

The Temple Above the Clouds, by Rev. Dr. Richard Boeke

Berkeley 1968- 1995 - From Viet Nam to Misogi

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“He who has a Why to live for, can bear with almost any HOW.”

Nietzsche, as quoted by Viktor Frankl in Man’s Search for Meaning

Prologue

The name, “*Temple above the Clouds*” comes from American Missionaries to Western China, Dryden and Margaret Phelps, who gave that name to their retirement retreat at Big Sur, 1200 feet above the Pacific Ocean. Dryden and Margaret Phelps felt the term equally fitted the new Unitarian Church on the East Bay Hills. Many mornings, both looked over the “Marine Layer” clouds from the Pacific.

From 1891 to 1961, the Unitarian Church was next to the University of California, and linked to what is now the Starr King School for the Ministry. The church became a safety value for the “*steaming unrest*” on campus. Speakers from Albert Einstein to Timothy Leary came to preach their gospel. As the McCarthy period began, California passed the “Levering Act” (1950) which required public employees to declare that “*I do not advocate, nor am I a member of any party or organization, political or otherwise, that now advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States or of the State of California by force or violence or other unlawful means...*”

An amendment to the California Constitution was passed by popular vote in 1952 to require churches to do much the same.. Religious institutions had until March of 1954 to decide whether or not they would comply. The Berkeley Unitarian Committee refused to sign. Just as 35 U.C. professors refused to sign, including psychotherapist Erik Erikson. At the church meeting a committee member said, “To support my family, I felt the need to sign. But I would be proud if my church refused to sign.” In 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Levering oath applied to churches was an unconstitutional violation of First Amendment, Taxes paid were refunded to the four churches which took the case to court (3 Unitarian & 1 Methodist).

To get “this centre of unrest” off the edge of the campus, the University Regents took the old church by eminent domain. The church rejected the \$85,000 offered. Once again the church went to court and the jury awarded over \$300,000. The old church is now a landmark and home to the University Dance Studio. Once the congregation left the old church, “all hell” broke loose on campus. Perhaps closing the “Unitarian Safety value” was part of the cause.

The congregation voted to follow Dr. J. Raymond Cope to the new building on 8 acres offered by Architect and church member Bernard Maybeck on top the East Bay Hills three miles north of University of California..

The Architect chosen to design the building is Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons (see Google articles on the firm. It was said “Wurster builds barns.” Some saw the new Church as a “barn,” long as a football field, alienated from the world below it.

Dr. Cope joined in the design for worship space linked to the nature around it. Ten dozen precast pebbled concrete slabs were lifted into place to become the walls. Three great rooms are all under a single “barn-like” roof. On the south is the sanctuary with only narrow vertical windows: Ancient abbey or Acropolis, this is a cave for the soul. In the centre is the atrium with sky lights and rubber trees, looking out on San Francisco Bay. On the north is the Social Hall with the gracious Fireside Room beside it. Outside are acres of landscape, an acre of parking, two Religious Education Buildings and playground. The congregation made the move in 1961.

In 1968 Dr Cope concluded his 22 year ministry to the Berkeley, as protests against the Vietnam War peaked. That year, Martin Luther King was murdered in Memphis, and Robert Kennedy was murdered in California. Back east I was one of eight ministers elected as anti-war delegates to the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. In the caucus room at the Convention Hall, we watched demonstrators outside the Hilton Hotel being clubbed by police. Over three hundred joined us in buses for a candlelight procession at the Hilton.

The Challenge

**“Face the realities, only the realities
Nothing is so terrible when you face it,
As when you run away from it.”**

- A. Powell Davies, All Souls Church (UU), Washington, DC.

As I candidated for the Berkeley ministry in 1973, I walked in the Berkeley Hills with Dr Robert Kimball, President of Starr King School, part of the Berkeley Graduate Theological Union. Kimball suggested that my family find a home close to the church. Dr. Cope had been followed by Dr. Howard Oliver who chose a home a dozen miles from the church. He got a severe “spinal condition” at least partly from the twice daily commuting drive on a winding road. Oliver preached regularly against the Vietnam War. This pleased many in the church but others quit coming. Oliver resigned after three years

. From Kimball and others I learned that a Starr King Teacher was teaching a class using Peter Raible’s book, HOW TO CASE A CHURCH. He discussed Berkeley as an example of a “failing church.”

I learned the congregation had split. Sixty (60) families refused to move up the hill, formed their own congregation, and bought a building one mile northwest of the University. One wit said, “*The church blew it’s brains out.*” A local black minister called the new building, “*The abomination on the hill.*” [1]

My family accepted the challenge and we bought a home on the flattest piece of ground we could find, facing the valley just west of the new church. In Autumn, 1973 we

moved to what became our home in El Cerrito for almost 22 years. Our daughters could walk to the nearby school and I could walk to church. There were challenges to face. We brought in Rosemary Matson, who interviewed members and studied our situation. She pointed out to us that the Church is no longer in the centre of Berkeley Life. While the proverb says, **“the city that is built on a hill cannot be hid,”** The trees between the church and the Bay create a green hilltop. Unlike the Mormon Temple in Oakland, the church is almost invisible from San Francisco Bay. Rosemary Matson made several recommendations: we needed programmes that would appeal to a variety of people, we needed to promote these programmes in the six or seven nearby cities of East San Francisco Bay. While the great musicals such as “Guys and Dolls” and “The Merry Widow” put on by our choir helped, we needed something more. We started with several obvious changes :

First, It was a peak of sexual liberation in California. I was concerned when the District Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) asked to hold a weekend retreat as a sleepover at our church. The Chair of Religious Education was angered when I insisted that we have a church member in the building as well as the District LRY leaders. On Saturday night, I walked the circuit from our home around the church as I often did. Looking in the window I saw three dozen naked teens having a playful time. I walked to the church office and found the R.E. Chair crying. I walked out to the parking lot and found the three LRY advisors high on pot outside their trailer. I took it up with the District, and a more responsible youth programme was created. .

Second) I started an early Sunday meditation group, and an adult class that met Sundays at the same time as choir rehearsal. The adult class thrived as chapter by chapter we discussed Joe Campbell’s MYTHS TO LIVE BY, and Julian Jaynes, THE ORIGIN OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BICAMERAL MIND. About this time the former Dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School started attending our church. On the advice of his wife, I asked Dr. Bernard Loomer if he would like to take over the Sunday morning adult discussion. He agreed and delighted in leading or hosting “Personal Theology” (Which still continues). Several weeks before his death, this “Process Theologian” joined our church as the place where he had found a spiritual home..

Third) We needed to reduce the church debt. We had almost two hundred thousand dollars in mortgages to pay. We had two unused acres of land downhill. A few years after I came, the Finance Committee wanted to sell the two acres as two building lots. It happened that I met with Chief Priest Yamamoto from Tsubaki Shinto Shrine, a Japanese member of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). He wanted to establish a small shrine in America as a centre for worship, dialogue and understanding. They offered the full amount that the Finance Committee requested. The offer was submitted to the Congregation for approval. Without any warning or discussion with me, Dr. Cope offered to give the church Ten (10) thousand dollars if the church would not sell the lots. The sale of the lots was defeated and Dr. Cope’s offer of cash was refused.

I apologized to Yamamoto, and was ready to apply for another church. Jopie reminded me of my pledge to stay as minister until our daughters finished high school. I went to

the minister of our San Francisco Church. He listened, ... and told me to sit tight. I don't know what happened, but Dr. Cope and his wife moved. Later they sold the Parsonage they had been given.

The Partnership

**“Life is yours, in you I grow tall,
Seed will come to fruit I know,
Trust that after winter’s snowfall
Walls will melt and truth will flow”**

Last verse of “View the Starry Realm of Heaven”

Written by Norbert Capek in prison

before being taken to Dachau and death in 1962.

English verse by Richard Boeke

One of three Capek Hymns in Singing the Living Tradition (a hymnal)

Soon after that start of my Berkeley Ministry, with the help of many, two events happened that set the future tone of my ministry.

1) I delayed my installation until the sermon could be given by my friend Huston Smith in January, when he and his wife, Kendra, would be in Berkeley to visit their daughters. Sociologist Robert Bellah welcomed me on behalf of the University of California. The organist and choir were magnificent and in the congregation was Dr. Howard Thurman and his wife, coming on the invitation of their friends, Dr. and Mrs. Dryden Phelps and to hear their friend Huston.

When Huston retired from the U. of Syracuse, he and Kendra moved to Berkeley, where he rewrote his book THE RELIGIONS OF MAN in gender inclusive language as THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS. He also added a chapter on Primal Religions. Huston became a regular guest at Bernie Loomer's Personal Theology His wife Kendra asked me if a Buddhist could join a Unitarian Church. Of course, I said “yes” and she joined. Huston remains a Methodist. His parents were Methodist Missionaries to China.

2) Reading Robert Jay Lifton's book HOME FROM THE WAR on Vietnam Veterans, I was inspired to draft portions of the text into a REQUEIM FOR VIETNAM, adding a few extra songs. I took it to our church organist, Arthur Hills. He looked over the text and said that he would be glad to write the music. I wrote Lifton our plans. He wrote back news of a weekend when he could come. I picked Lifton up at the home of his friend, Erik Erikson across the Bay in Tiburon. . Erikson greeted me at the door and we enjoyed coffee while Robert finished getting ready. At the church the service opened with beautiful South Sea sounds blown through a Couch Shell The music moved from mourning, “

“Our land became as the face of the moon,

Defoliated trees and craters of doom.!"

To the closing choral

"Peace on earth, let it be,

Let the mountain come down to the sea

And the joy we will share

When there's peace everywhere.

Peace on earth, Let it be."

Lifton's book HOME FROM THE WAR asks, "How can you be a man today?" In World War II you could be a good soldier. But the Vietnam Veterans came home to scorn. In Vietnam they were hooked on drugs and shame. They came home to blame. They became the scapegoats for the collective guilt of our nation. By the end of last year, more Vietnam Veterans had died from suicide and drug related deaths than were killed in Vietnam. Especially since Vietnam, male identity is in trouble. . Robert Bly's [Iron John](#) points to a problem not just for men, but for our whole culture

his was a subject the mental health professionals group in the church took up with interest. Many were Jungian therapists. They preferred sermons with soul, and great music. On the other hand the Peace Committee seemed to want us to battle for peace. Especially in the time after Watergate I saw dozens of people in pain. Remembering my few weeks of daily Zen Meditation, I gave a sermon titled, "THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO DO NOTHING. The sermon affirmed three things: 1) the importance of short periods of meditation each day. 2) the importance of taking a Sabbath, a day off, without feeling guilty. 3) In a time of crisis, rather than rushing to action, it is important to step back and get perspective." The Peace Committee was enraged. To them, "The most important thing is to do SOMETHING !"

What should I do? Dr. Howard Thurman had been at my induction service. He had been friend and minister to Martin Luther King, Jr. I invited him to give our second Lawrence Lecture. He asked me "What should I speak on?" I told him about the difference between Jungian Therapists and the Peace Committee. After a little thought, he chose the topic, MYSTICISM AND SOCIAL ACTION. To sum up the beautiful images of his lecture, he said, "*my heart must be a swinging door that opens in and opens out.*"

Howard's lecture inspired me to work more closely with Dr Lucile Green, President of the World Citizens Assembly, one of six church members born of missionaries to China. Lucile was a dream member, intelligent, fluent in Chinese, and who welcomed our family at her swimming pool. She was a main stay in several weeks of discussion before the church voted to become a Sanctuary Church for political refugees from Central America. When the vote was taken, two members resigned. Five new members joined. Soon our first refugees arrived, Dr. Ricardo Calderon and his family. They were assigned to our church because he had been Chancellor of the University of El Salvador.

From that beginning, the doors opened as we became a church with an international mission. We hosted a large family of ethnic Chinese refugees driven out of Vietnam by the policy of "*Vietnam for the Vietnamese.*"

Then I got a call from the YMCA in Hong Kong. They had several refugees from Tiananmen Square. The refugees could get US Visas, but only if they had sponsors. Lucile Parker, another great lady in our church, said she would take two men for two months. Thus we had the joy of helping Jing Chang and Arthur Lui. Like one of the Vietnamese, Jing helped clean the church to earn money while learning English..

The Church Choir joined us to sing in Cambridge, England, and at the 1981 IARF Congress in the Netherlands. Three years later with 50 choir members and friends we shared the top cabin of a 747 as we sing our way to the great 1984 IARF Japan Congress. We meet at the Tokyo Centre of six million Buddhists of Rissho Kosei kai. Barbara Back, the choir pianist, will never forget being taken to the piano in the basement, then being elevated to the stage before an audience of seven thousand. Our pilgrimage continued to the ice cold waterfall of Tsubaki Shrine, and prayers at Hiroshima. Three years later our church joined in hosting over 700 guests for the 1987 IARF Congress at Stanford University. Our choir sang in two beautiful services in the Stanford Chapel.

1990 was a dream trip. We sang at the IARF Congress in Hamburg at which Hans Kung told us "*There will be no peace in the world until there is peace among religions.*" We then took a bus to Eastern Europe. The Berlin Wall had come down. We brought home a fragment to bury on our church patio. Then to Prague and Vienna led by Dr. Joseph Fabry. There is no Unitarian Church in Vienna. Joe, who had been awarded the CROSS OF GOLD by Austria, arranged for our concert to be one of the evenings of a concert series in the Vienna Town Hall. Then we went on to Budapest and Kolozsvár and the Homorod valley to sing and start afresh one of the many partner church connections. Four other bus loads of Unitarians Led by UUA Moderator, Natalie Gulbrandsen, made similar partnership connections in Prague, Budapest and Romania.

From this beginning, with Dr. Judith Gellerd, Rev. Leon Hopper and others, we organized the Partner Church Council, linking over 200 UU churches in North America with churches in Eastern Europe, India, and the Philippines.

Back in 1939, Joe got out of Europe just in time to miss a Death Camp. He knew many tragedies including the murder of his daughter by a lover she had kicked out! I came to the Fabry home as soon as I heard of the death. I helped by answering the phone, "*Fabry residence.*" The voice on the other end said, "It's Viktor, Vienna." Joe came to the phone and poured out his heart to his friend DR. VICTOR FRANKL.

Thanks to Howard Thurman, the refugee programme, IARF, Joe Fabry, and Viktor Frankl, we found the greater purpose that could both inspire the veterans and help the church come together.

I became Vice President of the American Shinto Shrine rejected by the church. I helped Gugi Yuki-taka Yamamoto establish Tsubaki Shrine of America, first in Stockton, California, and now in Granite Falls, Washington. Yamamoto received an honorary

degree from Starr King Seminary. Each year, Tsubaki continues to pay the airfare to Japan for a UU Seminary Student. On the beautiful grounds of Tsubaki Grand Shrine they experience Shinto life, including Misogi, purification under an ice cold waterfall.

For years after our church received the phone call from the Hong Kong Council of Churches, dozens of refugees from Tiananmen Square and Tibet have been helped by our church members.. Liu Xiang joined us by way of New York. Liu had his first U.S. job as custodian in our church. He encouraged us to take a group to China. Our 1991 spring tour to China was so beautiful, I went again in April 1993. This time Lucile Green had arranged a dialogue with the Philosophy Department of People's University in Beijing. After listening, I said to the Chair of the Department, "It sounds to me like soon you will be doing weddings. He replied, "O, Yes. I married 100 couples in Tiananmen Square last week."

As our trip came to an end, at our Hotel in Beijing, our group from the church watched the news that the Richmond Unified School District on the border of our church, was bankrupt. In the United States, in a rich school district, home of major refinery of one of largest corporations in the world (Chevron), our public school system was broke and threatened with closure.

It will take a miracle for Richmond and the other schools of California to get the public and financial support needed for quality education. The Richmond Unified School District was 60 million dollars in debt. Once again our church supported a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court. Sadly, it was not the same court we had in the 1950s. William O. Douglas and other liberals were gone. The petition was dismissed by the court. With the help of Winnie Sayre, the church gathered two dozen volunteers to give two to four hours a week to keep the library open in the largest primary school in Richmond. Others read weekly to students with learning difficulties. Others volunteered for the Richmond soup kitchen, and for a week in mid-winter a dozen or more homeless were brought up to the church to spend the night

EPILOGUE - PRESERVING THE VISION

In 1989 an earthquake broke the bridge between Oakland and San Francisco. It killed two dozen as a Freeway collapsed. While our church was sound, we paid for a survey. We learned that it would cost a quarter of a million dollars to pay for the cross bracing that would likely assure the survival of our church. This is part of the sermon I gave which helped raise the money.

"Friday night, 30 Tibetan monks sat in our Fireside Room and held a healing service. Yesterday afternoon, almost 100 Sufis sat in our Fireside Room and chanted, "**Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me.**" I hope you will forgive me this morning as I talk about that forbidden five letter word, **money**. Think how those Tibetans or those Sufis would love to have a building like ours. What a gift we have been given.

"For a text this morning, let us consider these words from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, "*Their foot in due time shall slide.*" This is the text used by a famous

preacher before the Revolutionary War: Jonathan Edwards. His sermon was titled, "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*"

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell is an angry God.
You are to him as a spider or some loathsome insect. Yet it
is nothing but his grace that keeps you into hell this very day,
this very hour, this very minute "

So spoke Jonathan Edwards. If an earthquake struck today and this building collapsed on us, we would feel very much like the spider in hands of God. If we do not do the retrofit, when the earthquake strikes in 1997, these walls may collapse. Even if no one is in the building, it will be a tragic loss. A church is made possible when we give up some of our egos for the sake of a greater loving. The goals of our fund raising campaign are a cooperative effort to see our church through to the year 2000.

To reach this goal some members are giving four and five times their annual pledge. From most of you we need three or at least two times your annual pledge to reach our goal. You may say, "I have all these other charities which send me mail every week." Why, I receive a personal request from Bill Clinton or George Bush almost every day. Well, millions of people receive those requests. There are only about 400 of you here to respond to this request. Like Stephen Hawking, you can do the Math and realize that it will take \$25,000 pledges, \$10,000, and \$5,000, and \$3,000 pledges to reach our goal. Our aim is not equal dollar amounts from everyone, but equal loving.

There is a tradition in Japan, that every 20 years the Shinto Grand Shrine at Ise is rebuilt. A new building is built next to the old building. In the middle of the night, the sacred objects are carried from the old shrine to the new. The new generation then dedicates the new shrine which they have built.

Thirty one years ago, our church was raised as "The Temple above the Sea of Clouds." If we succeed in our fund drive, in about two years, there will be a dedication service in which this present congregation will celebrate the rebuilding of the shrine.

And this house will continue to be "the cradle of our dreams and the workshop of our common endeavor."

In faith, love, and hope,

C0da

On Sunday morning, a few days after our choir director died of AIDS, our choir was to sing the Durufle Requiem. I was to give a homily before the Requiem. After an invocation and a hymn, I gave my Homily.

When a friend dies, there is a stirring of a thousand memories:

joys, regrets, anger, frustration, a sense of loss.

Edwin Barlow was a wonderful rose with determined thorns.

For my few words of reflection prior to the Requiem,
there are at least three subjects which deserve the whole time:

1) Yesterday, I gave a prayer at the unveiling of the statue of
the Goddess of Democracy at Portsmouth Square in San Francisco. I said,
**"As the Statue of Liberty honors freedom on our East Coast,
So may the Goddess of Democracy
Honor the vision of Democracy for the Pacific Rim."**

We prayed for freedom of prisoners of conscience
in America, in China, in Tibet, and in almost every land
of this suffering earth. In a way this Requiem is for them.

2) Tomorrow, we observe the 50th Anniversary of D-Day.
We remember the eight thousand who died on the beaches:
The beginning of the end of World War II.
In a way this Requiem is for all the dead of war.

3) But most of all, today honors Edwin Barlow. Dr. Barlow, his wife Paula, and their
daughter Juliana, were part of our church for almost ten years. Edwin led our choir on
trips to the IARF in Japan and Germany. Edwin had a gift for bringing out the best
in voices. He attracted singers who wanted to sing under his skilled leadership.

Thirty of us remember singing together to an audience of seven thousand in Tokyo. We
learned Japanese words, "Michi Wa Kokokara," the Way begins here. We remember
Hiroshima on August 6th, a solemn service of remembrance. And Edwin's head turning
red in the hot sun as we sang at Suzuka City.

Edwin was away from our church a few years. He changed his life and Eric Howe
became his partner. In 1993, we welcomed Edwin back as our choir director. At our
"welcoming congregation" service this fall, he gave a homily in which he told us he
had AIDS. He struggled with illness, bravely coming to lead **Cinderella** at our Opera
ala Carte. He conducted for the last time in our church on May 1st. He knew that this
Requiem might be for him. For Edwin and his music, we sing today. Amen.
