

**REQUIEM FOR FATHER HACKER
(Richard S. Forsyth, 1992)**

Obituary [May 1992]

Regular readers will be saddened to learn that the death occurred on 29th February this year of Father Aloysious X. Hacker, aged 88, on what was, technically, his 22nd birthday.

Father Hacker is perhaps best known to the general public for the first volume of his celebrated autobiography, *Zen and the Art of Truth Maintenance*, which became a runaway best seller on its publication in 1967 at the zenith of the so-called psychedelic revolution. His mind-boggling description of experiences with the drug 'Epiphany' (which at that time was so recently synthesized as to be still legally available) won him an enduring place in the hall of fame of the drug culture.

SGES members, however, will no doubt recall him better for his subsequent work in the field of Artificial Intelligence, such as the invention of the world's first edible knowledge base.

At the time of his demise Fr Hacker was experimenting with the untried but potentially earth-shattering technology of Virtual Divinity -- in which a headset controlled by a massively parallel network of thousands of processors is used to create the illusion of paradise, and it is believed that the weight of an early prototype display helmet may have contributed to the fall that led to his death.

A Police spokeswoman, however, said that all avenues were being explored, and did not rule out the possibility that Fr Hacker may have succumbed to an as-yet-unidentified computer virus.

Fr Hacker leaves a widow, two daughters and a Galapagos Tortoise.

(A full appreciation will appear in our next issue.)

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Aloysious Xavier Hacker (SJ, lapsed): born 29th February 1904, Chittipaddy, West Bengal; died 29th February 1992, El Rancho, California.
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Appreciation [Sept 1992]

In our last issue we briefly reported the death of Father Aloysious Hacker. A personal appreciation, by Miranda Grace, of Wessex University, follows.

I still have a vivid memory of my first encounter with Fr Hacker, which took place in the autumn of 1969 at the UNESCO Symposium on the Quantum-Theoretical Implications of Murphy's Law. It was in Dublin, at the Donleavy Hotel (now sadly demolished to make way for a multi-storey car park). I was a raw postgraduate in philosophical theology, attending my first international conference. Returning from a hurried breakfast to collect some papers in my room, I had just mounted the first-floor landing, when a large black-robed figure toppled down the stairway from the second floor and literally knocked me off my feet.

I picked myself up, and enquired whether he was all right. He rolled over onto his back, focused his eyes on me with considerable effort, and, after a loud groan, asked me to marry him.

I was still pondering my reply when his wife, Lady Joanna Hacker, appeared at the top of the stairs, demanding to know what in hell was going on. "Not Hell, just Purgatory" he replied, staggering to his feet. Lady Hacker took command of the situation and, with my help, hauled him back to his room. There we revived him with him an entire tube of Alka-Seltzer washed down with strong black coffee and a medicinal gulp of Cognac. By then it was 9:15 a.m. and the opening session was due to start at 9:30 -- a debate between Fr Hacker and the youthful Stephen Hawking entitled "Is the mind of God a black hole?".

Somehow we half-carried Fr Hacker to nearby Trinity College, where the debate was to be held. The mind of God remained dark and impenetrable, but that the mind of Aloysious Hacker, in such a condition, was able to hold its own in the cut-&-thrust of intellectual disputation with one of the foremost physicists in the world seemed little short of miraculous to me.

Immediately afterwards I applied for a transfer to the University of Torremolinos, where Fr Hacker was then based, and took time out from my PhD programme to assist him in preparing an English edition of *The Visions of Vostrodamus*, a prophetic medieval manuscript that Fr Hacker unearthed himself in the library of the Alhambra Palace.

It is not perhaps widely known that the controversy over the authenticity of that work led him to a study of author-identification algorithms and thence to embark on a new career (his fourth) as a computer scientist at the age of 69.

The world is a more mundane place without him.

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[Dr Grace is compiling material for a Life of Fr Hacker (to be published next year by Bandwaggon Press) and would be grateful for any memorabilia, recollections or correspondence which SGES members may be able to supply. Confidentiality is assured.]