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An Alphabet for West African Languages

AN international group of linguists met under the auspices of Unesco in Bamako (Mali) from 28 February to 5 March to draw up a practical and rational unified alphabet for six major West African languages. These include the Mandingo languages (such as Bambara and Malinké in Mali, Guinea, and Western Senegal), Songhay-Jerma (Mali and Niger), Tamashek (spoken by the Tuareg), Hausa (Nigeria and Niger), Kanuri (Nigeria and Niger), and Fulani (spoken from Senegal to the northern Cameroon). The new alphabet consists of Roman characters, with only eight new letters for Fulani, Hausa, Tamashek, and Songhay-Jerma (*b*, *d*, *y*, *z*, *t*, and *k* with additional 'hooks', a spread *n* and an inverted *e*). These letters are already widely used in Nigeria and in school textbooks in Niger. The creation of the unified alphabet should enable a start to be made on the urgent task of transcribing oral literature in the territories occupied by these six linguistic groups, and national languages can now be used for adult literacy training and primary education.

The Revd. Father V. van Bulck, S.J.

WE deeply regret to record the death in July of the Revd. Father V. van Bulck, who was associated with the Institute's activities for many years, as a research worker on the Linguistic Survey of the Northern Bantu Borderland, and later as a Member of the Executive Council. A fuller appreciation of his work will be given in a forthcoming number of *Africa*.