basis of styles or periods; rather he undertakes an exposition of African achievement in the arts as an expression of African ideology, values, and "philosophy". This is a tall order indeed, and if Mr. Jahn's thesis is not in all respects completely convincing, his work has real importance both as a pioneering attempt at synthesis and as a repository of authentic and sensitively-comprehended information about modern African culture.

In his first chapter Mr. Jahn sets out the problem as he conceives it and the method which he proposes to adopt. Since African culture "appears as a unity" it makes no difference from which African cultures or languages the key concepts for its understanding are derived, and in fact the author selects his basic categories from two widely separate and very different contemporary African cultures. In chapters 2 and 3 ("Voodoo" and "Rumba") the fundamental concern of African thought with "powers" or "spirits" ("since everything is force or energy" is developed, and mediumistic cults, especially in Haiti and Nigeria, are discussed with remarkable insight, especially their connection with dancing. "In 'possession' man takes these forces into himself, intensifies his own nature", and at the same time the spirits themselves are thereby strengthened, sustained, and in a sense "created" too. Mr. Jahn is particularly interesting on the diffusion of earlier African dance forms, beginning with the *sarabanda* in the 16th century. In chapter 4 the "four categories of Bantu philosophy", all taken from the Ruanda tongue of central Africa, are identified. These are "Muntu", intelligent force; "Kintu", things in their passive not their active aspect; "Hantu", space and time; and "Kuntu" form or modality. And in chapter 5 "Nommo", "life force", expressed through the power of the word ("the word alone rules the world"), is added to the battery of African ontology, this time borrowed from the language of the West African Dogon. Chapter 6 deals with "Kuntu" ("style"), and contains an interesting discussion of drum rhy-

thms. The author is also perceptive here about ghost or spirit masks; the mask is meant to represent "not a face but a non-face". Chapter 7 ("Hantu") reviews African literature, largely a literature of liberation, and the final chapter ("Blues"), after a lively discussion of cultural conflict and the sociological function of "blues" singing, concludes unexceptionably that "for the answer to the question why African philosophy and culture differ from other cultures there are enough historical reasons which could be investigated, for one to do without physio-psychological arguments which are on the one hand vague and on the other dangerous.

In this reviewer's opinion, the value of Mr. Jahn's book, to the richness of which the above summary does very much less than justice, lies rather in its penetrating and sentive analysis of the meaning and significance of African and neo-African ritual and art, than in its attempt to present a coherent, systematic, "African" philosophy. It may well be that no better attempt could be made; but even though, as the author claims, "the philosophical systems of five different peoples—Baluba, Ruandese, Dogon, Bambara and Haitians—agree basically with one another", there is no doubt that they also differ importantly from one another and from those of other African peoples, and that they resemble in some significant respects those of many non-African peoples (the work of the American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf on Hopi categories comes to mind here). But, more importantly, Mr. Jahn should—and probably does—know that there are dangers in imputing to other cultures systematic philosophical theories of which the members of those cultures are not themselves explicitly aware. Thus even if Ruanda do represent their universe to themselves in terms of the four categories based on the root "-*tu*" which Mr. Jahn has identified for us (and it is not entirely clear from his account that any of them actually *do* represent it in quite this way), it is certain that they have to manage without the concept "Nommo" which the author imports from a very different, and non-Bnaru, culture. Are we then to assume that Ruanda philosophy is after all incomplete? And how do the Dogon manage without the four "-*tu*'s"? Would it not after all have been more satisfactory to have had a complete account of one "African philosophy"—or of several, if the evidence is available? Despite Mr. Jahn's subtle and often profound insight one is left with the strong impression that the "systematic" unity which he imputes to African thought is *his* rather than Africa's. This is of course not at all to disparage the quality of African thinking, but one is bound to ask whether any individual African has ever really held the systematic metaphysic propounded by Mr. Jahn.

The heart of the matter is, I think, that one feels a little uncomfortable at the suggestion that there can, or should, be a specifically "African" metaphysic, and, especially, at the injunction that this product of the African intellect should be measured not by the universal standards of human reason but only "by standards proper to African culture".

Such relative, contextual standards are plainly appropriate where matters of taste and aesthetic and perhaps moral values are concerned; they appear very much less so when the nature of the universe which Africans share with all other human beings is in question. Beliefs about the power of ghosts, the magical force of the word, and so on, are all highly important cultural facts, but as beliefs they are either valid or invalid, and the criteria by which their validity is to be assessed are not a monopoly of Western culture. In the end it will be no service to Africans to suggest that what is true for them and what is true for Europeans should be determined by different criteria.

But as cultural facts, the beliefs and values of the various African and neo-African cultures need to be understood in context, as it were from the inside. And especially in his brilliant discussion of African ritual, music, dancing and writing, Mr. Jahn makes a most valuable contribution to this kind of understanding. He understands, as many anthropologists have failed to, that African ritual and art are expressive rather than instrumental; they are a language, a way of saying things, rather than a technique, a way of doing things (though they may be this too). "In African culture function is directed to meaning not to purpose". When this is understood the right questions can be asked, and sometimes answered, and there is no doubt that Mr. Jahn's rich and evocative study comes up with a good many of the right answers.

John Beattie.

LES CORDOPHONES DU CONGO BELGE ET DU RUANDA-URUNDI by J. S. LAURENTY, 2 vols, 4to. paperback. Vol. I, text with 122 line drawings, 230 pp.; Vol. II, 37 plates and 5 maps. *Annales du Musée Royal du Congo Belge*, Tervuren, Belgium, 1960.

The author of this considerable work is a Doctor of Anthropological Science and assistant at the Royal Museum of Tervuren. His present study, this reviewer understands, was made solely on museum exhibits and through extensive researches in the local museum library. Thus the work is literally an encyclopedia of the complete collection of "The Stringed Instruments of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi" available at the Museum of Tervuren.

This tells enough of the scope of the work, of its limitations as well. Further, we are warned that "one should not expect to find in this work a study purely musical in scope" (p.2). Students of African music especially will regret that the author, after having gone through so much research work, did not find it appropriate to give us at least some indications regarding the range of the more important