

THE ORTHODOX FAITH, RUSSIA, SUSSEX UNIVERSITY AND THE BBC

“East-West: In Memory of Sergei Hackel, A Russian Priest and English Scholar” Commemorative Essays collected and edited by Faina Ianova Christians Aware 2014

Launch of a new book published by Christians Aware, about the life and work of The Reverend Doctor Hackel, Orthodox Russian Priest, luminary of The British Council of Churches during the Cold War, formerly Professor of Russian at the University of Sussex and subsequently Editor of the BBC's Russian Service.

Westminster Abbey, 14 October 2014

Concluding Address by Sir Leslie Fielding

Father Sergei was a multifaceted person, and every facet of his personality shone with the talent his life embodied.

At this gathering at Westminster Abbey, we have therefore celebrated a great man and a remarkable priest :

- Unpompous and humble ; yet outspoken and an inspirational leader ;
- Multifaceted and egregiously talented ; yet an approachable and lovable human being.

Alas, I myself never saw enough of Sergei, who left the University of Sussex for his new duties at Bush House shortly after I arrived from Brussels to become Vice-Chancellor. Yet I have always felt drawn to him. Why?

Drawn, as a Sussex Vice-Chancellor, because he embodied the ideals of the founders of this innovatory and dynamic modern university.

Drawn, as a Reader in the Church of England, because of his exemplary ecumenism, and the insights he afforded me into Russian Orthodoxy.

Drawn, as an admirer and supporter of the BBC Overseas Service of the post war years. And because of his contribution to that jewel in the crown which was the BBC's Russian Service, on which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has latterly pulled the plug (a false economy if ever there was one, and a major diplomatic error, which we have all since come to regret!)

Drawn, as myself a former member of HM Diplomatic Service and one-time Senior Eurocrat (as the EU's Director General for External Relations), because of Sergei's own exemplary multilingual internationalism, his inclusivity, and his refusal of all anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism. And because of his personal embodiment of the best of eternal Russia – his reminder that Europe must embrace East as well as West ; and that there is, despite Mr Putin, another and more sympathetic and more glorious reality to the East of us.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude :

- To the eighteen talented contributors to this book, for their wisdom, insight and love ;
- To our financial sponsors, for their generosity, including Professor Beryl Williams and many other Sussex alumni ;
- To Barbara Butler and her team at Christians Aware ;
- To our Moscow Publishers, because this book will be coming out in the Russian language early next year ;
- To the Dean of Westminster Abbey, for permission to launch the book in this incomparable setting ;
- And finally to two individuals in particular who have each been quite indispensable. First, to the late Reverend Doctor Colin Davey, a fellow undergraduate and great chum of mine at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in the fifties. I was his Best Man, when he got married. Colin saw the book into its final form with great courage in the final months of his fight with cancer (let me wave to his wife Janet and his daughter Caroline, who are with us this evening). And, last but not least, to his editor, Faina Ivanova, of whom it has been a privilege for me to be among the sponsors, and alongside whom it was a great pleasure to work.