

Trek to Bucha Epilogue: Force Majeure (Act of God) – Part 2 (Spirit)

Summary

Finding the Spirit in Trek to Bucha.

Part 1 of this essay looked for economic lessons from *Trek to Bucha*. Part 2 tries to discern the more spiritual elements. The title: *Force Majeure*, touches upon both in that the legal jargon it represents to the insurance industry also uses prophetic language more akin to a theological inquiry.

Intriguingly, war is not an act of God like a hurricane or earthquake. War is manmade. Faith is critical to think God is present at all. If so, where and what is He doing, for whom, and for what reason(s). These are difficult questions for humans to grasp, much as we might try.

It's not something I've spoken about aside from conversations with Fr. Yaroslav at Christ the King UCC in Boston. He being a priest means that a conversation about the Spirit's role – especially in his homeland - comes naturally.

In *Trek to Bucha* it's easy to think the Spirit is guiding the project. Events constantly take me to unanticipated rendezvous - as in Boston when I see the Phillis Wheatley statue, and take note of the poem carved into the granite:

Phillis Wheatley Statue in Boston



“In every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance.” - [Phillis Wheatley - 1774](#)

This mention of God is the first in the film. The reason I've included it is to note how it touches the human sentiment that influenced the Minutemen in 1775 to fight for their liberty in Boston. It's the same God given sentiment driving Ukrainians today and why we relate so readily to their cause.

The story begins in Boston—the birthplace of American Independence and a kindred spirit with Ukraine—with an encounter with the Phillis Wheatley statue on Commonwealth Avenue. then a fortuitous introduction to Fr. Yaroslav, the UCC, and Ukraine Forward in action at the church.
[Announcing TheoEco's Ukraine Trek](#)



The Ukrainian Catholic Church

Phillis Wheatley was just the beginning of Spirit sightings in the film.

Next, I was nudged toward [Fr. Yaroslav](#) through a “chance” encounter with REI associate Gene Yee when buying gear for the trek. Next thing I knew I had prayers and a Guardian Angel to accompany me. I saw just how Christian these Ukrainians were as I saw the parish house bustling with parishioners gathering supplies for the front lines.

It turns out Christianity in Ukraine is ancient going back more than a thousand years to an individual and people Putin uses to back his claims to Ukraine. That somehow the former 10th century ruler of [Kievan Rus](#), Volodymyr the Great somehow legitimizes Moscow’s claim to Ukraine now. The fact is Saint Volodymyr was from Kyiv which existed more than a century before Moscow was founded. [History of Christianity in Ukraine - Wikipedia](#)

Fr. Yaroslav– Post Premiere Interview



The UCU segment includes a statement from the administration, student interviews, medical supply activities, and a service at [University Church of the Holy Wisdom of God](#). Student Sasha’s interview gets into a discussion of Ukraine’s power being derived from their Christian traditions and the Holy Spirit [Ukrainian Catholic University \(UCU\) in Lviv](#).



The Ukrainian Catholic Church was totally new to this Anglican, but the services felt familiar. Most importantly perhaps was Fr. Yaroslav’s telling me about [Ukrainian Catholic University](#) in Lviv. He told me to be sure to visit.

UCU holds a big place in the film. Most poignant from a Spirit perspective for me is the quote from student Sasha about how secular Ukrainians might appear. In fact they hold their Christian traditions very close – and are a big part of their power. He also offered that for him the Holy Spirit most closely relates to the feeling of hope.

What we don’t capture in this segment is how much impact UCU had on my plans. The Russians retreated from Kyiv’s suburbs during my time there and a place named Bucha emerged in the news.

Folks Like Us

As I left UCU on my way to Bucha the stories turned less overtly religious and more secular though churches dotted the landscape everywhere.

Easter - In Bucha we find the [Church of St. Andrew & Pyervozvannoho All Saints](#), the mass grave and the outdoor church service. Talk of a Red Cross that did not come through. Resources used in the field kitchens. Pets set free. Gardens. When the Russians left, they survived on their own. Electricity comes back on. [Easter in Bucha](#)



I interviewed people that talked about their spiritual lives like most Americans would. Most are Christian and might go to church a couple times a year to celebrate Christmas and Easter. But there is a difference. Ask an American what religion they are, and most Christians will identify their denomination: Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, etc.

In Ukraine people seem to hardly understand the question. Most all are Ukrainian Orthodox when one moves east and out of Lviv and Ukraine's west with its large representation of Ukrainian Catholics.

We see an Orthodox church service at Easter (Orthodoxy's Palm Sunday) at the Church of St. Andrew, a beautiful church with a now notorious identification as the sight of mass graves and Russian atrocities.

Finding the Spirit in

Bucha is hard to square with what happened there. Yet, it is everywhere.

We definitely find it in a basement where "Ukraine is Peace" is written on the wall of a condo basement that acted as a bomb shelter for some 90 residents in the early days of the war. It was written by children who were playing as the war raged outside. Fr. Yaroslav in his comments after the premiere screening feels that this is the most poignant scene of the film because it shows how Ukrainian children see their own country.

During the rest of the Easter segment we see the humanity in Bucha's people as we interview Timer, a citizen with firsthand and unfiltered views of what happened there. He was the only individual we interviewed who never evacuated.

The Basement – Kids and people survived in basement bomb shelters. A demonstration of the peaceful ideology of the children.



Conclusion

I had originally decided to go to Ukraine to bring attention to the nuclear power plants in the war zones.

Turns out the stories I documented had nothing to do with power plants. But they had everything to do with the Spirit and more than a little faith. Which sort of begs a question I ask myself: “Would you have gone to Ukraine to document Bucha’s aftermath?” Unlikely, if I’m being honest with myself. In the words of Jake Blues (John Belushi) in *The Blues Brothers*: “[The Lord Works in Mysterious Ways](#)”.

Does Ukraine reflect a war of the Spirit against its metaphysical foes on the other side? Is Russia the “Dark Side” in Star Wars speak. Putin as Darth Vader is obvious, as is the empire (Russia) trying to eliminate the Galactic Republic (Ukraine). Put a lightsaber in President Zelenskyy hands and he makes a pretty convincing Obi-Wan. In Star Wars the republic is outgunned and seemingly doomed. But the “force” is with them, and they prevail. It’s an old story George Lucas picked up

As I leave Kyiv the park is open, and kids are playing on my way to the train station. On the ride we catch a glimpse of a gold domed church in a village and a little refugee on her way to open arms in Poland. [Heading Home](#)



from [Joseph Campbell](#) and part of why the West is so united in helping them. As we saw in Phillis Wheatley’s poem, we relate to people fighting for their liberty.

The final segment of the film is the trip back to Poland from Kyiv. This was a tale of three trains including a sleeper train boarded an hour or two after midnight in a blacked-out train station somewhere in the middle of Ukraine. In the lonely waiting room, the TV was turned to an Orthodox service celebrating Easter at midnight. I had the feeling people throughout Ukraine were watching with me.

The final segment of the film is the trip back to Poland from Kyiv. This was a tale of three trains including a sleeper train boarded an hour or two after midnight in a blacked-out train station somewhere in the middle of Ukraine. In the largely empty waiting room the TV was turned to an Orthodox service celebrating Easter at midnight. I had

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Getting on the train in the dark I was brought to a fully occupied compartment with what I thought were three others. Soon after the train got rolling I heard murmurings. In fact, there were five of us in the compartment. The little refugee really brought home what this war is all about.

When I got back to Boston, I made my way to [Christ the King Church](#) and saw Fr. Yaroslav the following Sunday. He was very happy (relieved?) to see me I think – and I him. Since then I reviewed footage with him and received invaluable support and advice. He and Christ the King’s parishioners also graciously hosted the film’s premiere on September 11th.

Turns out the Spirit is easy to find in Trek to Bucha. How could it not be with Ukraine’s spirit so powerful.