

Conversation with the Reverend Olivia Nikolaidis on Konkokyo, Shinto, and Christianity

We frequently receive questions from people outside Japan, asking, “Is Konkokyo a sect of Shinto?” or “Was Tenchi Kane No Kami rooted in Shinto?” This query has made us think about Konkokyo’s traditions and its connection with Shinto.

Konkokyo is neither shrine Shinto nor state Shinto. The latter was established as a state religion during the modernization of the Meiji Government. From 1868 to 1945 Konkokyo was oppressed by state Shinto under the aegis of the Empire of Japan. It is during this period that Konko Daijin died and Konkokyo registered as a Shinto sect. In this “Shinto-ization” process, Konkokyo lost many lively elements of its folk faith. In addition, Konkokyo’s practices underwent some changes, to align itself with the standardized and modernized shrine Shinto rituals. This was done to preserve Konkokyo under the current oppressive government.

The Konkokyo Kyoten (the Sacred Scriptures of Konkokyo) mentions a number of folk faith deities (kamis) such Nittenshi or Hi No Kami (the Sun), Gattenshi or Tsuki No Kami (the Moon), Ne No Hoshi (the North Star), and Amaterasu Omikami (Tensho Kotaijin, major deity of shrine Shinto). From this, we know Konko Daijin lived in the diverse folk religious tradition which included Shinto. From the time of revelation of Tenchi Kane No Kami to Konko Daijin, it is clear that at the core of Tenchi Kane No Kami is the character of inclusiveness and fullness. He didn’t deny other kamis existing mutually and independently

After WWII, Konkokyo underwent a process to “de-Shinto-ize”, to clearly distinguish itself from the Shintoism of state Shinto. However, in recent years, Konkokyo has been revitalizing its Shinto roots and reevaluating their connection. It has been rethinking Konkokyo’s roots and also reexamining Shintoist elements as an integral part, of a vivid religious tradition. In order to propagate our way of Konko faith all over the world, KIC should face the influence of Shintoism and grasp the Shintoist elements properly.

KIC had a conversation with Reverend Olivia Nikolaidis (Konko Church of Toronto) who was ordained as a minister in 2015 and now does sacred tasks at the Konko Church of Yokosuka in Japan. We learned a lot about how Konkokyo is understood from the viewpoint of a younger generation, a person who grew up outside of Japan.

KIC: How did you encounter Konkokyo?

In 2011, on my way home from school, I saw the *chigi*, an architectural feature of shrines, on the Konko Church of Toronto. Seeing them outside the bus window, it struck me, to wonder if it was a shrine. When I got home I searched



Reverend Olivia Nikolaidis

the internet for “Konko Church”. Reading about the teachings and liking it, I arranged to meet Reverend Takao Kishii, the Head Minister.

KIC: Did you already know about Shinto in those days?

When I was younger, I practiced shrine Shinto at home with a *kamidana* (household altar). Before Konkokyo, I only had a vague understanding of Shinto.

KIC: Did you belong to any religion before encountering Konkokyo?

I was an agnostic. Although I had spiritual experiences such as seeing spirits, I couldn't understand why spirits were here. In Christianity, once people die, they are said to go to Heaven or Hell, so seeing spirits was so strange.

After learning about the concept of *Mitama*, everything began to make sense. By practicing Konkokyo, my spiritual senses were energized and I can now distinguish which spirits are *Mitama* or another spirit, such as a nature spirit.

KIC: Do you feel the difference between God and human relation and Tenchi Kane No Kami and human relation?

In Christian doctrine, human beings are regarded as creations of, and subordinate to God. It's different than *Aiyo Kakeyo*, the interdependent relationship in which Tenchi Kane No Kami and people help each other.

KIC: Why did you hope to become a minister?

Originally, I didn't aspire to become one. However, practicing over time, I casually thought it may be good to do someday. I have always wanted to help others, but I knew as a follower of Konkokyo, I could do that. I had experienced so many difficult things in life that I didn't want others to suffer the same. In November 2014, a minister asked if I wanted to enter the Konkokyo seminary. I was shocked, but answered yes, immediately because I didn't want to miss the chance. My goal now, as a minister is the same as when I was a follower – to help others.



KIC: When did you start your blog?

In middle of 2013, I started the blog with my friend. I wanted to share my spiritual experiences and my Konko Faith. Currently, and gratefully, my blog has over 700 readers. Through the blog, I have made many new and wonderful friends. One lovely friend I met even created the Facebook page, "Konkokyo Australia", and was able to participate in the 2nd Konko International Gathering.

KIC: What is the purpose of those who read your blog? What do they seek?

Most readers are seeking to learn about different spiritual experiences and practices. There are many young people who are oppressed under different religious dogma. Due to this, many people want to seek out a different faith and spirituality that can resonate with them. Many are just curious to learn about a new religion.

KIC: We frequently receive emails that mention how Konkokyo is accepting of others. Occasionally, young people write to us, hoping for relief and comfort from what they feel is monotheistic oppression of a faith upon them, seeking release from the guilt of sin. There have also been a few LGBTQ queries, asking about our faith and if we are accepting. How do you think about acceptance in Konkokyo?

Konkokyo is one of the faiths that is explicitly welcoming of others. No matter the race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, everyone is welcome. Tenchi Kane No Kami is incredibly loving and open hearted, and dislikes suffering. I think as people who follow the Konkokyo, and especially ministers, this is an ideal to strive to. We should aim to have a heart connected with Tenchi Kane No Kami, just as Konko Daijin did.

KIC: They say a lot of young people have interests in Shinto through anime or manga. For example, kami and *yokai* appear in Studio Ghibli anime. Can those people easily accept and understand them?

Anime and manga can introduce people to Shinto, and in some cases get them to learn about Shinto more seriously. There are two types of people, those who keep their knowledge of Shinto to anime and manga, or those who learn about it from anime and manga, and then study more deeply about it

KIC: For you, what attraction does only Konkokyo have, and also only Shrine Shinto have?

Konkokyo and Shrine Shinto are both practices which revere nature, honor ancestors, and build up community, among other things. However in Konkokyo, there is *Aiyo Kakeyo*, the mutual relationship of Tenchi Kane No Kami and people. Tenchi Kane No Kami is intertwined with the lives of humans all over the world on an involvement of

interconnection of Kami and people. Tenchi Kane No Kami is a broad and all encompassing Kami, the universe's spirit and energy. In contrast, shrine Shinto's concept is of a kami that may not be universally involved with everyone, but more based on family, community, region, or natural body.

KIC: What do you think of helping others with faith?

I think faith is an important way we can help others. We, as people, can ease suffering in the world by trying to help, understand, and protect one another. I feel when we do this with trust and faith in Tenchi Kane No Kami, or any higher power, the results can be doubled.

Pioneering Activity in Southern Brazil

By Mr. Duda Cechinel

First of all, I would like to introduce my family and me. I'm Duda Cechinel, my wife is Tania Hanashiro and our son is Nathan Hanashiro. We live in the City of Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina, Brazil. We like Japan's art, food and spirituality.

How did I find Konkokyo? It was mainly from searching the internet about Japanese religions in which I found the history of Konko Daijin; a farmer who had a life experience that transformed his destiny completely, leading him to Kami. What impressed me was the simple and deep way how Konko Daijin helped people who would come to him looking for his advice and blessings to deal with their problems.

In January of 2014, I visited Konkokyo of Butantã for the first time, in the City of São Paulo. It is approximately 700 kilometers (435 miles) away; an 8 1/2 hour drive each way. I spent a whole day learning about Konkokyo, the history of Konko Daijin, and asking Reverend Tadashi Miyazaki and Reverend Carlos Hasselmann several questions. My faith was awakened by listening to the divine teachings of Konko Daijin.

On my way back to Florianópolis I felt, in my heart, a sensation of great peace. There was no clear reason why I had this feeling, but I felt it was a divine blessing. I felt like my heart was overflowing with peace. This particular experience gave me firm conviction in the teachings of Konko Daijin.

What caught my attention in Konkokyo? For me, "Konkokyo" means a "Teaching of gold." Konkokyo is like "Kintsukuroi," the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with powdered gold; believing that when something suf-



fers some type of damage, it's worth repairing because it has a history. Indeed, in fixing it, it becomes a unique and special object, which becomes worth more than before. The teachings of Konko Daijin are like this way of thinking, that is "To repair, restore, revive, and give a new shine and strength to our lives."

What is the "Practice of Faith" for me? Konko Daijin teaches that, "To practice faith means you direct your heart toward Kami." (Gorikai I: Ichimura Mitsugoro, 1-20-1). Thus, I pray daily and read the biography of

Konko Daijin to direct my heart toward Kami. To deepen my faith practice, I do research reading Konkokyo's books in English and Japanese. Also, once a week I study with Reverend Miyazaki over the internet using Skype's software in my computer.

Konko Daijin teaches that, "If you practice faith and receive divine blessings through someone's teachings, you should express your appreciation by teaching others, in turn. This is the responsibility of a person who practices faith." (Gorikai III: Jinkyu Kyogoroku, 26) So I started to spread the teachings in our home and on the internet. In our home, we hold monthly meetings to spread the teachings of Konko

Daijin and share our faith experiences. On the internet we created a website and a fan page on Facebook with the name "Konkokyo of Floripa" to spread Konkokyo, because there are not many publications about Konkokyo in Portuguese.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my friends of "Konkokyo of Floripa" for their support and participation. Thanks to my mentors Reverend Miyazaki and Reverend Hasselmann for their teachings, prayers and *Toritsugi* (Spiritual Mediation). And my gratitude to Konko Daijin and Tenchi Kane No Kami for the many blessings that come my way through the practice of faith.



Mr. Duda Cechinel (on the far left)



New Church in Embu, Brazil

On January 22, the head minister of the Konko Church of Birigui, Reverend Tateo Suenaga, held a ceremony for the establishment of the Konko Church of Embu. Reverend Mikio Nitta, the head minister of the Konko Church of Embu, his family, church believers, and other ministers in Brazil participated in the ceremony.



Reverend Mikio Nitta
(on the far left)

Mikio Nitta is a son of Reverend Katsujiro Nitta, the first head minister of the Konko Church of Birigui. When he was young, he became a farmer like his father, who became one when he immigrated to Brazil. They experienced the development of virgin forest. After Katsujiro returned to Japan, the third Konko-Sama said

to him, "You are supposed to return to Brazil again as a minister." He was determined to become a minister.

Realizing the hope of Kami and his father, Mikio became a minister and established the Jequitibas Propagation Hall in 2007 at the age of 70. After that, the Hall was moved to Embu.

In Reverend Suenaga's sermon, he asked Reverend and Mrs. Nitta in a quavering voice, "It takes a long time to realize Kami's Wish, doesn't it?" He reviewed Reverend Nitta's life and said, "Kami's Wish for Katsujiro that he received from the third Konko-Sama finally came true as the Embu Propagation Hall was founded."

The participants were impressed by his sermon and shared their enjoyment at the ceremony.



Welcoming the 3rd Konko International Gathering at "Goreichi" Back to the Day : Inspiring the Future

Believers from all over the world and those who are interested in Konkokyo are welcome to join us in celebrating Konkokyo's Establishment Day at the Sacred Place "Goreichi".

Faith Enrichment Activities include:

Guided tour of "Goreichi", Prayer Service, Party, Workshop, Konkokyo Establishment Day Service

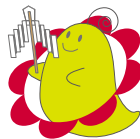
Date: November 14th 13:00 - 15th 12:00

Place: Konkokyo Headquarters, Okayama, Japan

For further information, please contact KIC.

Please check our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/koncele/>



Come Join the Konko Faith Gatherings in New York & New Jersey 2017

Manhattan: Sept. 15 (Fri) Informal Faith Conversations

Skillman, NJ: Sept. 16 (Sat) Fall Grand Ceremony

For more information, please contact Reverend Joanne Tolosa,

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