

# KONKO-KYO : A RELIGION OF MEDIATION

By Delwin B. Schneider

It is well known that though people are sincere and conscientious in their belief in Kami,<sup>a</sup> countless numbers are still troubled. Help them out of their difficulties and both Kami and his children will be relieved. Kami and his children are co-existent; the realization of this truth will lead you to prosperity. You will thus be handing down to future generations the way to prosperity through this mutual response.<sup>1</sup>

*Rikkyō Shinden,*<sup>b</sup> "The  
Call of the Founder."

Through Ikigami Konkō Daijin<sup>c</sup>  
To Tenchi Kane no Kami<sup>d</sup>  
With heart and soul pray.  
The divine favor depends on your own heart  
On this very day, pray!<sup>e</sup>

*Kakitsuke,*<sup>f</sup> "Heaven and  
Earth's Reminder."

Now is the time to pray with a single heart; the receiving of the divine favor depends upon your heart.

Neither night or day, being near or far away, can separate you from Kami; pray with a trusting heart.

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a. 神 (Following the practise of this journal, the word "Kami," like Allah, is treated as an English word and therefore is not italicized. Ed.) b. 立教神伝 c. 生神金光大神 d. 天地金乃神 e. 誓附

1. *Kyōten (The Scriptures of Konkō-kyō)* p. 6

2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Spiritual exercise is more profitable than bodily exercise.<sup>3</sup>

*Michi Oshie no Taikō,*<sup>a</sup>  
“The Teachings of the Way”

There can be no love in the mouth if there is hatred in the heart.

Those who believe should carry an amulet in their hearts.

It is better to seek a kindred heart than to seek the well-born and the well-bred.

Whether your prayer is answered or not depends upon your own heart.

The poorest of men are they who know neither the teachings of Kami nor the True Way.

Kami is without voice and without form. Because of this, some men will always doubt his existence. But doubt is a fearful thing; lay aside all doubt.<sup>4</sup>

*Shinjin no Kokoroe,*<sup>b</sup>  
“Instructions concerning  
the Faith.”

Even as a parent loves a worthless child with greater love, so Kami loves those without faith. Have faith and receive his favor.

Tenchi Kane no Kami is tolerant of all religions. Your faith should not be narrow; it should be broad. Think of the whole wide world, for the world dwells within your mind.

If you would see Kami, step out into the garden. The sky above you and the earth beneath you is Kami.

Have faith. To have faith means to have your heart directed toward Kami. Even though the children of Kami are in the

a. 道教乃大綱 b. 信心の心得

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 17 f.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 20 ff.

midst of the divine virtue, without faith they do not have the divine favor. A lamp filled with oil cannot be lit without a wick. If a lamp is not lit, the night remains darkness. Without faith, the world becomes darkness.

Have a plum blossom faith rather than a cherry blossom faith. The cherry blossom falls quickly; the plum blossom, having withstood adversity, endures.

It is better to purify the heart in faith than to wash the body in purification.

If you have faith, the unseen gifts of divine favor which you receive are greater than those which are seen; the unknown gifts are more than those which are known. As you ponder this, you should understand that all things have occurred in your life because of the divine favor. A true believer is one with such a faith.<sup>5</sup>

*Gorikai*,<sup>a</sup> "The Understanding."

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The above quotations are taken from the scriptures of Konkō-kyō, still referred to as one of the traditional thirteen sects of Shinto. Konkō-kyō draws attention to itself for various reasons. It has within a century of its history deepened its vision and arisen from the level of a faith-healing sect to become one of the more noble in teaching of the popular expressions of Japan's old religion. It has repudiated the charm of the soothsayer; it has debarred from its practice the jargon of incantation; it has rejected from its life the power of magic to add to its

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a. 御理解

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 31 ff.

ability, and it has sought its faith-referent in Tenchi Kane no Kami, the Parent Kami of the Great Universe.

Konkō-kyō has been incongruously and differently described. It has been described as a monotheism, an informal pantheism and a polytheism; its Kami has been called an omnipotent creator, an ever-loving god, and there are those who have found in it a tritheism. With none of these appellations is Konkō-kyō concerned. Konkō-kyō is the way of the Kami and, more particularly, the way of Tenchi Kane no Kami. Konkō-kyō is not concerned with the secondary conceptual derivatives of its experience; it is a religion of function and as such experience is primary. Though it has grown up as a sect under the shelter of Shinto and has taken the form of Shinto in its rites, prayers and ceremonial robes, it is according to its adherents "a new religion which arose in modern Japan without any essential relation to the religions, sects or religious movements that had existed and, as such, it has its unique province and mission."<sup>6</sup> It has, in fact, both in point of its supreme Kami and its teachings and articles of faith, its own characteristics based upon the experience of the founder and the message which became his upon his Kami-possession. It combines some of the more lofty elements of Japan's old (and still "new") religion and has been called "the fulfillment of Shinto" and "the Christianity of the Japanese nation." As such, it wants to be understood as an unique and universal religion. The cry of the founder remains the clarion call to this day: "Heaven and earth is now open; awake and hear its sound."<sup>7</sup>

6. Satō, Kazuo 佐藤一夫, editor, *Konkō-kyō Outline*. (Konkō: Konkō-kyō Hombu Kyōchō 金教教本部教序, 1958) p. 1.

7. *Kyōten*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

The founder who was a participator in the "divine atmosphere" of a new spiritual realm mediates to the world his new-found understanding and calls it to share in his delight. And today his devotees, each one a mediator, is telling Japan, Hawaii and America that if the eyes and ears of mankind become spiritual eyes and ears permeated with the divine virtue, those same eyes and ears shall be the bearers of the dawn of a new world. This universe, said the founder, is the shrine and the image of Tenchi Kane no Kami. It is the home of man and no man need aspire to another "ideal" or heavenly home. He lives now in the midst of the "infinite benevolence" of the Parent Kami of the Great Universe; by throwing away selfish desire and opening the mind to understanding, he will find that this home of his "itself is the Kingdom of God."

### The Founding

Bunjiro Kawate,<sup>a</sup> founder of the Konkō sect and well-known throughout Japan by his religious name, Ikigami Konkō Daijin, (The Living Kami, The Great Konkō), was born on August 16, 1814. He was born when Tennō Ninkō,<sup>b</sup> the 120th emperor held court at Kyoto, when Harumasa Ikeda<sup>c</sup> was feudal lord of Okayama, and when the peasant sage, Sontoku Ninomiya,<sup>d</sup> who had pondered long about Shinto, what it calls the Way, and about Confucianism, what its teachings consist of, and also about Buddhism, wrote a poem to sum up the temper of his age:

The things of this world  
Are like lengths  
Of bamboo rods

a. 川手文治郎 b. 仁孝天皇 c. 池田晴正 d. 二宮尊徳

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For use in fish nets  
This one's too long,  
That one too short.<sup>8</sup>

Kawate was born in Urami<sup>a</sup> near the Inland Sea between Ōsaka and Hiroshima in the feudal district called the land of Kibi,<sup>b</sup> The land of Kibi has contributed its share in Japan's religious history. From this land of brooks and inland bays, of plains and mountains, came Hōnen<sup>c</sup> (1132—1211) one of the great patriarchs of Pure Land Buddhism and the builder of the Chion-in<sup>d</sup> in Kyōto. From it came Munetada Kurozumi<sup>e</sup> (1780—1850), the founder of the sect that still bears his name. But for the faithful of Konkō-kyō, no one is greater among the religious of the land of Kibi than Bunjirō Kawate who found the living Kami whom he called Tenchi Kane no Kami.

Though the biographies of the founders of religions are often lost in antiquity or shrouded in legend, the student stands a chance of getting through to the historical person of Kawate and finding justification for his life and work in its own right. His quest for the religious life was not easy, for his life like the lives of those about him was made bewilderingly difficult by a maze of belief in lucky and unlucky days, favorable and unfavorable auspices and in good and bad directions. The *Ying-Yang* way has always exercised a tremendous influence on the life of the Japanese people and there were those like Kawate's neighbor, Munetada Kurozumi, who could plot his fortunes and his future by the use of the hexagram and trigram. For others and for Bunjirō Kawate it was the cause of deep

a. 占見 b. 吉備 c. 法然 d. 知恩院 e. 黒住宗忠

8. Wm. Theodore de Bary, editor, *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 585.

spiritual agony and insecurity. And of all the curses dreaded by Kawate and his peasant neighbors nothing was more dreadful than the curse of a deity called Konjin,<sup>a</sup> a semi-demonic Kami who found his way to Japan through the calendar of China.

Konjin was called Ushitora no Konjin,<sup>b</sup> the "metal-Kami of the northeast" and guardian of the *kimon*<sup>c</sup> or demon gate. The power of *In*<sup>d</sup> is concentrated here, they said, and one hundred demons are constantly passing through the northeast gate. But Konjin does not remain stationary at the gate; he takes a trip to the north every second and third year, to the east every first and fourth year and to the south every fifth year. To keep informed of these periodic moves of Konjin took some of the best minds of Kawate's day; for to begin construction, to embark on a journey or to institute marriage procedures at an inauspicious time was to invite the inevitable retribution of the angry demonic Konjin.

It was in fear of this Kami that Kawate lived his early life; but out of this fear originated his conversion whereby he transformed the awful wrath of Konjin into a benevolent and powerful Kami, interpreting the ideogram *Kon*<sup>e</sup> or "metal" (in Chinese cosmology symbolizing the killing power of autumn) as "gold" which became a part of the name of the sect which he founded. After experiencing the double burden of family responsibilities and successive misfortunes, it was in the forty-second year of his life.....his climactic year.....that he was seized by one of his more forceful Kami-possession which resulted in what A. C. Bouquet unreservedly judged to be "an example of an independent approximation to prophetic

a. 金神 b. 丑寅の金神 c. 鬼門 d. 陰 e. 金

monotheism.”<sup>9</sup>

The making of Kawate's spiritual life and the re-making of his worldview begins with this event. He believed that some spiritual principle or agency from another world had communicated with him and that it was trying to do him good. He recovered from a serious illness, minutely investigated the impulses of his life and gradually there developed within him an understanding that combined his divergent views of his own life and its spiritual world. At first, he connected this experience with the calendar Kami, Konjin. But as time went on he called the Kami with whom he had been in contact Kane no Kami, the Kami who unifies, *i.e.*, the spiritual principle that gives unity to life.

On October 21, 1859, the oracle spoke to him again. He received from Kane no Kami the directive of establishment by which both Kami and the children of Kami would prosper. He was to abandon the occupation of his family, put aside the interest of self, and give assistance to Kami. The oracle communicated also with his wife to inform her that she was to consider herself a widow so that her husband could devote all his energies to the task of propagating to future generations and to the countless number of people who were troubled in his day, the way to prosperity through the “mutuality” of Kami and his children. The founder was to think of Kane no Kami and his children as a father and son relationship where both are needed and each depends upon the existence of the other. Kawate deferred to the promptings of his Kami and began a period of mediation. Building himself a small place of

9. *Comparative Religion* (Penguin Books, 1958), p. 199.

mediation (*hiromae*<sup>a</sup>), he began to mediate between Kami and those who sought his help. During this period he several times changed the name of the numinous power which he worshipped. He insisted that the Kami came to him because of his faith and belief and not as the result of logical introspection or philosophical speculation. He has said, "I have not sought him."

Thus as his insight deepened and he grew more confident of his spiritual abilities, he employed the name Tenchi Kane no Kami from 1873 onward as the supreme object of his devotion. *Tenchi*<sup>b</sup> is "heaven and earth," "universe" or "cosmos"; *kane*<sup>c</sup> is the ideogram for "*k'in*" or "*kon*" or "*kane*," meaning either "gold," "metal" or "money." But none of these different readings are carried over into Konkō-kyo thought. The character "*kane*" was incorporated into the name of the founder's Kami because it was the name of the Shinto shrine (Kane no Jinja)<sup>d</sup> that lay adjacent to the home in which he was reared. He had received sustenance in his spiritual quest from the ministrations of the shrine and retained the word in his designation of Kami as a token of gratitude. But more important, according to one Konkō teacher, "*kane*" is related to "*kaneru*,"<sup>e</sup> meaning to "combine," "possess" or "include." Thus, while the character remains the ideogram for "gold," "metal" or "money," it relates itself to a word of similar pronunciation which conveys the meaning of "include." This symbol had also been long used in writing the name of Konjin which has and still causes a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding for the followers of Konkō-kyō. It is used also for the "*kon*" of Konkō-kyō and, if it has any meaning at all, it is the "golden

a. 広前 b. 天地 c. 金 d. 金乃神社 e. かねる

light" which dawns upon the believer who has found Tenchi Kane no Kami to be the "Parent Kami of the Great Universe."

With the name of his Kami settled Kawate turned to other matters. He soon brought upon himself the opposition of official circles for his repeated maligning and repudiation of the calendar. In order to mitigate misunderstanding of his teaching he made application to the government to become a Shinto priest. The request was granted in 1867. But with the reorganization of religious affairs, which was effected by the Tokyo authorities in 1872, by which both Buddhist and Shinto priests were utilized in the system of popular religious and educational propaganda fostered by the Ecclesiastical Board (Kyōbu Shō<sup>a</sup>), Kawate refused to become a member of the approved priesthood.

He was permitted, however, under government protection to continue teaching publicly in Okayama prefecture. His life came to a peaceful end after twenty-five years of declaring the Way. On September 26, 1883, he said, "Why has Kami chosen me, an unlettered farmer, to be the founder of such a high and noble company of believers?" Two weeks later he was taken into the spirit world, but before he died he promised that he would go wherever he was called by his followers who had already reached out beyond the borders of the land of Kibi.

### Mediation

The "Reminder of Heaven and Earth" or "memo" quoted at the beginning of the article finds a place of honor in every Konkō home and calls the believer to the remembrance of his mediator, his Kami and his faith. It remarkably demonstrates

a. 教部省

the relationship of these three elements in the believer's faith-life by calling to his remembrance through Ikigami Konkō Daijin that it is to Tenchi Kane no Kami that one prays, at the same time keeping in mind that the divine favor depends on one's own heart.

We can go into only the first of these relationships because of the limits of space. Through the founder, Tenchi Kane no Kami declared for the first time in man's long history his intention to lift men "sunk in the depth of agony and revive them in the world of divine favor through Konkō Daijin's mediation."<sup>10</sup> The term which describes this function is *toritsugi*<sup>a</sup> or "mediation." There is no term in English that adequately describes it although the above comes closest to it. A maid makes *toritsugi* when she announces to the master that a guest has arrived; or the guest will ask the maid to make *toritsugi* for him to her master. In Konkō-kyō the term expresses a two-way relationship in which both Kami and man meet in mediation; the terms "Living Kami" (*Ikigami*<sup>b</sup>) and mediation are equated.

When man becomes a living Kami it follows that he becomes an agent of mediation between Kami and man. In this sense, Kami becomes man and man becomes Kami. It is this act of mediation which is performed both by priest and layman. Every priest is a mediating priest who sits at the mediating desk in the sacred hall to transmit the way of understanding to those who seek. The founder spent twenty-five years in mediation in Konkō village and the present spiritual head of Konkō-kyō,

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a. 取次 b. 生神

10. *Konkō Outline, op. cit., p. 2.*

a grandson of the founder, has spent each day from 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for the past sixty-six years at the mediating desk. Because he carries the responsibility for 700,000 believers, the present superintendent priest, Konkō Setsutane,<sup>a</sup> better known by his followers by the term of high respect, Konkō Sama,<sup>b</sup> was chosen by a group of scholars in the *Bungei Shunjū* (July, 1960) as one of the ten most influential religious leaders in Japan. Some of the others were Tatsuo Dōi,<sup>c</sup> Cardinal of the Catholic Church, Hinsuke Yashiro,<sup>d</sup> Bishop of the Anglican Church, Shōzen Nakayama,<sup>e</sup> head of Tenri-kyō,<sup>f</sup> Ryūmyō Tsunawaki,<sup>g</sup> head of Nichiren<sup>h</sup> and Konkō Setsutane, the kindly octogenarian who was noted for his zeal, consecration and devotion.

Because Kami and man became one, it remains no longer necessary to pray directly to Tenchi Kane no Kami. It is, indeed, less difficult to pray when prayer is directed to the person of him who mediates. It is easier to direct prayer to the "divine movement" or "principle" of the founder or of the other great men who make up the Konkō-kyō pantheon of "Living Kami." It is recorded that the founder prayed to those who came to him as well as to his family for they were people filled with the "divine movement." The founder's life was a preparation for mediation. His call from Tenchi Kane no Kami was a call to mediation between Kami and man. He was to serve in this capacity not as a wise and kindly counselor but as the direct representative and substitute of the Kami. He himself was the bearer of the "divine will." His purpose and

a. 金光眞胤    b. 金光様    c. 文芸春秋    d. 土井辰雄    e. 八代徳助  
f. 中山正善    g. 天理教    h. 綱庵庵妙    i. 日蓮

those who followed him was to bring mankind to a correct understanding of and a right relationship to the will of Kami. And thus from early morning to late at night he mediated and his practical solutions based upon a long spiritual pilgrimage brought thousands to his counsel. "Deliverance through mediation" became the means of his communication and from it all later-day adherents of Konkō-kyō have taken their cue.

The act of mediation is no longer the act of man, but much more of Kami himself. This form of mediation determines the relationship between priest and people and forms the creative character of Konkō teaching. As people are helped in their search for the meaning of life, there arises between them and the mediator "a warm sympathy, a stream of warm love like blood which courses through the body." For the founder has said that all were to receive the favor of Tenchi Kane no Kami through him. Because of Konkō Daijin, the scriptures say, Kami is known to the world. Both Kami and his children owe a debt of gratitude to the founder. Therefore, "do not act contrary to the words of Konkō Daijin, but keep them well and have faith. In time of need it is not necessary to call upon Tenchi Kane no Kami; ask only for Konkō Daijin's help and he will bestow his favor."<sup>11</sup>

The founder was the first to have received from Kami the information (*shirase*<sup>a</sup>) that man lives within his own destined cycle (*meguri*<sup>b</sup>) and needs only to break out of it to know the principle and the movement of the universe. Anyone can receive it, but it was the founder to whom this news first came.

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a. しらせ b. めぐり

11. *Kyōten*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

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It is no longer necessary to receive this information directly from Kami. Since the founder announced the Way, it can be had from mediation. Thus people today who are seeking wealth, health, and ennobled personality will seek through mediation the knowledge of the way of life. This knowledge and understanding brings bodily health, spiritual peace and mental happiness. In a passage describing the founder's life as mediation the theologians of Konkō-kyō have said :

The founder who was called upon to devote himself to the divine work, appropriated one of the rooms in his residence to "the hall of the divine presence" where he sat as "Kami's Intermediary," living an assiduous life devoted to prayer and preaching for twenty-five years. He expounded earnestly the way of truth which he especially called "the path of salvation by the word." He denied all superstition and all belief in good and evil days and good and evil directions. By explaining how heaven and earth are man's eternal home, he taught the doctrine of true faith, bestowed the divine favor on those who prayed to the Kami for mercy, relieved them of misery and anguish and showed them that it was in their power to lead full and happy lives. Thus setting himself the task of accomplishing the divine word, the founder finally attained the rank of Ikigami, "the living Kami," who though in the flesh, is one with God, and was given by God, the divine name, Ikigami Konkō Daijin, the Living Kami, Konkō Daijin.

Having received the message of establishment, Bunjirō Kawate became the mediator between Tenchi Kane no Kami and his children. Though he was born a simple farmer and was barely able to read and write, he was the first, according to his followers, to have recognized the profound and intimate relation between Kami and mankind and the first to have explained the true pathway of life in the great universe. According to his new belief, he gave clear and perfectly reasonable explanations about the absurdity of the superstitions regarding days, months, years, directions and aspects which affected those who came

to him. The divine virtue of the Parent Kami had existed from the beginning of time, said his devotees, but no one has "explained this reasoning clearly enough to make the life of this world peaceful." But as the founder has explained in the scriptures it is easy to find this way, "Simply say, 'Konkō Daijin, save' and the plea will surely be answered."

The followers of Bunjirō Kawate have been remarkably true to his teaching. The home of the Konkō religion in the village of Konkō in Okayama remains the place of mediation for the founder and the place to which the followers and believers bring their requests. In each of the 1,600 local churches (*kyōkai*<sup>a</sup>) there is for each a priest who sits both day and night within the place of mediation as the direct representative of the founder. No matter what kind of man the mediator may be in his private life, his explanations are heeded when he speaks as Kami's substitute. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Konkō religion in 1959 the present head of Konkō-kyō gave to the tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over Japan, from Hawaii and North America, who came to celebrate the grand festival of the centennial, a message which displays the very genius, and perhaps even the success, of this new expression of an old religion. Speaking before the multitudes he said:

I am very grateful to have conducted the service today for the grand festival dedicated to the founder and the Centennial Anniversary of the founding of our religion. It is a matter of gratitude that a way has been opened for Ikigami Konkō Daijin's mediation thereby making it possible for Kami and men alike to be saved and to exist and that boundless blessing has been bestowed upon us these 100 years. We must here in a renewed state of mind understand Kami's will shown

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a. 教会

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in the 1859 Revelation and get the blessings whereby we can practice Konkō-kyō's teaching. In this connection I sincerely wish that the "Movement for the Realization of Toritsugi and Training Faith" will be more eagerly pushed forward; that new blessings be given on each new day upon our personal welfare and upon the functioning of the church and the management of the whole organization; that all of us contribute more to the happiness and welfare of mankind. I hope you will share my wishes and cooperate.

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