

追悼 InMemoriam

In Memoriam: Carl Yasuo Furuya

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Anri Morimoto

It was December 9th, 1980. I was in my second year at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, just next to ICU. That day, I was walking through the ICU rotary, wearing a black suit, a black tie, sad and devastated. I happened to come across Rev. Furuya. He noticed me, hailed me cheerfully as usual, and asked if I was commemorating the outbreak of WWII some 45 years before. I said No, aghast and exasperated by his ignorance of the world-changing, single-most important tragic event that had happened a few hours earlier in New York City. It was the assassination of John Lennon.

I was irritated, but Rev. Furuya didn't seem to be bothered. He was genuinely intrigued, even amused by my reaction, all the while trying to learn from my generation, trying to learn something that didn't quite belong to his. I have to say that he didn't always succeed, but it was really heartening and liberating to know that he was trying his best. That was how he gained trust and confidence from the people around him, regardless of their position, high or low, student or president of the university.

Rev. Dr. Yasuo Furuya, or Carl as he was called, was born in 1926, and died last week at the age of 91. He was my undergraduate senior thesis advisor. He recommended me that I go to Princeton, and he invited me back to ICU when I finished my doctorate. He officiated my

wedding. Eventually, I took over his position, as ICU church senior pastor, Director of Religious Center, and professor in the Division of Humanities, teaching the courses he once taught--the courses I once took. We moved into the house on campus where he and his family had lived for 30 years, and the office that I now use used to be his, with some of his books, more like antique items, still sitting in the back of my shelves.

Obviously, I was very close to him, perhaps too close to make any formal comments. But none of you here today expects to hear a formal eulogy from me, either. I kept a distance after his official departure from ICU in 1997. I had had too much of him, and he was not the kind of person who faded out. I needed my own space to breathe.

Looking back, I am sure he was not unfamiliar with the kind of awkwardness I experienced. Rev. Furuya came to ICU, following his elder sister, who worked under the great and popular spiritual leader of ICU's earliest days, Rev. Masumi Toyotome. Rev. Furuya often told us amusedly, how difficult it was for him at first to settle into the regiment of Japanese authoritative intellectual elites. We all enjoyed, time and again, in great variations the same-old story of a Shanghai-born, American-bred, stuttering, small-framed man fighting his way into ICU's snobbish faculty establishment.

Professor Kiyoko Cho, who also passed away recently at the age of 100, was still young, but she had already been on the faculty. Professor Cho was no longer teaching at ICU when I was a student, so I do not have any personal recollections about her, but believe me, Rev. Furuya had

so many stories to tell about her—some hilarious, some somber—that I feel like I knew her well, too.

And indeed, the atmosphere he wore around him set the basic tone of ICU's Christianity in its formative years. It was pragmatic, not dogmatic; it was broad and ecumenical, rather than confessional; it was international and definitely not domestic. It was egalitarian rather than authoritarian. Rev. Furuya could not tell a lie, not because he was honest, but because it was too obvious when he was lying. Such a lovable creature.

He was flexible and adaptive. To some, it seemed too pliable to the point of being irresponsible. He was liberal, sometimes too liberal as to upset ordinary, sincere, straight-jacket, Japanese Christians. His personal charm, however, attracted leading Mukyokai (non-church) Christian scholars in Japan. He made ICU a place for both sides of Christians, Kyokai and Mukyokai, to meet and learn from each other. The newborn, little-known, small college was thus able to secure a foothold in Japanese academia, partly because of this happy amalgamation. Rev. Furuya is to be credited for this union. ICU has never imposed chapel attendance, and precisely for that reason, our chapel service continues to have a solid number of attendants, still today. The on-campus alcohol policies were never strict, reflecting Rev. Furuya's own habit of drinking. He also smoked. As excuses, he often named two German theologians, Karl Barth for smoking and Rudolf Bultmann for drinking.

Rev. Furuya was always positive, optimistic and forward-looking. Some colleagues say it was simply because he

refused to look at anything that was negative. As a pastor, he visited the sick and elderly only when it was absolutely necessary. As a professor, he deftly evaded confrontations, when everyone looked to him for a definitive comment. Or, he would make an incredibly out-of-context remark, enough that everyone burst into laughter, end of discussion. He minimized the impact of any negative element company to the life of every person, and he maximized the benefit of whatever opportunity came his way. Tragedies didn't exist, for he knew that "all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). The power of positive thinking!

He was a very helpful friend for those in need. He welcomed strangers. He offered real and concrete assistance for anyone coming for his help. He was mindful of those struggling to develop, especially our friends in Asia.

His free spirit, unwavering confidence, childlike faith, will continue to inspire us all for years to come. May God rest his soul in peace.