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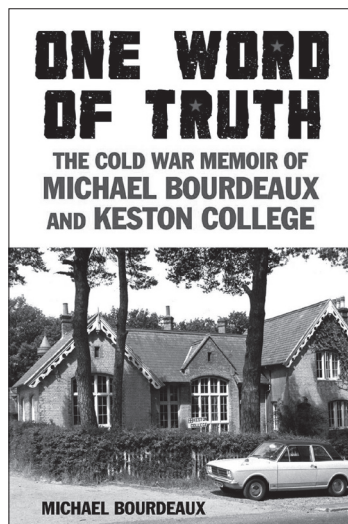
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Memoir Book by Canon Michael Bourdeaux

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One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College, by Michael Bourdeaux. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2019. 311pp.



1 illus. *Front page of the book: Keston College, founded in 1969*

Canon Michael Bourdeaux stated in his speech for the celebration of Lithuanian Independence Day in the Welbeck Hall in Nottinghamshire on that Lithuania was the

inspiration for writing his memoirs. He said that his first visit to Lithuania in 1989 was the culmination of many years of preparation, including writing *Land of Crosses*: “This visit opened my eyes not only to new friendships, but also to the possibility of a wonderful future for Lithuania, not only in terms of political, but also of religious, freedom.

It was, in one way, the culmination of my life’s work and certainly it was an inspirational time”.¹

Indeed he has written in the preface of the book of memoirs: “It was 1989 and the world was changing. During my life I have been eyewitness to several extraordinary events, into which I was propelled by the unseen hand of God. One of these brought me unexpectedly to participate in a moment of history, when a tiny nation measured its strength against the might of the Soviet regime. No one could have predicted that the Christian faith of the Lithuanian people would predominate, but their path of prayer and suffering was to lead to freedom for church and nation”.²

“It is not by chance that I chose to open my memoirs with an account of that visit. The preface of *One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College* is entitled ‘A Time of Transition’, which refers to the aspirations of the Lithuanian people. These became my motivation, too, and they would very much inspire my memoirs when I came to write them. This devotion led to my receiving the Order of King Gediminas in 1999 and the Karininko kryžius in 2004, honours which I bear with pride.

If you look at the index to my memoirs, you will see that Lithuania is mentioned on at least 23 pages – that’s without searching the index for the names of individual people.”³

Canon Michael Bourdeaux also highlighted that “Keston College celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its founding at the end of last year and the memoirs were published to add weight to the date. Our work, necessarily, has to be very different now, but it continues, and the archive, containing many treasures from Lithuania, is carefully preserved and catalogued at Baylor University, Texas”.⁴

Rt Revd & Rt Hon The Lord Chartres, former Bishop of London, wrote in his review of the memoir book by Michael Bourdeaux: “As well as descriptions of some of the original documents preserved in the archive there are brief essays on significant events, such as Pope John Paul II’s visit to Poland in 1979, and also on lesser-known individuals who contributed to the struggle for religious freedom in Eastern Europe. One of the most moving illustrations is of a list of more than 17,000 signatures of the courageous people who in 1971 protested against Soviet oppression of religion and signed ‘The Memorandum

¹ BOURDEAUX, Michael, Speech for the Celebration of the Lithuanian Independence Day in Nottinghamshire on 16 February, 2020.

² BOURDEAUX, Michael, “One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College”. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2019, p. xiii.

³ BOURDEAUX, Michael, Speech for the Celebration of the Lithuanian Independence Day in Nottinghamshire on 16 February, 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

of the Lithuanian Catholic Church'. It has since become a treasure of national significance. Bourdeaux travelled to Kaunas in 2007 to restore it to the keeping of the church".⁵

Wishing them a happy Independence Day, Canon Michael Bourdeaux urged the Lithuanians to value their unique heritage. Indeed, it would be important to publish the Memorandum with all the signatures as a separate book, an important document which is still virtually unknown to historians in the West.

Returning to the memoir, "The title is the penultimate sentence of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize speech, which reads in full: 'One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world'", explains the author in the "Note on the Title".⁶

Canon Michael Bourdeaux is an Anglican priest and founder-President of the Keston Institute in Oxford.

Keston College, later known as The Keston Institute and The Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, was established by the Reverend Canon Michael Bourdeaux in 1969 to perform research and provide reliable information about societies under Soviet communist rule.

Oxford graduate Michael Bourdeaux became one of the first full-year British exchange students at Moscow University, studying medieval Russian history (and, unofficially, the situation surrounding religion in the Soviet Union) in 1959 during the Khrushchev era. He was asked to become "a voice of persecuted people" by Ukrainian dissidents, while paying a visit during his studies to the grounds of the former St Peter & St Paul Church in central Moscow, which had been destroyed by the Communist authorities.

As the Keston Institute published information about the persecution of the Catholic, Baptist, Orthodox and other churches in the Soviet Union, and published the academic journal "Religion in Communist Lands" as well as regular press releases, Canon Michael Bourdeaux became a human rights advisor to the British Government, by helping Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in concert with President Ronald Reagan, to establish "the policy of change" towards the Soviet Union.⁷

Keston's international profile reached its peak in the early 1980s, states the author, describing high profile policy briefings given to Prime Minister Thatcher and to Vice-President George H. W. Bush before his trip to Moscow in 1983. As a member of the British delegation in the Helsinki process, Canon Bourdeaux faced the Soviet authorities as well as the pro-Soviet Orthodox Church in the USSR.

Thus, Keston College and Canon Bourdeaux contributed not only to an increase of awareness about the situation of believers in the Soviet bloc and the violation of human rights by the Communist authorities in the USSR, but also put pressure on the Soviets to

⁵ LORD CHARTRES, *One Word of Truth* by Michael Bourdeaux, *The Church Times*, 2020 June 12.

⁶ BOURDEAUX, Michael, *One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2019, p.ix.

⁷ BOURDEAUX, Michael, *One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2019, p. 161–163.

respect human rights. Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College played an important role in the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union by the encouragement of dissidence in the USSR, by making the dissident voice heard in the West and by helping Her Majesty's Government to formulate policies in support of dissidents within both the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union itself. In recognition of his life-long work and achievements in the advancement of human rights, Canon Bourdeaux was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which within the field of spirituality can be compared to the Nobel Peace Prize.

Canon Michael Bourdeaux is also an author of the monograph about the persecution of the Lithuanian Catholic Church.⁸ One of the author's aims was to enable the Catholics of Lithuania "to present their case to the world in their own words". Thus, *Land of Crosses* included numerous case histories from the stories of underground literature smuggled to the West, including "the Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church" in the 1970s.

The archive of Keston College was a rich depository of documents from occupied Lithuania. It held the "Memorandum of 17,054" from the Catholics of Lithuania, which was returned to the Lithuanian Catholic Church before the Keston College archive was moved to Baylor University in Texas in 2008.

Dr Darius Furmonavicius had a chance to examine the document before its return to Lithuania and found his grandmother Ona Lazauskienė's signature on it. Addressed to Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, and organised by Cardinal Sigitas Tamkevičius, the Memorandum of 17,054 was the first sign in December 1971 that the liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet occupation was forthcoming. "I have signed it. We are doing revolution!" stated my grandmother proudly.⁹

This book of memoirs by Michael Bourdeaux is a valuable story of the Cold War as witnessed by one of its successful and most optimistic warriors. The author asserts that the election of Pope John Paul II from Poland on 16 October 1978 was an important international factor contributing to the speedy and peaceful collapse of Soviet communism.¹⁰ Former President of Keston College Sir John Lawrence believed that the Soviet Union would collapse like the proverbial house built from cards.¹¹ The Lithuanian Declaration of Independence and the firmness of President Vytautas Landsbergis in searching for international support, successfully resisting the Kremlin's pressure which came from both the East and the West, thirty years ago catalysed the collapse of Soviet Communism. The American policy of "the roll back of communism" led by President Ronald Reagan and continued by President George H. W. Bush placed important international pressure

⁸ BOURDEAUX, Michael. *Land of Crosses. The Struggle for religious freedom in Lithuania, 1939–1978*. Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1979.

⁹ FURMONAVICIUS, Darius, "We Are Doing Revolution? How Believers Won the Cold War". *Draugas News*, June 2020, p. 11.

¹⁰ BOURDEAUX, Michael, "One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College". London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2019, p. 220.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

on the Soviets. Keston College and Michael Bourdeaux's work, informing the outside world about the situation within the Soviet Bloc over a period of three decades, also contributed to the collapse of the Soviet communist state.

The Keston Institute continues its work by producing newsletters and providing scholarships to study archival material in the Keston Centre for Study of Religion, Politics and Society at Baylor University in Texas.

It will be important to translate the book of memoirs by Canon Michael Bourdeaux into as many languages as possible, including the Lithuanian language, since Lithuania played such a pivotal role in the Keston Institute's work.