

One word of truth. The Cold War memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College. By Michael Bourdeaux. Pp. xvi + 311 incl. 45 colour ills. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2019. £19.99. 978 0 232 53414 6
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It is extraordinary that Keston College has survived until today from its foundation in 1969, for, like David facing Goliath, it was small, impoverished, rather a country bumpkin in the eyes of the academic world, and faced the opposition not only of Western appeasers but that of the gigantesque organisation, the KGB, which considered it one of the most dangerous Western organisations. After fifty years a history of this hybrid organisation – part academic and part populariser of information on religion in (now former) Communist countries – has at last appeared in the form of the memoir of Michael Bourdeaux, the founder of Keston College which he described as ‘my concept’ and into which he poured his energy and commitment over this half century.

He has chosen a telling phrase as his title, *One word of truth*, for it was the facts, the reality on the ground in the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Communist bloc, which undermined Communist propaganda, that he and his staff sought and studied: he fought against those ‘perverters of truth’ in Isaiah Berlin’s words (letter to David Astor, 14 May 1958) ‘who squeeze the facts into iron frameworks of doctrine, against all that their hearts or consciences tell them’. Hard as the authorities and even church leaders within the Communist bloc tried to hide the persecution of religious believers, and claimed that there was religious freedom, the reporting of Keston College through the press, the BBC and its own publications proved in the long run to be accurate. Most telling are the words of the distinguished Romanian Orthodox theologian Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (d. 1993) who was imprisoned for many years by the Romanian Communist regime: in 1991 at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, he said to Michael Bourdeaux, ‘Michael, you were right all along – and you are still right now’ (p. 195).

But many did not think so. Michael Bourdeaux and Keston faced criticism from the Left and were accused of being cold-warriors, they received disapproval from the ‘club’ (p. 79) of ecumenists and the World Council of Churches for rocking the boat, and from anti-Communists and some missionary groups for not taking up a crusade against the Iron Curtain countries. It becomes clear from this memoir that right from the outset he and Keston were determined to maintain a balance, whereas had Keston tipped one way or the other it could have attracted the kind of funding which it often desperately needed.

It became a rule of thumb among British journalists during Keston’s heyday that if the information came from Keston it was reliable and did not need to be checked. The official Soviet and East European press as well as *samizdat*, which from the late 1960s flowed *via* usually unknown routes into Keston, were the basis for this information. And for the academic world Keston’s constant gathering of documents, photographs and press cuttings over the years has produced a formidable archive which is now housed in Texas at Baylor University.

The reader of *One word of truth* will be struck by how impecunious was Keston with its staff housed in ramshackle surroundings for most of the organisation’s existences. The staff – and I was one – all worked for a pittance and were dedicated. I

remember how reading particularly Soviet religious *samizdat* – accounts of trials or conditions in labour camps – put you in touch with those who were suffering and gave an impetus to getting the material translated and published. Written communications from Soviet dissidents were not the only source of information for Keston's reports; often it could be direct communication *via* the telephone. Missing from this memoir is one example of such communication, an extraordinary moment when Keston's Head of Information, Alyona Kozhevnikova, telephoned the husband of the imprisoned poet Irina Ratushinskaya. As neither could be sure who was at the other end of the line, Alyona started reciting one of Irina's poems, then broke off pretending she could not remember the next line. Irina's husband promptly continued. They played this game four or five times until both were assured that each was who they claimed to be.

As I participated in much of the history described in *One word of truth* I can vouch for its accuracy, though of course there are elements which I did not know about and which now fill in the background to events. I could only find one small mistake: a footnote (p. 247) gives the year 1974 for first issue of Keston's academic journal, *Religion in Communist Lands* – it was in fact 1973. Slightly misleading is the statement about Fr Gleb Yakunin (p. 239) who, it is true, first joined the True Orthodox Church but, when it splintered into many strands, became a leader within a new structure called the Russian Apostolic Orthodox Church.

With the fall of Communism, Keston had an identity crisis and struggled to find a *raison d'être*. Although Isaiah Berlin told me he thought Keston had had its day, I discovered in contrast, as one of those who manned Keston's Moscow office in the 1990s, the near veneration in which this organisation was held by many religious believers whom I met. When I took the first ten volumes of *Religion in Communist Lands* to present to Moscow's Library of Foreign Literature, the director received them and solemnly declared that these volumes were of inestimable value for those who had lived through the Communist era. More recently, affirmation of Keston's importance not only in the past but also today was given by Rowan Williams on the occasion of Keston's fiftieth anniversary late last year. He said:

what Keston has done has been not only about picking out examples of bad practice. It has been something to do with a witness to the nature of religious liberty itself, not in terms of partisan defence of any one group, not in terms of weaponising one group's injustices as against another's. If it has, indeed, worked on the basis of the necessity and indivisibility of religious liberty, it has worked on the basis that is still an absolutely necessary contribution to the society we're in, in West and East.

Evidence to support this accolade is provided a-plenty in *One word of truth*.

KESTON INSTITUTE

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A gospel for the poor. Global social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical left. By David C. Kirkpatrick. Pp. x + 244 incl. 10 figs. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. £45. 978 081 225094 7

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This book can be situated within a new stream of studies on the history of Christianity in Latin America. In recent years, the works of Ricardo