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With My Feeling of Gratitude to Prof. Yuki Hideo

I got to know Prof. Yuki Hideo in 1994 when I started to serve as the Director of Chūō Academic Research Institute of Risshō Kōsei-kai and to participate in the Conference on Religion and Modern Society (CORMOS) in Kyoto. He was slender and tall, and used to wear a gray suit which looked nice with his silver hair. He was a gentleman with a soft and calming air, but always resolute attitude.

When I remember him, I just have a feeling of gratitude for his sincere efforts in establishing the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations (*Kyōdan fuchi kenkyū-sho konwa-kai* 教団付置研究所懇話会).

In the 1990s, religious organizations in Japan faced a wide range of contemporary challenges. There were frequent incidents related to religious organizations which threatened Japanese society. Japanese religious circles could not have substantive discussions, and a resolution on the controversies surrounding Yasukuni Shrine was nowhere near. Also, a religious political party joined the government for the first time in Japanese history, and this raised questions around the relation between politics and religious organizations.

In 1992, the Provisional Commission for Study on Brain Death and Organ Transplantation submitted its final report to the Japanese government, which suggested to recognize brain death as legal death; since that time bioethics became a major challenge for religious circles. Moreover, so-called “problems with cults,” including antisocial activities such as the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system in 1995, or the methods to sell spiritual experiences by exerting pressure provoked serious questions about the social responsibility and morality of religious organizations. Eventually, these developments led to the revision of the Law for Religious Corporations.

The religious circles in Japan were greatly rocked. A deep-seated distrust for religion spread among people. Of course, religious organizations tried to respond to this, but generally they could do little more than to protect themselves. Also our Chūō Academic Research Institute could not achieve enough.

In such circumstances, I tried to find out the core of these problems. The social role of religions and the morality of religious organizations were at stake. If religious leaders were not aware of it sufficiently, they might put “religion” itself into

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a dangerous situation. However, it was not easy for religious leaders to have enough discussions on the role of religion and their self-reform due to certain circumstances, although interfaith dialogue and cooperation have been advancing in recent years. Then I came to think that research institutes associated with religious organizations might play an essential role in that process.

With this in mind, I communicated with many religious leaders and researchers about tackling the issues, and I became convinced that there were many like-minded people. I then contributed a short article titled “Crisis of Religion and the Role of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations” to *Candana*, the newsletter of Chūō Academic Research Institute, in August 1996. I concluded the article with the simple idea of creating a network of research institutes associated with religious organizations to respond to the issues, to overcome the crisis of religion, and to contribute to society and our own religious organizations.

The first and important step was to find a person who could translate this idea into reality. It was not something anyone could do, but there had to be the right person. After almost three years, in June 1999, I decided to visit Prof. Yuki Hideo at the Center for the Study of Japanese Religions of the National Christian Council in Japan in Kyoto, on my way to Kobe for a board meeting of the Federation of New Religious Organizations (*shinshūren* 新宗連) of Japan.

I had a gut feeling that I should come to Prof. Yuki on this matter. He kindly shared his precious time with me although I had not told him the purpose of my visit. In that short meeting, I explained about my idea frankly, and asked him to take an initiative in networking research institutes associated with religious organizations.

It was almost the first time for us to talk closely. Prof. Yuki might not have known me well since I was not in the academic field. But he listened to me quietly. After a moment of silence, he kindly accepted my proposal, saying “Every religious organization has its own circumstances and conditions, so we need to prepare carefully. Please leave it to me. I will sincerely do my best.” I was really grateful.

Two years later, Prof. Yuki called me and said that now we could officially start preparation for the networking. During a CORMOS meeting in 2001, he introduced several people to me and this was the beginning of our work.

In February 2002, the first preparatory meeting was held at the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto. Attendants were Prof. Kumoi Shōzen, Director of Tendai Buddhist Comprehensive Research Center, Prof. Nara Yasuaki, Director of Sōtō Institute for Buddhist Studies, Prof. Ishigami Zennō, Chairman of Jōdo-shū Research Institute, Rev. Satō Mitsutoshi, Director of Konkō-kyō Research Institute, Prof. Yuki, I, and my successor Rev. Imai Katsumasa since I had already retired in December of the previous year.

As the preparation went smoothly, we decided to have the inauguration ceremony of the forum at Tendai Comprehensive Research Center on the slopes of Mt. Hiei. It was fortunate that Dr. Kumoi offered the site since he intended to show a newly completed building of his center to the public by hosting this ceremony. In October 2002, the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations was finally established with thirteen member institutes.

I do not know what efforts Prof Yuki made during the three years after I first approached him. I imagine he probably waited for the right time while carefully watching trends of society and the religious circles. I still remember that he was just quietly pleased with the establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations without taking any credit for it.

Today, the forum has nineteen member institutes and nine observers, and it holds annual conferences. Additionally, individual members resp. researchers of these institutes convene in three sub-groups to pursue together research on bioethics, interfaith dialogue and suicide. It is a very meaningful development and I deeply appreciate it.

I would like to express my deep gratitude for Prof. Yuki's great achievements in regard to the establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations and I will keep him in my memory. At the same time I would like to remember Rev. Satō Mitsutoshi of Konkō-kyō Research Institute, who also greatly contributed to the forum's establishment from the very beginning, and who passed away in April 2012 already at the age of sixty-two. With sincere gratitude, I pray that Prof. Yuki and Rev. Satō may rest in peace.

Translation by Uo Akie and Taketani Naoki