Keston Newsletter

No. 4, 2007

Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius (left) and Canon Michael Bourdeaux

To Lithuania with Love

by Michael Bourdeaux

On 9 July I handed back to the Lithuanian Catholic Church the petition, or Memorandum, signed by over 17,000 Lithuanian Catholics, which had been sent to Keston in 1972 (text in *Keston Newsletter* No 3). This document is rightly thought of as the founding document of Lithuanian independence. Although it only speaks of church affairs, the spirit behind it is unmistakable: Lithuania wanted to break free from the iron clutches of the Soviet Union.

Since *perestroika* I have visited Lithuania a number of times. On 5 February 1989 I was in Vilnius at the invitation of Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, the Soviet Union's longest Christian detainee of the post-Stalin period, who had returned at last to his diocese. Just released from house arrest after 29 years (he was never tried), he greeted the massive crowds on the streets with quiet dignity. He was in total command, as I observed from the back seat of his car. In 1971, after ten years of detention, his invisible spiritual force had been behind the collection of signatures for the petition which called for his release with that of other senior clergy in prison, the abolition of compulsory atheism in schools and the ending of Communist control over the lone theological seminary.

A young priest at the time, Fr Sigitas Tamkevičius – now Archbishop of Kaunas – organised the circulation of the petition. It was a one-page document which was clandestinely sent to most of the 570 churches of Lithuania (half of the number before Soviet occupation). The KGB intervened and tried to halt the collection of signatures. They seized maybe

three quarters of all the texts, but, astonishingly, over a hundred survived, with no fewer than 17,054 signatures. The copies were bundled together and a volunteer found to take them to Moscow. They reached – not the Communist Party, to which they were addressed – but my desk at Keston College in Kent which had been founded three years earlier. Each copy of the text is individually typed or carbon copied. The sheets were mostly in poor condition when we received them. After all, they had passed from hand to hand, in and out of deep pockets, while the collection of support went on. But the signatures are as fresh as the day they were written. In blue, black, red or the occasional green they show the hand of the school-teacher as well as of the artisan.

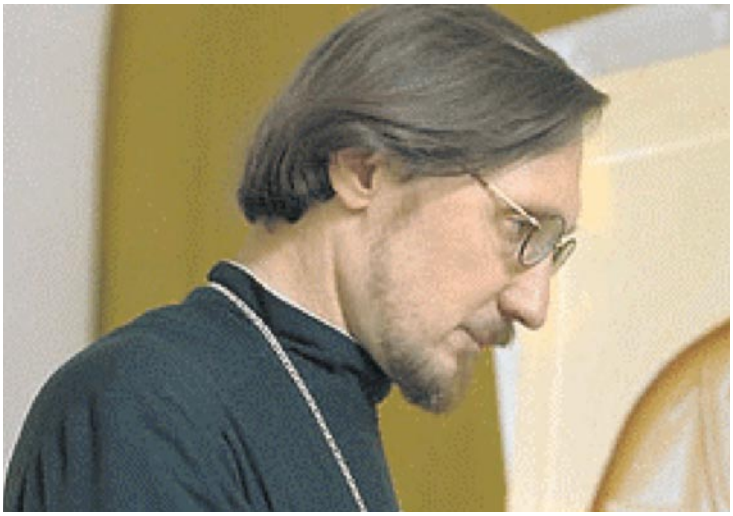
This time my visit to Lithuania was to be the focus of intense media interest. I travelled with hand-luggage only and the 'Memorandum of 17,000' was safely tucked away in it. Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius was at Kaunas airport to meet me. He is one of my heroes. I do not think his authorship of the petition was ever discovered, but his imprisonment in 1974 was for a multitude of other 'offences', including the founding and circulating of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, on which I based my book of 1979, *Land of Crosses*.

Very few former political prisoners in Eastern Europe have been able to return to normal life and occupy a place of such prominence and influence. He was not released until 1988, one of the very last, already three years into Gorbachev's *perestroika*, which illustrates the immense fear that the regime had of the Lithuanian Catholics. They had good reason to be afraid: I have always been certain that their immense fortitude and initiative was one of the key factors in the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Kaunas is the most historic see of Lithuania (Vilnius, the capital, was for many years a Polish city) and Fr Sigitas Tamkevičius became archbishop there soon after his release. He is immensely respected, so why he is not a cardinal I am not sure. However, I am sure that he will be beatified – although one hopes not for a few years yet, because at 69 he is full of vigour and plans to carry on working until he has to retire at 75. This was the fourth time I had met him: he greeted our Keston 'pilgrims' travelling around the Baltic States in 1997; I stayed with him for one night in 1999; and in 2005 he came to the opening of the Keston exhibition at the Mažvydas National Library in Vilnius.

The Curia, where Archbishop Tamkevičius lives, is right in the centre of the Old City. After a quick lunch, we walked across the square to the Town Hall. At the top of the grand staircase, people were assembling and a string quartet was playing (Beethoven) in greeting. Nijole Sadunaite, hugely respected in Lithuania for her intrepid work – and suffering in prison – on behalf of freedom, came forward from the crowd and launched herself into my arms. I was conducted into the magnificent ceremonial hall, where row upon row of dignitaries were seated on two parallel sides, church people separate from civic officials. Cameras flashed. There were about eight speeches, mine in the middle. To explain how I received the document 35 years ago I had to explain something of my history and how we established Keston College. There was consecutive translation from English into Lithuanian. It was, for me, when the moment came, a profoundly moving experience to hand back the Memorandum to the very person who originated it. A vast battery of cameras appeared: I have never before been confronted by such a wall of them. I wish I had the texts of all the wonderful tributes to the work of Keston.

Other speakers included the British Ambassador, Colin Roberts, and Anthony Packer (the splendid Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Wales, who originated the idea of returning the document), as well as the Mayor and of course the Archbishop himself. The whole ceremony lasted about an hour and a half, after which there was a short but intensive press conference in an adjacent room. The questions were all so positive and the report on the television news that night must have lasted a full five minutes. Well, I understood my own speech... I was glad that I had remembered to wear my Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas, with which President Adamkus had invested me eighteen months ago. There was then a reception, with lots of good conversation, followed by a private meal with the Archbishop. After a rest he took me out for a walk around the park adjoining the Curia. We shared breakfast next morning and he showed me some of the press articles, which they will collect and send to Keston. I had time for a short walk on my own around the Old City before being taken to the airport for the flight home. This visit to Lithuania, although short, was one of the most intense experiences of my life.



Fr Georgi Chistyakov

Fr Georgi Chistyakov
In Memoriam

Xenia Dennen writes:

It was with great sadness that I heard of Fr Georgi Chistyakov's death on 22 June. I met Fr Georgi for the first time in the early 1990s after I had begun visiting Russia regularly as Keston's Moscow Representative. We became firm friends and I would arrange to see him during each visit either in a small room at the Church of SS Cosmas and Damian, where he served as a priest, or at the Library of Foreign Literature, where he ran the department devoted to religious literature. At the library we would usually sit in the room which housed Dr Nicholas Zernov's books – a strange link with my past as it was Dr Zernov who originally recommended me to Michael Bourdeaux in 1966 and led me first to work as Michael's research assistant and then for Keston itself after it was founded in 1969.

Georgi Petrovich Chistyakov was born on 4 August 1953. He graduated from Moscow University after specialising in classics and ancient history, and from 1975 taught Greek and Latin at the Moscow State University of Linguistics. From 1985-1997 he lectured on church history and theology at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology where he headed the department on the history of culture. He also taught at Moscow University and the Russian State University for the Humanities. Having 'sat at the feet' of Fr Alexander Men for many years, and discovering that he had a vocation to the priesthood, he nevertheless chose not to be ordained when clergy were still vetted by the Council for Religious Affairs, the CPSU's arm for controlling the churches, but waited until 1992. From that year he served as a priest at the Church of SS Cosmas and Damian in the centre of Moscow until his death. He was greatly loved by the parishioners there: he was a wonderful pastor, preacher and confessor. He also devoted much of his time to supporting the parish's ministry (originally begun by Fr Alexander Men in 1989) to the Children's Republican Hospital, the only hospital in the whole of the Russian Federation to offer children transplant operations. A chapel – the Church of the Protecting Veil – was established in 1994 by the parish in one of the hospital's lecture theatres and parishioners regularly visited the young cancer patients. Fr Georgi spent much of his time caring for the children and their parents whom he described as his friends and teachers. They were members one of another, he said, and because death was such a daily reality at this hospital, Fr Georgi felt the dead to be very close when he celebrated the liturgy. I noticed that he kept photographs of the children who had recently died next to the altar.

Fr Georgi was a man of wide interests, highly cultivated and well read. He followed the political situation in Russia as well as

international affairs; unlike many Russian Orthodox priests, he understood western theology and always spoke well of the Roman Catholic Church. He helped to run and taught at the Alexander Men Open Orthodox University where at one time I remember him planning a course on different Christian denominations. Who, he asked me, would lecture well on the Anglican Church? I recommended an Anglican woman priest who spoke Russian, and he was delighted at the suggestion. The ordination of women, which is unacceptable to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), was not a stumbling block for him.

well as spiritual matters: the present period in Russia is one of psychological and cultural stagnation. Fr Georgi sees a new iron curtain falling between Russia and the West.

When in June the following year, Keston organised a launch of the Encyclopaedia's first two volumes at the Library of Foreign Literature, it was Fr Georgi who gave the opening speech, saying that Keston – considered 'an enemy' during the 1970s and 1980s by the Soviet government – had done much to help lift the Soviet 'ban on religion'.

The Church of SS Cosmas and Damian in winter

When we met in September 2003, I wrote down what we talked about in my diary at the time:

He thinks the move to turn the ROC into the established church is slowing down and hopes for an improvement in ROC-RC relations. The Anglican Church is now the most popular denomination at the Moscow Patriarchate since the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit for the St Seraphim canonisation celebrations. Putin on 1 August emphasised that 'Russia is a multi-confessional country': Fr Georgi saw this as a positive sign - of government even-handedness towards different denominations and religions. But the Moscow Patriarchate, he said, admires the church-state relations of the Brezhnev period, the 'period of stagnation', as the ideal! People are currently passive, uninterested in political as

My last meeting with Fr Georgi was on 21 June 2005 when we had a long conversation ranging over many subjects. I recorded in my diary:

Russian Orthodox Church: *Fr Georgi told me that the Moscow Patriarchate is following like a lamb the main propaganda line of Putin's regime, i.e. 'patriotism'. The next day, 22 June, being the anniversary of the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, every Moscow priest would be expected to attend the ceremony by the grave of the unknown soldier in the Kremlin. He, however, would not go and would celebrate the liturgy instead, 'protected by the chalice'. The ROC's support for introducing* Foundations of Orthodox Culture *[a controversial textbook on Russian Orthodoxy] into schools was*

opposed by the Minister of Education and most parents, who only liked schools which could get their children into higher education and had no interest in inculcating Orthodox culture. The ROC is afraid of charismatics as they are spreading rapidly and appealing to the young. Baptists are mostly old and no threat. Sects are minimally influential now. Some good aspects of ROC today: more parishes are aware and involved in current social problems; education in the seminaries is improving with more emphasis on biblical studies; the Bible Society is consulted by seminaries; priests will be better prepared, thus enabling the church to be ready for the new post-Putin era in ten to fifteen years.

Church of SS Cosmas and Damian: *A new priest, imposed by the Moscow Patriarchate to keep an eye on the parish, writes denunciations to the Moscow Patriarchate about Fr Georgi and Fr Alexandr [Borisov], but nothing comes of these; this priest, said Fr Georgi with a smile, thinks Orthodoxy is expressed fully in peasant handicrafts such as weaving bast sandles, so he has gone off at the moment to busy himself with such enlightening activity. Fr Georgi wrote an article about the negative sides of the ROC which was read by the Patriarch who was furious, but this led to nothing and Fr Georgi is still in place.*

ROC-RC Relation: *The Moscow Patriarchate was pleased with the election of a German Pope in the place of one from Eastern Europe as the hierarchy hopes now for a reduction in the Catholic presence in Russia, e.g. they hope the Catholic bishops will be replaced by Apostolic Administrators, as was the case before 2002, and that Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz [head of Catholic Church in Russia] will be replaced by someone who cannot speak Russian, ideally by, say, an Italian.*

Social problems: *More than a million homeless; government is doing nothing about homeless/street children; many children abandoned by alcoholic parents; some small charities are trying to do what they can; Fr Georgi approved of foreign adoptions as he knew many children whose lives had been transformed by a new life with American families – however, the official line is 'our gene pool is being plundered'.*

Media: *The only influential independent newspaper is* Kommersant; Izvestia *has a new management and will not be worth reading;* Novaya gazeta *is the organ of Yabloko [small political party] and distributed only in Moscow but has a number of powerful journalists on its staff. The standard of television programmes is very low: all you see are reality shows and game shows.*

Politics: *Two officials are the power behind the throne: Surkov, a 'pseudo liberal', and Igor Sechin [Putin's secretary in St Petersburg] are in charge and at the next presidential election will find a Putin look-alike to replace him. Another scenario: Putin might pronounce himself the PM and arrogate all power to that post away from a puppet president. According to an* Ekho Moskvy *[popular Moscow radio station] poll, 88% were against the abolition of elections for local governors, but the population is generally passive, said Fr Georgi, whilst the government very much fears an Orange Revolution and is taking measures to prevent such a development. In the provinces life is less fraught, less oppressive; the ideological oppression of Putinism is not felt there. Recent social reforms were bungled; then rescinded by governors in the provinces and by Luzhkov, Mayor of Moscow. The effect of the Putin regime on society – a general growth of indifference, which includes indifference among the intelligentsia to religion. The opposition to Putin is very small – indifference is the general mood.*

In October 2006 I spent a few days in Moscow and visited the Church of SS Cosmas and Damian on Sunday, hoping to see Fr Georgi, although I knew he had long been ill with leukaemia. Sadly he was not well enough to be there that day.

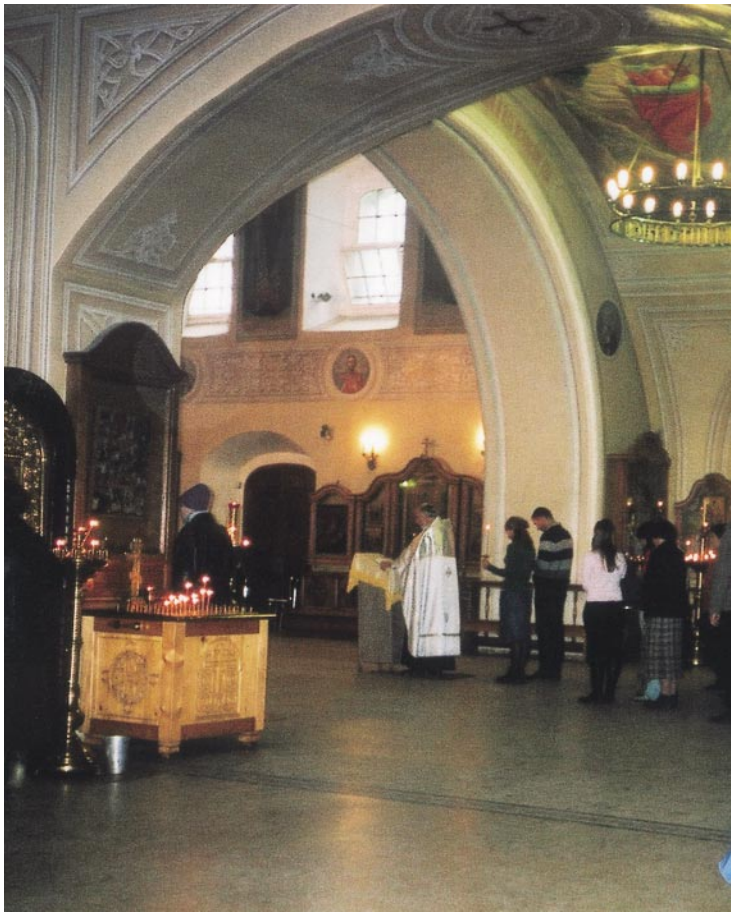
Michael Bourdeaux writes:

I did not know Fr Georgi until his last few years. In 2000 I helped set up a visit to Russia by the Choir of Exeter Cathedral, the first time an English cathedral choir had done a full-length tour of Russia (as opposed to visits to a single city, such as St Petersburg and Moscow). Relations between the Church of England and the Moscow Patriarchate always contained an element of reserve and it proved difficult to find a church in St Petersburg, Yaroslavl or Moscow which would invite the choir to sing, there being no tradition in the Orthodox Church of choirs from elsewhere being invited to participate in worship or perform on their premises. It was Fr Georgi who extended a generous invitation to us. I say 'generous' because from the first he made it clear that he would facilitate all our wishes.

So almost my first memory of seeing Fr Georgi in the flesh was of his spare frame hauling benches from an ante-room into the empty spaces of the church itself. Then when the choir began to rehearse he looked at their music and asked whether he could photocopy some of it for his own choir. But all this was a prelude to one of the most joyous occasions I have ever shared in a Russian church. It fell to me throughout the tour to announce all the items in Russian, as we did not have the back-up to produce an individual programme for each event.

The concert was at 4 p.m. on a weekday in July, but Fr Georgi had 'commanded' his congregation to attend and the church was nearly full. There was rapt attention during the singing in the beautifully restored building of SS Cosmas and Damian, interspersed with lighter episodes. Each time I announced an item, Fr Georgi would stand up and preach a mini-sermon on the theological import of the words, leading to verbal responses from the congregation. The choirboys frequently had a little giggle, too. They were taken with Fr Georgi and his fluent but idiosyncratic English, not so much because of what he said (he translated some of his thoughts for them), but because of what he looked like. 'Ken Doddski', they all called him – and you could immediately see the resemblance. Fr Georgi had invited a reporter from *Izvestia*, who subsequently wrote that the boys, in their scarlet robes, were a 'choir of young cardinals'.

Then in 2005 Fr Georgi helped the BBC and me with a broadcast which made a profound impression. I was in Moscow with the Revd Stephen Shipley, the producer, to make a programme to be broadcast in the Choral Evensong slot on 15 September, the day of the 'Elevation of the Holy Cross'. We had some trouble in finding a Moscow cleric who could speak English well enough to give the meditation and we tried one or two people unsuccessfully. Eventually we asked Fr Georgi. Coaching him to perfect his pronunciation was a joy in itself, but what we eventually recorded was a profound experience for all of us. The broadcast, preserved on a BBC CD, is a memorial to a remarkable priest, a spiritual leader, especially of the young, who will be long remembered.



Interior of SS Cosmas and Damian

Home News

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 3 November at 11 a.m. in London, at the St Andrew's Court House, 7 St Andrew Street, London EC4A 3AB (nearest underground Chancery Lane). The Chairman and Council of Management look forward to welcoming you and discussing Keston's plans for the future.

Following the signing of an agreement on 21 June 2007 with Baylor University, which will found a new Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society, the archive and library were packed up during August with the help of Keston's archivist, Malcolm Walker, and a team from Baylor. The collection was then transported to the coast and shipped to the United States. Michael Bourdeaux wrote to the Council of Management as follows on 13 August:

"The deed is done! On Saturday and yesterday Malcolm helped the team of five people from Baylor University to load the archive and it will leave the country by sea in a great container on Friday. Then it will take three weeks to arrive in Texas, after which, of course, unpacking will start straight away. They want to bring out the books first, so I imagine it will be at least three months before the archive can be used again. In a way, this is a sad day for me, but at the same time I'm delighted to know that it will be in such safe hands, guaranteeing its future for ... well, who knows about the long-term future of mankind on this planet? I must tell you all that Malcolm has been brilliant, superbly organised and then working without stint when the team arrived. It could not have been done nearly as quickly if Malcolm had not prepared everything meticulously. My wife, Lorna, and I entertained the Baylor five (plus Malcolm) to a meal last night here at our local Tree Restaurant. It was a very happy occasion indeed. I already knew three of the Baylor team (Chris Marsh, Bill Hare - chief librarian - and Suzanne Sellers, Chris's assistant). The other two were more junior and, I think, enjoyed their short visit to Oxford - their first to the UK - despite all the hard work. They return to Texas tomorrow."

The new Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society will be officially opened at Baylor University on 27 November 2007. The President, Michael Bourdeaux, and the Chairman, Xenia Dennen, will be flying to Texas for this important event. In order to maintain on-going cooperation between the Council of Management and the new Center, Keston will be represented on the Center's governing body. The Director of the Center will be standing for election to the Council of Management at the AGM. With the departure of the archive and library, the Chairman was able to give notice on Keston's tenancy of the ground floor at 38 St Aldate's, Oxford. The notice period will end on 28 November 2007 at which point Keston will no longer have the burden of regular and expensive rental payments. Thanks to the careful pruning of Keston's expenditure, the trustees will now be able to count on a regular income, and on this basis plan for the future.

Keston's Encyclopaedia

Ten years ago Keston launched an ambitious project – to produce an Encyclopaedia describing the complex religious situation in the contemporary Russian Federation. The title of this extensive work (the text is in Russian) is Religious Life in Russia Today: A Systematic Description*. Six volumes have now been published – the last to appear grew into twice the size originally planned – as well as an introductory volume of essays. The final volume should be published in the spring of 2008. Keston's Chairman has had the privilege of participating in some of the research, which has involved many fieldtrips to different parts of Russia. In October 2006 she travelled with Sergei Filatov, head of the Encyclopaedia team, and Roman Lunkin, to Tula and Ryazan. Below she recounts some of her experiences during this fieldtrip.*

Swimming in Glue

by Xenia Dennen

I have always enjoyed the memorable phrase of Keston's first chairman, Sir John Lawrence – 'swimming in glue' – which he often used to describe the frustrations of life in the Soviet Union. (If anyone taught me how to write and edit it was he: when I was plunged into the deep end in 1973 and asked to start a journal for Keston, Sir John came to my aid.) I think he would have found some aspects of an Encyclopaedia fieldtrip worthy of this description, although, of course, life in today's Russia is very different in many respects from Soviet days.

I joined Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin on the 5.55 p.m. train from Moscow to Tula on 15 October 2006. The train was a fast one and only took two hours, rather than the usual four or five to cover 200 km. No smoking was allowed as the carriage was made of plastic and could 'burn in two minutes,' said the woman conductor with great optimism, 'but you can smoke in the toilet'. It had turned very cold, although no snow had yet started to fall, and the carriage had no heating at all. I did not take off my fur-lined raincoat.

Our hotel in Tula was a leftover from the Soviet past. The windows in my room did not fit, there was neither heating nor hot water, and after

Tula kremlin

A street in Tula

midnight no water at all. By midnight I had had enough and complained: the solution – a bottle of cold water which I could pour into my basin. That night I froze, having only one thin blanket, and despite remaining in my raincoat's fur lining, wrapping my head in a scarf and keeping my gloves on. Next morning I got a manager to look at my room: she admitted that the windows needed seeing to and kindly moved me to a room where there was even some hot water and at least no freezing draughts.

By this time the first snowflakes of winter were falling. Young lads outside the hotel were smoking by the 'eternal fire' – a war memorial – trying to keep warm. It was a great treat to find a heated café where we were able to get breakfast. On the way I noticed the young people outside the university: many of the girls wore tight jeans, high-heeled boots and fashionable knee-length trousers. Tula was famous for the manufacture of armaments, so the city was adorned with monuments of guns and rocket-launchers. As Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's country estate, was not far away, he was a local hero, and a statue of him was to be seen on one of the main streets.

On a fieldtrip the team depends on having a telephone in Sergei's room, our headquarters,

from which we can ring and arrange meetings. This Tula hotel had no telephones working on our floor, so we had the inconvenience of having to use the telephone downstairs at the reception desk in the hall. Sergei got through to the diocesan office but the only person there was a doorman who eventually gave Sergei the number of the bishop's secretary; she, however, was not at her desk and had gone to post the letters. Eventually she answered the telephone, informed Sergei that the bishop, Archbishop Alexi (Kutepov), was away from Tula for the whole week and suggested he speak to the bishop's personal assistant. Thus started a frustrating patch – often the case at the start of a fieldtrip. It definitely felt as though we were swimming in glue. By evening, however, Sergei's telephone was functioning and the glue felt a little less thick.

Sergei & Bishop Zhuravlev

Roman meanwhile was hard at work talking to the *oblast* and city officials dealing with religion. They knew little about Protestants but mentioned that there were Mennonites, Baptists, *Initsiativniki* (Reform Baptists) and followers of Rerikh in the area. They intended to ban all 'alternative' Orthodox (those not belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate) and were keeping a close watch on the leader of a new branch of the Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Reformed Church, whose leader, Bishop Sergei Zhuravlev, had taken part in the Orange Revolution.

After many fruitless telephone calls to Archbishop Alexi's personal assistant who was nowhere to be found, we decided to contact this 'alternative' Bishop Sergei Zhuravlev who could see us the next morning at 10 a.m. We decided to meet him in our nice, warm café!

Xenia, Fr Kovalevsky & Sergei

Bishop Sergei Zhuravlev had a small, neatly trimmed beard, wore a striped jumper, black trousers and brown shoes, and bore no signs of being an Orthodox bishop. He told us that he had been brought up in an atheist family (his grandfather was in the NKVD) and in 1988 decided to leave his profession as an artist and get ordained. He completed a correspondence course at a Moscow seminary, was ordained in 1991, and then served in Moscow Patriarchate parishes in the Ryazan and Bryansk dioceses until 1996. There was much in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) which he did not like: the authoritarian system, ritualism, monasticism, the veneration of saints. In the mid-'90s he met Fr Gleb Yakunin and Bishop Stefan Linitsky whose Orthodox Church of Renewal he then joined. Owing to much official persecution in the Bryansk diocese he left Russia for Ukraine in 1998, was consecrated bishop by Stefan Linitsky and another Renewal bishop in 2002 and then founded the Orthodox Reformed Church (ORC). He managed to found 20 ORC parishes in a year, and in 2003 returned to Russia, settling in Tula: by late 2006 there were parishes in Tula, Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Udmurtia, Yroslavl, and in the Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk *oblasts*. He called himself a 'Christian anarchist', rejected control from above and considered that bishops and priests should be chosen by the people; he wanted the laity to have a much greater role in the church; he had experienced 'baptism in the Spirit' and recognised charismatic gifts, including speaking in tongues; the lives of saints should be imitated but they themselves should not be venerated as this he thought idolatrous. He was married and, not surprisingly, supported marriage for bishops. He had opened an internet-seminary with its centre in Tula and was allowing women to train for the priesthood. He preached sometimes out on the street wearing his vestments, believed that good pastors were needed above all (Moscow Patriarchate priests were only 'concerned about the purse, not the soul') and disapproved of paying for any services provided by the church. He had many contacts in the US: he was about to travel there to celebrate the liturgy at a charismatic Orthodox church in Florida, and had lectured on Byzantine Christianity at American Baptist colleges. He was ecumenical, held his services in Protestant churches and supported inter-faith work. He preferred 'Christ without the Church' to 'the Church without Christ,' he said.

To learn about the official Orthodox Church, later that day we went to see Fr Vyacheslav Kovalevsky who headed the Tula diocesan Orthodox youth movement – one of the most impressive aspects of the Tula diocese which had existed now for ten years. He came from a family

which had produced priests for the last 200 years. He told us that in 1988 there had been only 30 parishes in the diocese and now there were 132, with 170 priests and 30 deacons. The most important focus of the diocese was education: Tula University had a department of theology with an intake of 100 students per year. The seminary, developed from a church school, had been founded in 2002, said Fr Kovalevsky, and had good links with the intelligentsia. Monasteries were weak and there had been few historically in the Tula diocese. There were 17 churches in Tula, four of which had remained open during the Communist period. In general, he observed, Tula had always been a rich city, calm and inert. He came across as a moderate conservative churchman, opposed to most religious minorities apart from Old Believers, Lutherans, Catholics and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Tula *oblast* was the first in the Russian Federation to adopt a repressive law against missionary activity, particularly that of foreigners, which was then imitated in many other parts of the Russian Federation from 1995-1996, leading to the repressive 1997 federal Law on Religion. Protestants found they could not rent premises for their services and Catholics were discriminated against. Many Lutherans, Old Believers, and Pentecostals organised themselves through contact with fellow believers in Moscow. The administration favoured the ROC, gave back confiscated Orthodox property, helped fund the restoration of its churches, and supported the founding of the theological departments at Tula University and the Tula Pedagogical University. During the 1997 election and again in 2001 Vasili Starodubtsev, a Communist, was elected: as a result the pressure on the non-Orthodox was reduced, and, for example, the Adventists, whose main seminary was built at the start of *perestroika* near Tula, were officially praised for their agricultural achievements. Starodubtsev, however, virulently attacked Tula's Catholics and, although he permitted the return of their pre-revolutionary Church of SS Peter and Paul in 2004, would not allow the Catholics to start restoring it. In March 2005 Vyacheslav Dudka was elected governor: he was Russian Orthodox and kept in close contact with the bishop. Religious minorities thereafter continued to face obstacles both to obtaining land on which to build a church, and to renting premises for their services. The Catholics, on the other hand, were allowed to start restoring their church in 2006.

Catholic Church of SS Peter & Paul

With difficulty Sergei and I managed to unearth the Catholic priest, Fr Henryk Lewandowski. He was most unfriendly when Sergei rang him a number of times. In the end we decided to call in at his church, where we found him – discussing the restoration of what was a very badly damaged building with the builders. Initially he refused to talk to us, but bit by bit as I chattered away and he registered the sort of people we were, he melted, showed us round and even in the end invited us back to his flat to drink coffee.

Poles and German Catholics had lived in Tula, he said, since the 18th century and by the end of the 19th century (the church was consecrated in 1896) there had been 1,500 Catholics. A Catholic congregation was registered in 1993 before which Tula's Catholics – Poles, Lithuanians and Germans – used to travel to Moscow to Mass. Now the congregation had grown to about 50 and included many with higher education and foreigners studying in Tula. Two nuns worked with him (we had bumped into one of them, who was young and most friendly, in the street, and she had helped us find the church). It took the Catholic parish eleven years to get the church back, he told us – it was used by the Ministry of Justice for medical tests in legal cases – and only this year had they been allowed to start restoring it. He was having constant struggles, he said, with the city authorities: in Soviet times trees had been planted much too close to the building and it had taken a long time to persuade the authorities to cut them down. Russians, he said, 'punch you in the face metaphorically. Russia is a crazy

Xenia talks to Fr Lewandowski

place,' he exclaimed as he puffed at a cigarette. He was a chain smoker. The church building was as yet nowhere near ready for use, so services were currently held in the crypt; but this was better than when the congregation stood outside, before the church was returned, while the priest celebrated in what remained of a corrugated iron garage.

When Fr Lewandowski had first arrived in Tula he went straight to see the Orthodox bishop. At first relations were good, he said, but when a server from the ROC wanted to become a Roman Catholic, the bishop was furious and refused to see Fr Lewandowski. Only when the Papal Nuncio visited Tula would the bishop receive him once again, at which point he was able to explain that it was not he who had 'converted' the server, but rather that the server had insisted on joining the Catholic Church.

Our next port of call was the Tula Pedagogical University (TPU) where Professor Vadim Nazarov, head of the theology department within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and Elena Meleshko, head of the department of philosophy and culture, were waiting to see us. They taught not only Russian Orthodox theology, but Catholic and Protestant theology as well and wished to distinguish their institution from Orthodox seminaries. The staff in the theology department particularly valued the writings of the 19th century Slavophile Alexei Khomyakov as a liberal and creative theologian, and had therefore named the department after him. Their admiration had grown into veneration and now they wanted him canonised! Elena Meleshko was herself an expert on Tolstoy and told us that interest in his religious ideas had been revived.

(Left to right) Elena Meleshko, Vadim Nazarov, Sergei, Xenia & a TPU graduate

The department took 15 students a year while nine applied for each place, and required them to learn Hebrew and Greek as well as other relevant languages if they wanted to take up biblical studies and work on the Church Fathers. Last year 28 theologians qualified: some went to work in schools as teachers of religious education, some were now involved in social work, others had become religious consultants for the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice. The department's aim was to produce a higher class of lay theologian like those who existed in Russia in the early 20th century.

It is extraordinary what you come across in the Russian provinces! The TPU was a delightful surprise – an oasis of intellectual freedom which made you believe once more in Russia's potential for positive change and development. Thus in a hopeful mood, the Encyclopaedia team set off for Ryazan (230 km from Tula and 300 km south of Moscow) on the evening of 19 October; the quickest way to get there was by taxi, as buses were infrequent and no trains fitted in with our schedule.

To our delight we found that the hotel Roman had booked (cheaper, I may say, than the Soviet one in Tula) had all European mod-cons, was warm, and had running hot water. Although the Encyclopaedia team had already organised a fieldtrip some years before to Ryazan, it was important now to get the most up-to-date information as in March 2004 a new governor, Georgi Shpak, (a former military officer) had been elected and the situation had changed.

First thing after breakfast Roman headed off to talk to local officials (they refused to talk to him directly, we later heard, insisting that he submit any questions in writing) while Sergei rang the office of Archbishop Pavel (Ponomarev), the local bishop. The latter had been appointed to Ryazan in 2003 after a career during which he had lived in New York, served in Jerusalem and been Abbot of the Pskov Monastery of the Caves. The bishop's assistant, Fr Roman Sizov, answered the telephone and told us that the bishop was in Moscow. I would have to speak to the bishop on his mobile, he said, and get his blessing before he, Fr Roman, could do anything to help us. I dutifully rang the bishop (the first time I had approached an unknown Russian bishop in this way!), explained that I was from England and was interested in finding out about the ROC in Ryazan, to which he at first answered (assuming that I was Orthodox) that I had to go through the correct Orthodox channels first in England. So I battled on, in a meek voice saying how much I would like to visit monasteries and parishes, whereupon he

Ryazan kremlin

suddenly changed his tone and told me to ring Fr Roman back in fifteen minutes. The magic wand was waived, and when I rang Fr Roman all doors were opened to us; the bishop had given his blessing.

We immediately went round to the bishop's office in a humble-looking small wooden house where his entourage worked in cramped conditions. The weather had warmed up, the birds were singing, and it felt almost spring-like. Fr Roman told us that in 1987 there had been only 51 parishes, whereas now there were 332, with 346 priests and 26 deacons, and ten religious communities – five convents and five monasteries. One of the latter, the Monastery of St John the Theologian (about 40 km from Ryazan) had 20 monks most of whom were well-educated and taught in the diocese. (This monastery also kept bees and produced wonderful honey, we later discovered.) Great emphasis in the diocese was placed on catechisation, said Fr Roman. There was one seminary and a theological department at Ryazan University. Good working relations had been established with Governor Shpak, he told us, although we later discovered that there was a running battle between the bishop and the city as the former wanted to live in the magnificent Bishop's Palace in the kremlin, which had been given by the ROC to the State even before the Revolution and was now the main museum for the area. However, the Cathedral of the Birth of Christ, the Dormition Cathedral, and the Monastery of the Transfiguration, now the diocesan seminary, all within the kremlin, had already been handed back to the ROC since *perestroika*, we learned.

Ryazan University chapel

In the afternoon we met Ieromonakh Platon Vorobyov, head of youth work in the diocese. He had been appointed in 2002 and had taken on the All-Russian Youth Movement which had been founded in 1991 but which had later collapsed and then been revived in 2001. He held monthly meetings in six local schools near his Church of the Annunciation, next-door to his office where we talked: 200 had been at today's meeting. The Bible was discussed and young people were encouraged to help the poor, hospitals, and orphanages by collecting clothes, shoes and toys. His main current project was to build a church for young people: with difficulty he had obtained some land from the city authorities, in amongst blocks of flats; he planned to create a playground and to build a youth centre beside the new church. Archbishop Pavel, unlike his predecessor, he said, 'is more free' and wanted the church to move out into society. Ieromonakh Platon was quite happy to visit discotheques, he said: 'If they don't come to us, we must go to them.' Wearing a cassock did not separate him from young people: 'I find a common language'.

Ieromonakh Platon Vorobyov

A theological department had been founded at Ryazan University in 2002, despite opposition from the University, and now had 150 students on a five-year course. We therefore made an appointment to see the department head, Fr Alexander Dobroselsky. He told us that the department offered a better theological training than the diocesan seminary and had a better 'formative effect'. He himself had studied in the Philological Department at Moscow University and was open to western theology, although he wanted to create an Orthodox environment. Some of his students had gone on to work in television or the

diocesan information department, but few had gone forward for ordination. Monks from the Monastery of St John the Theologian came to teach. In 2002 a chapel was built on the University campus with the support of the theology department and the diocese. Although most of the students, said Fr Alexander, were not churchgoers, and those who were usually attended the church nearest their home, the chapel, in his view, would act as leaven in the lump. Christianity did not put on 'shows', he said; it was 'quietly persistent – thus its effect would be more fundamental'. Two Baptists, he told us, had studied in his department and this had posed no problems at all. As I walked down the stairs to be shown the chapel outside, I noticed lots of delightful drawings by the students decorating the walls – all were trying to discourage smoking.

Monastery of St John the Theologian

The monk in charge of the Monastery of St John the Theologian, Ieromonakh Mefodi (Ilyutochkin), knew me (he had attended a conference in Moscow where I had read a paper) so Sergei and I set off in a taxi to cover the 40 km to the monastery knowing that we would be warmly welcomed. Before the monastery had been closed in 1931, there had been 100 monks; today there were only 15 with five postulants. It was re-consecrated in 1989 and opened again in 1991. During Soviet times a holy well within the precincts of the monastery, revered as a source of healing, had continued to be visited even when the monastery was closed; and an icon of St John the Theologian from the monastery had been preserved by local people and was now safely back home.

When we arrived Ieromonakh Mefodi was busy, so another monk, Fr Paisi, who like Ieromonakh Mefodi was highly educated (he was writing a thesis on the desert fathers of the 5th – 6th centuries) and taught at Ryazan University, showed us round. The monastery, said Ieromonakh Paisi, was involved in helping children's homes, visiting prisons and the many military training establishments in Ryazan. (I remembered noticing groups of young military recruits by the bus stops in the centre of the city; the girls wore a strange combination of camouflage with elegant high heels and carried fashionable handbags!) We were taken to see a chapel containing fourteen reliquaries: these were highly decorated golden boxes which had been given to a local priest by clergy over the years; they were presented to the monastery when it was reopened. Once Ieromonakh Mefodi was free, he invited us into a room where a table was laden with cakes and a pot of tea. He was a gentle, softly spoken monk, with a sweet smile. He spoke of the monastic 'golden mean', a balance between prayer and work, how it was important to find the right combination; that monastic life was a particular calling. I was showered with presents – monastery herb tea, a pot of honey, and a book of Esenin's poetry (he had been a local lad).

As ever Roman had been hard at work talking to local officials: he reported to us his discussion with Galina Martolina, the *oblast*'s specialist on relations with religious organisations. She dealt with the return of religious buildings and claimed that the administration was even-handed and did not get involved in anti-sect activity: 'We work mostly with the Orthodox as 96% of the population are Orthodox,' she said. We had also heard from other sources that the governor was close to Archbishop Pavel and did nothing without his agreement. This was borne out when we met Ryazan's Catholic priest, Fr Josef Gunchaga, who complained bitterly about the governor's treatment of his congregation.

Fr Josef Gunchaga, a Slovakian Roman Catholic priest, who had come to Ryazan from Oryol seven years earlier, had trained originally as a doctor. He then studied in a secret seminary in Czechoslovakia during the Communist era, was ordained in 1982, and served as an unregistered priest. He first came to the Soviet Union in the 1970s when he 'lost his allergy to Russians,' he said. Later he got to know Fr Alexander Men, Alexander Ogorodnikov, Sandr Riga, and other religious dissidents during his visits to Moscow.

The Catholic church in Ryazan, built in 1894 for the many Poles who had been exiled to the area after the 19th century Polish uprisings, was still standing, but the Catholic parish, re-established during *perestroika* and registered in 1999, despite strenuous efforts, had still failed to get it back. It had been confiscated in 1935 and turned

first into a student hostel and then into a studio for an art school. Although Governor Shpak had said it could now be returned, the city had made no effort to find alternative premises for the current occupants. So for the moment Fr Josef celebrated Mass (always in Russian) every Sunday for 20 people in his flat and in the summer outside the church. Catholics in Ryazan

Fr Gunchaga stands forlornly by the Catholic church

were all Russian citizens, he said, but with Lithuanian, Ukrainian, German or Polish roots. They all spoke Russian. There were rumours, he added, that Archbishop Pavel opposed the return of the church; he only agreed to meet Fr Josef once when he first arrived, and sent a message 'If you have nowhere to pray, come and pray in our churches'. The governor had given 70 churches back to the ROC, so Fr Josef felt it was most unjust that he had not yet returned the Catholic church.

Orthodox-Baptist relations in Ryazan were not friendly, we discovered: the Baptist church (the original Lutheran church building) had been shot at by hooligans recently. The Baptist pastor spoke to Archbishop Pavel about the incident, asking him to make a public statement about the friendship of Orthodox and Baptists but the latter had refused, stating 'all Christians are persecuted'. There had been anti-sect articles in the press and a programme on television had been very aggressive towards Protestants. The latter, however, were able to rent premises for their services, which we found was not always the case in other cities.

In order to gain insight into the life of Lutherans in Ryazan we invited Vladimir Solodovnikov to visit us in Sergei's hotel room, which as usual was our headquarters. I had known Solodovnikov in the early 1990s when he had been a Baptist, but since then he had gone through a few metamorphoses, had become a Lutheran and was now the pastor of a new Lutheran congregation founded that summer in Ryazan.

At the time of the Reformation many German Lutherans with specialist training were invited to Russia, and under Peter the Great and Catherine many more Germans arrived; a few thousand settled in Ryazan and in 1822 a Lutheran parish was officially recognised. From 1918-1929 the Lutheran parish still functioned and after the change in Party policy of 1929 parishioners managed to meet in each other's flats until 1989. During *perestroika* many Germans, exiled to Kazakhstan under Stalin, came to live in Ryazan so that today, although some had emigrated to Germany, there were about 2000 Lutherans. A German cultural centre was founded where in 2004 Lutheran services were started by Solodovnikov. He had wanted his congregation to join one of the two main Lutheran jurisdictions within Russia, but they had not been accepted by either and so went on meeting as an autonomous unit. Similar autonomous congregations were formed, Solodovnikov told us, in Moscow, Morshansk, Voronezh, Saratov, Udmurtia and Tatarstan, and had now amalgamated in a new structure called the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia which was less centrally controlled than the other Lutheran structures. His congregation was ecumenical, he said, concerned about social problems and supported international links. Lutheran youth work had not yet developed: most of his

Ryazan Lutheran church

congregation were middle-aged, he said, while young people were still attracted to Lenin – Communist influence in Ryazan was strong. His congregation were trying to get back the Lutheran church building which during Soviet days had been used first by bee-keepers, then by the local art school, and since the early 1990s had been rented by the Baptists. With the help of a German architect, Solodovnikov hoped to restore the church (declared an historical monument in 1997) which would also house a cultural centre and a museum about the history of the Germans and other foreign traders in the area. His congregation was on good terms with many other denominations, he said, with charismatics, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostals (he did not mention the Orthodox).

To add to the rich patchwork of religious life in Ryazan which we were discovering, Sergei and I arranged to meet an Old Believer priest (Belokrinitsky branch), Fr Alexander Maslov. (There were very few priestless Old Believers in the *oblast* and not one registered group in Ryazan.) Fr Alexander had been brought up by his grandparents and had learnt about 'the faith' from them, he said. His church called 'Joy of All Them that Mourn', with a regular congregation of 150, was built after the Toleration Act of 1905 and had been closed only from 1936-1945. He had already served as a priest at this church for six years and had focussed on work with young families. He had formed groups of young people who helped restore churches, he had set up Sunday Schools and organised congresses of youth from 20 towns. He supported Old Believer traditions – he was dressed in the usual Old Believer fashion with his shirt hanging loose and tied at the waist – but was not totally against such modern developments as television. He described himself as 'a democrat by nature', felt a responsibility for society and always prayed for the government in power, although he was very pleased when Communism collapsed. Ryazan was home to many former Old Believer families, he said, who, when visiting the cemetery by the church, would hear from him about their religious roots, while young people with higher education were studying Old Believer history and being drawn back. Much depended on upbringing in the home, he thought, and emphasised that his church's rule of life was much stricter than the 'new faith' (the ROC). Although at the top relations with the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) were non-existent, he said, he himself had contact with MP clergy and would welcome more contact were it not discouraged by the MP. The church building plus some of the surrounding buildings had been returned to his congregation, but not the cemetery. Small businesses provided some funding, whereas he received nothing either from the very rich or the local authorities. Neither the University nor television producers ever invited him to speak: 'this does not happen by chance' – the authorities always consulted the ROC first. Some articles about Old Believers, however, he told us, had been published in the local press by journalists who had become interested in his tradition.

Xenia & Fr Alexander Maslov

The Encyclopaedia aims to include information on all aspects of religious life in Russia today, which includes paganism, so we tried – but failed, alas – to interview the leader of a strange Ryazan pagan group. We had learned that the leader of this group was Marina Kachaeva, a devotee of a feminine deity called Makosh, who had 12 regular members with 50-60 usually attending big festivals. She had trained as an historian and had studied martial arts. Unfortunately, at the last minute, she cancelled the appointment with us so, with our feet temporarily stuck in glue, we quickly thought up another plan. We contacted a local historian and archaeologist at the Ryazan Museum, Elena Bulankina, who, we hoped, could tell us about local traditions and attitudes towards the medieval Prince Oleg of Ryazan. We were also curious to hear more about the bishop's efforts to take over the Museum (formerly the Bishop's Palace) as his own abode.

Dormition Cathedral

The Ryazan principality, we learned from Elena Bulankina, had been founded in the 12th century and was at first as powerful as the Moscow principality. Today, she said, Prince Oleg was honoured as a local hero and around him a cult had grown up which was still very much alive. Many wanted him canonised. The Museum's relations with the ROC, she said, had been amicable before the appointment of the current bishop. An Orthodox seminary had been established in the Monastery of the Transfiguration within the kremlin, and the Dormition Cathedral and Cathedral of the Birth of Christ handed over to the ROC. 'We don't want conflicts with the Church,' she said, but the current Archbishop Pavel wanted the Bishop's Palace back as well and portrayed the Museum as an enemy. He had called its staff

Entrance to Solotchensky Monastery

'thieves' and even led prayers during the liturgy, saying 'Lord, enlighten your servants who have deprived the Church of its property'! The bishop had gone to the Patriarch, Elena Bulankina recounted, who had approached the governor, and a detailed inspection by the Procuracy had taken place. No fault, however, was found, and the Museum so far was still in place.

After hearing that a Prince Oleg cult existed we were curious to find out more, so before leaving Ryazan, we visited the Monastery (now a convent) of the Birth of the Mother of God in the village of Solotcha (the Solotchensky Monastery) where Prince Oleg's head was kept as a relic. He had founded the monastery in 1390 and then joined it as a monk. The cult was much encouraged by Archbishop Pavel: the Prince's head, brought from the Monastery of St John the Theologian on 22 June 2001, was the focus of pilgrimages; his chain mail was believed to have healing powers, but, for the time being, was still kept in the Ryazan Museum (before the Revolution both had been in the Ryazan kremlin's Dormition Cathedral). When we arrived I was struck by the dilapidated beauty of the convent's two fine churches and arched entrance, over which a church had been built by the famous architect Naryshkin. The Mother Superior, Mother Varvara (Samarina), was not there, so we were shown round by one of the 25 sisters and were taken to see Prince Oleg's relics: these were kept in a large casket with a portrayal of him as a monk on the lid, and with an icon of him as a prince on the back. Our nun-guide looked forward to the day when he would be canonised: there would be general rejoicing, she said, 'a fantastic celebration… it will be a great event'. For the time being, however, not many pilgrims came to visit the convent, she told us, there were few vocations, and a dearth of people willing to help restore the convent's churches. To my eyes, the place looked neglected and unkempt, with little sign of the usual Moscow Patriarchate pomp and showy wealth.

Xenia & our nun-guide

Having got to the source of the Oleg cult it was now time to pack our bags and head back to Moscow, where, as always, the hard work would begin of collating our information and writing up, in this case, the section on Tula and Ryazan for the final volume of the Encyclopaedia.

Keston AGM

Saturday 3rd November 2007

11 a.m.

St Andrew's Court House

7 St Andrew Street, London EC4A 3AB

(nearest underground Chancery Lane)

Coffee and tea will be served at 10.30 a.m.

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