The 1st Lecture

Germinating Faith

Introduction

The faith of Konko Daijin is often compared to many paths leading to the mountaintop. This faith may be transmitted from one person to another, or it can be accessed through written documents.

In this course, we will seek the faith of Konko Daijin through his writings: *Konko Daijin Oboegaki* (Konko Daijin's Memoirs; henceforth *Oboegaki*) and *Oshirase Oboe-cho* (henceforth *Oboecho*). *Oboegaki* was written after the autumn of 1874 and recounts the birth of Konko Daijin (1814) and other events up to 1876. The estimated time of writing for *Oboecho* is the end of the Edo Period or the first year of Meiji (1868) onward. Its contents include events from 1854 (when Konko Daijin was 44) up to the time of his death in 1883. While these writings are records of his life, they are also manifestations of Kami, through which the Divine Message (*Oshirase*) was revealed to the world.

Oshirase includes a variety of messages, such as the will and wishes of Kami, guidance in concrete situations, the meaning of the world and history, and so forth. For such *Oshirase* to be made known, there were serious inquiries and responses between Konko Daijin and Kami—sometimes in heated debate and other times in silence. Encountering Kami is an experience that reflects the meaning of one's entire being in relation to the Universe: the source and goal of life are reexamined from the perspective of the Infinite. Through the study of the words entrusted to Konko Daijin and inscribed in *Oboegaki* and *Oboecho*, I hope to illuminate the concrete and foundational attitude of living in faith.

According to those who walked the path of faith before us, when we seek the faith of Konko Daijin in *Oboegaki* and *Oboecho*, where we begin and where we end is up to the individual and their circumstances. You can enter anywhere, and you can exit and re-enter. This course consists of six lectures, which more or less chronologically cover Konko Daijin's life from birth to death. Each lecture has a theme and is a complete unit, so you can study each chapter on its own or as part of the six-chapter series.

The events, experiences, and challenges of Konko Daijin's life are different from ours, as the strength and level of his faith are not the same as ours. Yet, as he was human, we share in the nature of the problems he faced—whether related to life or faith—by following his path in the same direction. We are invited to seek the faith of Konko Daijin from within our own

life context, to realize that Kami is close to us, and to reflect on the state of our own faith and where we currently stand.

Note: For all citations from *Konkokyo Kyoten*, Sacred Scriptures of Konkokyo (henceforth *Kyoten*), the chapter, verse, and article number are indicated. For citations from *Gorikai*, the category (I, II, III), the name of the witness, verse, and article number are noted.

I. The Meaning of His Birth

1. Receiving a Life as a Human

As a matter of fact, life is not possible without birth. Kandori Genshichi, as a person, was not the Founder, Konko Daijin, by birth alone. Yet, his birth marked the beginning of his life as Konko Daijin, and without him, there would be no Konko Faith. If I may add one more thing —without Konko Faith, we would not be who we are today. Since this is a memorial lecture commemorating his birth, let us begin by reflecting on what it means for a person to be born into this world.

The psychologist and philosopher KAWAI Hayao shared the following episode in one of his books. While riding in a car with UEDA Shizuteru, a philosopher of religion, they noticed a bird resting on the surface of the water. Overcome with emotion, Ueda remarked, "We were born as human beings, and the birds were born as birds!" Although this may sound a bit otherworldly at first, Ueda perceived the flow of life from the fountain of existence that animates every living being, whether human or bird.

Similarly, MIKI Shigeo, in his book The World of the Fetus, wrote that the facial features of a baby in the mother's womb resemble a fish in the early stages of pregnancy, then a reptile, and finally a mammal. This suggests that each individual undergoes the entire flow of natural history in order to be born into it.

In the early years of the Heisei period, Konkokyo believers often recited the phrase "My life is within the Life of Heaven and Earth" as part of the "Let's Tell a Good Story" Movement. The relationship between the Life of Heaven and Earth and our own life was taken as a given. A similar sentiment was present in the *Saishi* (Main Prayer) of one of the ministers, who often recited it during the Tenchi Kane No Kami Grand Service around the same time. He called upon "Ikigami Konko Daijin-Sama, Tenchi Kane No Kami-Sama," then continued with words of gratitude for the life given by Kami each day, and for the fact that we were born as human beings among all living beings. It was such a striking prayer.

Each of these episodes points to the contingency of our existence: we might not have been born as who we are, yet we were given life as exactly who we are. They stir within us a deep sense of gratitude for the fact that we live as human beings. Each of our existences is not something to be taken for granted.

2. *Oboegaki*: Written from the Scene of His Birth

As I mentioned in the beginning, Konko Daijin had been writing the *Oboe-chō* (Diary of Recollection) as he was directed by Kami to write the *Oboegaki*.

On this day (November 23, 1874), Tenchi Kane No Kami instructed:

> "Ikigami Konko Daijin, start writing about your life, your place of birth, past history, and other personal matters." *(Oboegaki 1-1)*

The *Oboegaki* begins with four Japanese words: "*Hitotsu*" (first), "*Konpan*" (this evening), "Tenchi Kane No Kami-sama," and "*Oshirase*" (notification/revelation). These words carry the potential to weave the grand narrative of his life from birth. Since it was by Kami's direction—not by Konko Daijin's own will—that the *Oboegaki* was written, the full intention behind it is known only to Kami. However, by tracing Konko Daijin's life through it, we may be able to catch a glimpse of its meaning.

Obeying Kami's instruction, he wrote about the time of his birth:

> "I was born in Urami Village, Asakuchi County, Bitchu Province. I am the grandson of Kandori Sennosuke and the second son of my father, Juhei.
> I was born a little before six in the evening on the festival day of the Omiya Daimyojin Village Shrine. My father, born in the Year of the Rooster, was thirty-eight, and my mother, born in the Year of the Hare, was thirty-two.
> My date of birth was August 16, 1814 (September 29 in the Western calendar), the Year of the Dog. I was named Kandori Genshichi. My mother Shimo was the daughter of Kobashi Tokuhachi of Masusaka Village. "(*Oboegaki* 1-2)

This account begins with the phrase "I was born in Urami," and includes detailed information about his birthplace—country, region, and village name. He also records the names of his grandparents and parents, his birth order among siblings, the fact that his birth occurred on a festive day for the local shrine, the time of day, his gender, his parents' ages, the date and zodiac year of his birth, and his childhood name.

Obviously, no one remembers the day they were born. These are details he was later told, as it is written:

> "My mother told me about the day I was born and other personal matters." (*Oboegaki* 1-3–4)

The facts recorded here—when and where he was born, who his parents were, his gender, and his birth order—are all elements that apply to anyone's birth, yet none of them are things a person can choose. We cannot choose our parents, nor can our children choose us. We may say, "I chose my spouse," but even then, we choose only from among those we have met—and the encounters themselves are not of our choosing, but involve a certain involuntary or fated element.

This first account of Konko Daijin's life shows that many aspects of our existence are predetermined before life even begins—not by our own will, but by chance, or rather, by fate.

Grammatically, "be born" is in the passive voice—like "be taught" or "be brought up." In Japanese, however, the word we use is *umareru*, which is grammatically active. It conveys the sense that the child emerges into the world, not as something acted upon, but as something coming forth. As a result, we may not think of birth as something passive. Perhaps this better reflects reality, as we consider the expression "given birth to me." After all, we were not born by our own will. There was no choice or compromise—we were born regardless of the conditions, without consent or decision. And that is how life begins. Yet these circumstances surrounding birth are not simply ordinary—they are specific and unique.

Not everyone is born on the festive day of a local deity. Konko Daijin was born just before six in the evening—around sunset—on the celebration day of the Omiya Daimyojin Shrine. In those times, such a festival was an occasion to give thanks for the harvest, to share a special meal, and to celebrate together as a village. His parents must have felt especially grateful and joyful that he was born on such an auspicious day—amid the sounds of festivity, gratitude, and communal joy. It felt as though this child had a strong connection to Kami and was born into the collective joy of many. This episode, told to him by his mother, was not merely a family story—it was a spiritual gift. It is now recorded as part of the *Oboegaki*, excavated from the recesses of memory. Many of us have had the experience of hearing stories about our childhood—things we ourselves do not remember. In Konko Daijin's case, this story carried a particular poignancy, as he was later adopted into another family. Rather than offering a material gift, his mother gave him the spiritual richness of his beginning. We can only imagine the gentle tone of her voice as she passed down this treasured memory to her son.

After recounting his birth, the *Oboegaki* continues with episodes from his childhood: how his younger sister's birth was difficult, how he suffered from eye pain after accidentally putting pepper in his eye, how he battled smallpox at age six and measles at age nine, and how he endured a major stomach ache at age ten. Each of these early memories tells of trials and hardships. Though he was born into a day of joy and celebration, life itself is inevitably a mixture of joy and distress.

Japanese writer Ogawa Yoko describes her experience of childbirth in a poignant way:

"The newborn baby was soft as if she were melting on my belly just after her birth, crying with a heartrending voice... I thought everyone is born with sorrow—the pure and untouched sorrow that infiltrates the very act of coming into life and continuing to live. But this doesn't mean our entire lives are filled only with suffering. We love, we care, and we become kind precisely because we know sorrow. Writing a novel is like digging deep into one's heart to express the sorrow at its core. I was thinking about these things while looking through the window of the newborn nursery." *(From "Untouched Sorrow," in The Night When a Fairy Alights)*

A newborn baby cries to breathe—to take in oxygen for the first time. They cry not because they are sad, but because they are trying to live. In their case, crying *is* living. Ogawa saw within that cry a form of pure sorrow—not despair, but the raw intensity of life itself. She interpreted that sorrow as the wellspring of compassion and kindness. In this way, sorrow does not have to lead to devastation; it can give birth to connection, empathy, and love.

This idea of pure sorrow resonated with something I heard from my uncle. He worked in city hall, issuing death certificates for soldiers killed in war. People would come to the counter—elderly parents hearing of their son's death, or wives whose husbands would never return. Sometimes, a child came to receive the news of his father's death, holding back tears because he had been told not to cry when his father left for war. Having witnessed such moments, my uncle once said: It is sad for the dead, and sad for those left behind. The living and the dead share the same sorrow. Witnessing this deep human sorrow stirred something in me. I wanted to respond to it—that desire became the foundation for my decision to become a Konkokyo minister.

For both Ogawa and my uncle, the sorrow they experienced was not simply the opposite of happiness. It was a profound recognition of the truth of life—a sorrow that exists simply because there is life. Whether we are aware of it or not, this sorrow lies within the cries of a newborn and the life of every individual. It runs deeper than the frailty or courage we witness in human life. It is the kind of sorrow that draws an inaudible gasp from the heart. For both personal faith and religious practice, it is vital to feel this deep human sorrow—as much as we feel joy and wonder.

3. The Meaning of Life – The Life of Ikigami Konko Daijin

Konko Daijin reflects on his life of faith from the time of his birth as he begins writing *Oboegaki*. In the year prior to writing, he received a divine message—a revelation we now call the Message of Divine Will, dated August 19, Meiji 6 (1873):

"I, Tenchi Kane No Kami, want to say the following…"

The message stated that people suffer because they do not recognize that their lives are indebted to Kami, which offends Kami. Wishing for people to have faith, receive blessings, and prosper eternally, Kami declared:

"I have sent Ikigami Konko Daijin to the people."

Through this divine message, Konko Daijin came to realize that he was sent to the people. Thus, when he began writing *Oboegaki* the following year, he looked back upon his birth and life from the perspective of one who was *sent by Kami*. This understanding brought meaning and continuity to his life—from birth, through his present, and into the future.

The word *sashimuke*—being sent—has deeper implications than simply a "calling" to relieve others. In another divine message from April 4th of Meiji 6, it says:

"Everything that happens is Tenchi Kane No Kami's doing."

This includes major upheavals (*Oboegaki* 21-13-1).

Here, *sashimuke* means that everything is orchestrated and given by *Kami*. It's the premise behind Konko Daijin being sent to human society. Both uses of *sashimuke* share a core essence: all is the work of Kami. But they are experienced from different directions.

We can compare these two experiences: one is being sent to others—a calling or mission. The other is recognizing everything that happens to oneself as being *sent* by Kami—a matter of fate. One looks outward, the other inward. In Japanese, these can be seen in the words *shimei* (calling) and *unmei* (fate). *Unmei* may sound tragic or inescapable, but when we examine the characters, *un* means "to carry" and *mei* means "life"—together, "carrying life." *Shimei* means "using life for a purpose." While *shimei* points toward the goal or direction of one's life, *unmei* refers to the whole journey—its places and seasons.

What emotions might Konko Daijin have experienced in his early sixties, writing about his life in *Oboegaki*? We can ask the same of his son, Ieyoshi (Konko Shijin), who transcribed *Oboegaki* after his father's death. Ieyoshi had known his father's life and faith journey since childhood. He himself had been saved from a grave illness at age six through his father's unwavering faith—a story he remembered even on his deathbed at age 40.

Interestingly, both Konko Daijin and Ieyoshi fell seriously ill at age six and survived. When we see such coincidences, we naturally begin to feel a sense of fate at work—an underlying divine arrangement. I imagine that both father and son, one writing and the other transcribing *Oboegaki*, were united by a shared awareness of Kami's mysterious guidance—an awareness of the wondrous nature of human existence.

"Everyone has a great mission at birth. It is already unreasonable that we exist as who we are, where we are—none of which we chose. The ideal way of life is to recognize and accept this unreasonableness and embrace our destiny anew. If we are overwhelmed by fate, we may miss the gracious gifts hidden within the unreasonable and lose the opportunity to grow." (Dialogue with Ogawa Yoko)

This statement underscores the importance of receiving "what is graciously given" amidst the uncontrollable and unreasonable aspects of life.

When we accept what we've been given with gratitude, even when we cannot change our circumstances, we come to utilize these gifts in discovering and living out our destiny. We come to understand that what once seemed like coincidence was, in fact, inevitable—and we can step forward to take part in the unfolding of that destiny.

Konko Daijin's *Oboegaki*, beginning with the account of his birth, reveals how his life and path in faith were shaped by this understanding of being "sent." We now recognize this perspective as the essence of his life.

II. Sincerity and the Sincere and Caring Faith

As we reflect on Konkokyo—both in individual belief and institutional history—there must be a recurring theme beneath the surface of change. I would argue that this enduring theme is sincerity—a sincere and caring, or conscientious, faith.

1. The Sincere and Conscientious Faith – Reexamining Doctrinal Discussions

There was a time in Konkokyo studies when "sincere and conscientious faith" was considered central to understanding both the founder's character and the core doctrine. His sincere devotion to daily tasks, meticulous attention to avoiding inauspicious days or directions, and his humble apologies to Kami for even unintentional imperfections, were highlighted as key elements of his faith.

Doctrinally, phrases such as "interdependence" (*aiyo kakeyo*) and "Kami is Kami because of people, and people are people because of Kami" were understood as rooted in this sincere and conscientious relationship between people and Kami. This became an important guide for living a life of faith.

However, around 1975, scholars began to reexamine this view. In Japanese historical studies, researchers noted that the common people of early modern Japan practiced moral standards like diligence, frugality, and honesty—what was termed "conventional morality." Some historians argued that this moral discipline among ordinary people contributed to Japan's modernization. Therefore, what had been considered unique to Konko Daijin was now seen as part of a broader cultural ethic.

Moreover, while these values were important in an age when daily survival depended on personal discipline and effort, critics began to question whether such moralism remains effective in today's highly organized society. (See Yasumaru Yoshio's Modernization of Japan and People's Thought and "The Significance of the History of Religion in the History of Japanese Thought," Konko Kyoho, 1974.) Within Konkokyo itself, some began to argue that while "sincere and conscientious faith" characterized the first half of Konko Daijin's life, he later moved beyond this moralistic framework. As a result, the role of sincerity in shaping the image of the founder and the doctrine of Konkokyo remains a subject of evolving interpretation.

As Konkokyo at large, both ministers and believers were taught the faith in terms of "sincere and caring," and they hold it dear even today. Yet, the doctrinal position of Konkokyo, as expressed in its publications, undermines this characteristic. For example, the glossary of the Konkokyo Kyoten, Sacred Scriptures of Konkokyo, does not have the entry "sincere and conscientious faith," but instead includes "sincere and caring," which is defined as "a lifestyle that corresponds to Kami's wish by showing one's trustworthiness in every aspect of life and by making the best effort for people and Kami." Ten years after the Kyoten, Kami and People Living Together – The Outline of Konkokyo Faith (1993) was published with a concise dictionary, in which neither "sincere and conscientious faith" nor "sincere and caring" appears. And here we stand today.

Both faith and doctrine are conducted by people within particular historical contexts. If faith is incarnated among people, some aspects of the faith should not be firmly fixed but should be transformed in accordance with the generation. However, that does not mean that "sincere and conscientious faith" was merely a product of a temporary condition of society or denomination. I would like to investigate "sincere and conscientious faith" as the foundation of faith at the origin of Konko Daijin's spiritual journey.

2. Aspects of Sincerity

According to *Konko Daijin* – A Biography of the Founder, "sincerity" means to have an attentive and considerate heart, and "caring, conscientious" means to act diligently and meticulously. It is to have a considerate heart that becomes visible. This attitude of faith in Kami is called "sincere and conscientious faith" (p.132). This definition may be sufficient to give us the dictionary meaning, but we may feel that we are simply given the bare semantics of the words.

Though I have introduced some examples of sincere and conscientious faith through the image of the Founder, here I would like to examine some of the examples in more detail.

Firstly, it is said that Konko Daijin was a hard worker ever since he was a child. As a child, he worked hard to gather pine leaves for fuel used by the roof tile maker in the village, and according to tradition, he used the wages to visit a shrine. When he grew up to be a farmer, he became one of the top producers in the village.

Secondly, he was honest. Because of his honesty, he was highly trusted in the village and was entrusted with the task of guarding the village water channel or the embankment. He was also trusted to go on errands to the feudal lord on behalf of the village headman. This sincere and conscientious attitude led him to gain social credibility.

On his pilgrimage to the Eighty-eight Temples of Shikoku, he made sure to visit each temple personally, while the villagers who accompanied him may have worshipped from afar. The "sincere and conscientious faith"appeared as faithfulness. He was meticulous in choosing the day and direction for repeated building extensions. His intention was to avoid any misfortune, as building and then losing a family member almost became a cycle. So much so that, when he was turning 31 years old, he ended up buying double the amount of wood to ensure the materials were ready to build the storehouse on a particular day because the delivery of the wood he had ordered was delayed (*Oboegaki* 2-7). I was struck with the idea of building a storehouse southeast of my house. I decided to make it four meters by twelve meters with a one-meter overhang. I had a specialist check the Days and Directions, and he told me to hold the construction initiation ceremony on the auspicious date of December 18, 1843 (February 6, 1844). I was also to begin construction the following year on January 8 (February 25) and finish by the twenty-sixth (March 14). I ordered the wooden posts from Kishu (Wakayama Prefecture) through a man in Haguchi. However, the ship carrying the materials was delayed. Pressed for time, I was forced to purchase the posts in Tamashima. Thus, I was able to finish the construction on January 26. Kawate Yasukichi of Otani was the carpenter. (*Oboegaki* 2-7)

The true value of Konko Daijin's faith should be further recognized in his admission of discourtesy to Kami, when, critically ill at the age of 42, he took responsibility for more than Kami had pointed out.

Hence, "sincere and conscientious faith" was found in the different aspects of Konko Daijin, such as his natural characteristics, his attitude as an adult in society, his status of faith, and his faithfulness in the most difficult circumstances. What is common in each case

is to be steadfast without being carried away to the easier path, but rather disciplined to be useful and to aid people. He aimed to seek and refine to the utmost.

He never ceased to seek what is right, without any compromise. This attitude, based on his faith, could have been an essential element for surviving a society rapidly undergoing modernization. He may also have been driven by the anxiety from which he was trying to be free, in the midst of a series of deaths in his family.

This attitude involves an aspect that could regulate us with a sense of certain obligation. Or we may seek rewards from it, always keeping checks and balances. For example, we might think in the back of our minds that if we act sincerely and conscientiously, good things will happen to us. In fact, because we are trying to be conscientious, we may notice—and be unable to get over—what other people would not care about, and could end up burdening ourselves. In some cases, we might feel unrewarded and angry because we are trying to be sincere and conscientious. Such an occasion could be a touchstone of true sincerity. Even when we fail, we can take that as a starting step of faith. I would suggest thinking of it as the movement within our heart when we step forward truthfully, instead of focusing on whether we can "achieve" being sincere and conscientious.

We have a good example in the *Kyoten*.

Once, when I went to the Hiromae, Konko-Sama told me, "I believe that a person named Irie Kane of Shitabara, Kita no Shinchi belongs to your hiromae. She comes to worship here every day. Take this and give it to her." He gave me a Tenchi Kakitsuke.

When I got home, I checked the prayer record book and sure enough found her name. I asked her to come to my hiromae. When I conveyed Konko-Sama's words, she replied, "Since I am busy struggling to survive day to day, how can I go to worship every day? I always pray day and night hoping to see Konko-Sama's face for once in my life." "Now I understand. Your praying day and night is the same as going to worship at Konko-Sama's Hiromae every day," I imparted. *(GII: Shirakami, Shin'ichiro:4)*

This text teaches that our single-hearted prayer and sincere wish are heard by Kami/Konko Daijin, who receives them without fail. This person, in particular, even thought her wish to see Konko Daijin was too much to ask considering her state of life. She had only heard about Konko Daijin from Shirakami as he spoke about him often, and became curious about this Konko Daijin, whom her mentor adored as he did. The phrase, "for once in my life," reveals the essence of her faith. She could not help wishing to see him even though she had no warrant for her hope. What she wished for was greater than what she could do, but Shirakami accepted her daily prayer as genuine. The words of Shirakami at the end of the text are not so much addressed to her, but rather something he said to himself to remember what he had learned from her about the genuine attitude of worship.

One of the predecessors of this faith once said, "The true faith is the heart seeking more than one's best effort." This sense of compulsiveness is important, and it comes from one's deep sincerity (The Tale of FukuokaChurch [*the story of the third*]). It is a similar sense when

we say, “At least.” In contrast, the phrase, “There is no way,” shows the opposite mentality, and this small difference in attitude will lead to completely different results.

Doctrinally, the final goal of Konkokyo faith should be sought at the highest level of one’s devotion. The “sincerity” here, on the other hand, is a guideline to know what is necessary as a first step of faith without seeking the all-encompassing ideal. The core of sincerity is a genuine human heart: it could be described as an honest heart without any lie, a heart with contentment, a heart that cannot help serving Kami without being forced. It is the heart that moves people as well as the state of mind.

◇ “Sincerity” and “Sincere and Caring/Conscientious Faith”

In the *Kyoten*, we find three related phrases: “sincere and conscientious faith,” “sincerity and caring,” and “sincerity.” Among these, “sincerity” and “sincerity and caring” appear more frequently. The earliest appearance of these phrases in *Oboegaki* and *Oboe-cho* is from 1875, with most occurrences during the Meiji period. “Sincerity” is often used in the imperative mood, such as “Be sincere” or “Do it sincerely,” directed to everyone for the future. On the other hand, “sincere and conscientious faith” appears twice in *Oboegaki*:

- In the divine message of February 24, 1858: “Due to your sincere and caring faith in the kamis, you and your wife were spared.” (*Oboegaki* 6-9-8)
- In the divine call on October 21, 1859: “Many people like yourself who have sincere faith in Kamis.” (*Oboegaki* 9-3-6)

In both cases, the phrase is in the perfect tense, indicating that Kami has recognized the fact that Konko Daijin practiced sincere and conscientious faith.

In the 1858 divine message, which I will discuss further in the second lecture, Kami reminded Konko Daijin of the miseries his family had suffered and told him that he and his wife were spared because of his “sincere and conscientious faith.” This message has two sides: they were approved by Kami and granted life because of their sincere and conscientious faith, yet despite this faith, they still “made seven graves” (i.e., experienced loss).

These two sides help us appreciate Konko Daijin’s compassion for people in need of salvation, as Kami told him,“There are many people like yourself who have sincere faith in kamis but still have many problems. Help these people by performing toritsugi.” (*Oboegaki* 9-3-6)

Konko Daijin was a successful farmer, yet many others lost their land and became destitute. He witnessed such societal shifts firsthand, which is reflected in the meaning of “sincere and conscientious.” Considering this, we can imagine that “sincere and conscientious faith” for Konko Daijin carried a sense of regret—perhaps not realizing certain things when he was young despite his earnestness, or feeling he could have acted differently. At the same time, knowing that all that happened shaped who he was and that Kami helped him despite his weaknesses, he likely felt grateful and obliged, mingled with sorrow.

Though it may sound somewhat helpless, it is also true that gratitude mixed with bittersweet memories or sorrow nurtures strength with flexibility—a strength deep within our heart and soul that cannot be bent or broken.

3. "Sincerity" (*Jitsui*) in the Meiji Period

I will now examine how the concept of "sincerity," discussed in the previous section, appears in *Oboegaki* and *Oboe-cho* during the Meiji period, a later phase of the founder's life.

One way "sincerity" is used appears in these records:

> "Though people address the carpenter with honorifics, he and his wife have no sincerity." (December 11, 1871, *Oboe-cho* 15-13-2)
>
> "Kami-sama also revealed, 'Until now, Shojin (*Asakichi*) had deceived his parents and Me. From now on, he should always be sincere.'" (July 10 of the lunar calendar, 1874, *Oboe-cho* 18-11-6)

Kami revealed the acts of "lie" or "deception" committed by the head carpenter of shrine construction and by Asakichi, when the carpenter solicited donations from believers and Asakichi asked for money. Here, "sincerity" means honesty or integrity.

Another use of "sincerity" is found in this record:

> "You will always be happy. Don't fret over anything. Be sincere. There is nothing to fear or be frightened of. Don't run away from your problems, whatever they may be. There is no need to flee. Don't depend on others." (December 4, 1871, *Oboe-cho* 15-11-1)

Here, "sincerity" is required as an attitude to follow faith—that is, Konko Daijin should not worry, should not run away from problems, and should not depend on others, even when propagation was about to be prohibited.

◇ "Removal of the Altar Fixtures in 1873," an Incident in the 6th Year of the Meiji Period

It is important to discuss the use of the word "sincerity" in relation to the incident known as the "removal of the altar fixtures in 1873." I will examine this event in detail. In the winter of the 6th year of the Meiji period, Konko Daijin was ordered by the village chief magistrate to stop serving the *Hiromae* (the public worship service). (*Oboegaki* 21-3-8, *Oboe-cho* 17-3~9) In response, Konko Daijin removed all the altar fixtures and sat quietly in the room adjacent to the Worship Hall. Beginning from January 21 of the lunar calendar, he devoted about a month to praying to Kami and meditating alone. According to tradition, Konko Daijin's wife, Tose, taught worshipers on his behalf during this period while she was spinning thread. Many worshipers left disappointed because their requests for prayers or teachings from Konko Daijin were refused.

This incident felt as if Konko Daijin had been told that everything he had practiced for 14 years since the Divine Call was meaningless in society, and that he should desist. Nevertheless, during this month, Kami spoke to Konko Daijin, saying, "Take a rest," and also, "Konko, be reborn." Moreover, Kami revealed the prototype of the Divine Reminder, known as the *Tenchi Kakitsuke*.

Following this event, on February 22 of the lunar calendar, the village chief magistrate personally instructed that Konko Daijin was permitted to resume practicing *toritsugi* (the mediation prayer). The next day, Konko Daijin restored the altar fixtures and resumed service in the *Hiromae*. The entire incident was concluded by a message from Kami on February 24: "You have shown sincerity even to the government."

In addition to the detailed records in *Oboegaki* and *Oboe-cho*, there are two notes in *Oboe-cho* that summarize the key aspects of the incident. These notes describe the three days when Konko Daijin contemplated whether to resume serving the *Hiromae* after receiving the magistrate's personal instructions. During these three days, signs of new development appeared, as Konko Daijin recorded in *Oboe-cho*: "From February 22 (March 20), the problems began to be resolved." (*Oboe-cho* 17-7-1)

In the process leading to Konko Daijin's decision to resume his practice, there must have been deep reflection and repeated reconsideration as he sought to understand the situation fully.

Konko Daijin's faith could have been suppressed during the incident of the altar removal. Yet, even in such difficult circumstances, he maintained his belief and a resolute attitude toward the government. At the same time, he sought the best possible harmony with authority. This attitude is often emphasized. It reflects a single-minded dedication to a grand goal combined with meticulous attention to small details that lead toward that goal. Rev. TAKAHASHI Masao (1887–1965) said, "Small things are small. To value small things leads to something big." From an objective perspective, it is difficult to deny that the importance of small things differs from that of big things. However, by treating small things carefully, they can grow into "something big" that exceeds their initial magnitude. I believe that "sincerity" can be found in such a reversal—a situation made possible by action grounded in faith.

We should pay particular attention to Konko Daijin's attitude when the village chief magistrate permitted him to resume serving the Hiromae. The magistrate told him he could practice toritsugi secretly because government restrictions had somewhat relaxed. However, Konko Daijin refused to do so in secrecy. This surprised the magistrate, who, while confused, still urged Konko Daijin to resume toritsugi openly. Additionally, a Hiromae assistant offered, "If there's any problem, I will accept any penalties in your place." Konko Daijin also refused this offer, stating that his goal was to save people, and he did not want to cause trouble for anyone.

If Konko Daijin had been an ordinary person like us, he might have jumped at the magistrate's advice to resume toritsugi. Practicing toritsugi was very important, especially when propagation was about to be forbidden. Unlike us, who know the eventual outcome—

Hiromae service was resumed after a month of prohibition—Konko Daijin did not know what would happen next, how long the ban would last, or if it would ever end. He may have faced an indefinite period of suspension. That is why I admire Konko Daijin's modest attitude in not immediately resuming Hiromae service after the magistrate's advice. Considering the uncertainty of his situation, his modesty becomes even more valuable.

At last, Konko Daijin decided to resume Hiromae service, persuaded by the advice of people around him. This shows that he had a flexible mind. At the same time, we see in Konko Daijin's heart the thought that he would not immediately do whatever he wanted simply because he was allowed to. He was thoughtful and wished to avoid causing trouble for others. More importantly, he believed that action should not be taken merely because it was possible. In other words, something more important than mere capability existed. He believed that he must show respect to something greater and that he was supported by something significant.

◇ "Sincerity" (*Jitsui*) in Divine Messages in Konko Daijin's Later Years

Throughout *Oboe-cho*, various meanings of "sincerity" appear up to Konko Daijin's later years. I will discuss three cases where the word "sincerity" is used:

- Kami's teaching to abandon profit-oriented business operations.
- Kami's request for Konko Daijin's family to accept happenings as "divine dispatch."
- Konko Daijin's teaching to his daughter and son-in-law, who ran an inn for worshippers, advising them not to operate it as a typical profit-driven business.

As for the first case, Tomonoya Chozaemon, who ran a wholesaler of cotton and tatami mat covers in Kasaoka, came to the Hiromae to give thanks to Kami. After he left, Kami revealed:

"When he purchases tatami mat covers, he should check their quality well. He should not include medium-quality covers in high-quality bundles. He may put high-quality covers into medium-quality bundles. In any case, he should conduct business honestly. In the future, I will help him become a successful and respected person in Kasaoka. When Chozaemon's son comes to the Hiromae, give him this teaching." (June 24 of the lunar calendar in 1876, *Oboe-cho* 20-17-2~4)

Kami indicated that when classifying tatami mat covers as high, medium, and low quality, it is wrong to mix medium-quality covers into high-quality bundles, even by a single piece. Conversely, placing high-quality covers into medium-quality bundles is acceptable. Kami seems to emphasize honesty in quality and pricing in business. To "conduct business honestly"—that is, to practice "sincerity" in business—requires a mindset that does not hesitate to accept less profit.

The second case concerns Konko Daijin's family...

On January 1, 1881 (January 30), Kami-Sama revealed:

"From this year, your whole family is to reform their way of life. Your children should get along well together and live peacefully. I will see to it that everything goes well; therefore, your family is to be sincere and single-hearted. Change the crest by adding eight petals around the circled kanji for gold as a symbol for Hassho Konjin (Deity of the Eight Directions, i.e., Konjin)." (*Oboe-cho* 25-1)

The theme of this revelation is the reformation of the way of life of Konko Daijin's entire family. There is an implicit urgency, suggesting that Konko Daijin's death was approaching. Additionally, Kami instructs changing the family crest, symbolizing a new beginning. After this revelation, "*Oboe-cho*" frequently records Konko Daijin's concerns about the well-being of his children and grandchildren—covering health, childbirth, illness, death, growth, and future prospects. Kami's words, "I will see to it that everything goes well," can be understood as teaching Konko Daijin and his family to accept all events, favorable or not, as "divine dispatch." This means that all happenings are sent by God's will. Therefore, "to be sincere and single-hearted" here goes beyond diligence, honesty, and consideration; it calls for embracing every event as divine will and living accordingly.

There is another revelation that teaches "sincerity" more specifically to Konko Daijin's daughter and her husband:

"(On New Year's Day in 1883) At about ten o'clock in the morning on the twelfth (February 19), Tsunejiro came to give thanks. He received a teaching: 'Tsunejiro should not plant the rice like others since he is also managing an inn. If he operates his inn, he can help people. Helping people will help himself. He is to be sincere because his inn is different.'" (*Oboe-cho* 27-1-2)

This teaching was for Mr. FUJII Tsunejiro and Mrs. FUJII Kura, who cared for worshippers at their inn. The previous day was *Yarebou*, the celebration of the year's first rice plowing. Tsunejiro, recently recovered from illness, was encouraged by Kami not to worry about farming but to help others through his inn.

Legend says that Mr. and Mrs. FUJII had the house built by Konko Daijin's request and had been running the inn since about the 14th year of the Meiji period. Tsunejiro likely felt uncertain about this shift from farming to inn management, especially since the inn was not meant for profit. However, Kami instructed Mrs. Kura not to discriminate against "problem types or scum" among guests (*Oboe-cho* 25-5-1), calling on them "to be sincere" both as an attitude towards all people and as the motivation behind it. Here, "to be sincere" also means to follow Kami's wish: "If he operates his inn, he can help people. Helping people will help himself."

As discussed, realizing "sincerity" requires persistent effort and willpower. More importantly, it means discarding calculated, self-serving behavior and surrendering one's own way of doing things.

We recognize that achieving "sincerity" is not easy; this should keep us humble and free from arrogance. At the same time, we must not give up, resigning ourselves to failure as natural. Kami continually calls us "to be sincere," encouraging and supporting us. Ultimately,

having the sincere attitude—being willing to follow Kami's wish—is the first step of faith, regardless of whether full realization is immediately possible.

4. Being Broad-Minded at the Same Time Strict

Now, let me introduce my personal experience as a kind of behind-the-scenes story of what I have talked about up to here.

When I was a teenager, I was often told that sincere and caring faith *(jitsui-teinei kami-shinjin*) is the faith of Konkokyo. However, my image of sincerity (*jitsui*) was simply being diligent and making an effort to become better, and I didn't find that very attractive. I thought it was something I was already good at and could easily do. I now know this was a great misunderstanding, but at that time, I believed I was on the side of the "sincere" person, so I must be close to Konko Daijin's faith. I couldn't understand that there was a big difference between me and him, or how powerful his faith was. This state of mind basically did not change even after I graduated from Konkokyo seminary, and that made me focus on Kami rather than Konko Daijin in my research on Konkokyo theological studies.

The change took place around my 10th year at the Konkokyo Research Institution. It was shortly before I started my research work to reconsider the meaning of sincerity in Konko Daijin's faith. One of the causes was the following essay that I came across.

At a train station in a small South Indian city, starving children scramble for banana peels tossed from the windows of passing trains. Among them is a young boy cradling his baby sister, who appears to be about a year old. When a passenger hands him a banana, he peels it and gives her all the soft, edible part—mindful that her baby teeth have yet to fully grow in. As he gently feeds her, his face radiates a quiet, profound joy—an expression so pure it resembles religious ecstasy. I have only seen such a happy face a few times so far, though the strong sunlight might have contributed to how I felt. After he gave the last part of the banana to her, he eats only the peel and then runs again into the merciless struggle, pushing and kicking others. Gaki [a demon in Buddhism who is always hungry] could be Bosatsu [a Buddhist saint of mercy] as he is, and Bosatsu could be Gaki as he is, too. (MAKI, Yusuke. "The Origin of Ego")

When I read it for the first time, I got teary imagining their feelings—I am easily moved to tears by nature, and besides, my wife had just had a baby then. These were not tears of sadness or pity, but mixed feelings in which I wondered if I could do the same thing as him, being full of joy without any grudging in the same situation.

A few years later, this memory—an impressive episode for me—came back in relation to my research about Konko Daijin's sincerity. The boy's behavior, which was not regulated by any code of conduct and was based on genuine feeling and a heart filled with joy, shook my notions about sincerity. I felt as if I were being challenged by him, whom I know neither name, face, nor whether he was living or dead, about whether I could reach the answer. I began to suspect that the boy was more sincere than I was, and then I gradually realized that sincerity was not what I had thought it was. Once the meaning of sincerity changed, Konko

Daijin's faith came to look different, and the distance between me and Konko Daijin changed, too. I realized I was not sincere in the true meaning; in contrast, Konko Daijin's sincerity was so virtuous that it was difficult for us to acquire. However, at the same time, it seemed to be calling and inciting us to try. In this way, I came to feel Konko Daijin was both close to me and far from me, strict but generous, and unapproachable yet as if he were embracing me. After I experienced that and got a feel for it, I became aware that there are often similar cases in the faith of Konkokyo.

One such example is an anecdote I heard when I was a Konkokyo Seminary student. According to it, a Director of Konkokyo Seminary happened to see a student littering a cigarette, and then he uttered, "Your ashtray is very big!" Of course, the conduct of the student was unworthy of a Seminary student; however, the remark did not blame him. Instead, it made his eyes turn to Heaven and Earth and led him to look at himself objectively from the viewpoint of something larger. That made me feel there is a broad-minded person who shows us an expanse of the world, and that there truly is a faith. However, at the same time, the remark was not only generous but seemed to contain some strictness, asking him, "Are you big enough compared to your ashtray?" "Which one is bigger: the one who litters a cigarette, or the one who tolerates and receives it?" Maybe I think too much, but it seems that something worthy of deep reflection dwells in the words of faith, the words of Heaven and Earth. Also, such words that imply the depth and broadness of faith, in which strictness and generosity coexist, remind me of Konko Daijin and his faith, who said to "be gentle by nature," and "have great dignity but not be overbearing" (*Gorikai*Ⅲ:2-9).

Ⅲ. *Oboegaki*, Again

In the first section, I talked about Konko Daijin's birth based on the text of Oboegaki. From here, I'd like to think about the meaning of Oboegaki, which began to be written with the birth of Konko Daijin and follows his life like a biography. It includes some abstract and longitudinal analysis, so it may not be easy to understand, but I crave your gracious patience to the end because it is an approach to a deeper understanding of the teaching: "I write faith with the kanji characters for kami and man" (*Gorikai* I KONDO Fujimori 66), and think about that based on Konko Daijin's faith and the Oboegaki upon which it was written.
[The word "faith" is shin-jin in Japanese, and the kanji characters for "kami" and "person" can be pronounced as shin and jin.]

◇Writing Begins with the Story of the Birth

Although the idea to write about the events from Konko Daijin's birth is mentioned at the beginning of *Oboegaki*, the actual message ordering this was revealed on October 15, 1874. In the *Oboegaki* article dated that day, the instructions about what to write are described as follows:

On the morning of October 15 (November 23), Kami-Sama instructed,
"Write the memoirs of Konko Daijin (*Oboegaki*), who has established a hiromae here. Write about the time you were born, what your parents told you, the events after you joined this family, and other recollections.
Write about the fears you had regarding Konjin and the Directions, the apologies you made for your irreverences, and your practicing of faith in various kamis." (*Oboegaki* 22-10)

Let's compare these points with the relevant parts of the text. Regarding "the time you were born" and "what your parents told you," we see descriptions of Konko Daijin's birth and childhood at the beginning (*Oboegaki* 1-2, 3), as I mentioned earlier in today's lecture. Next, the adoption and "events after you joined this family" are recorded (*Oboegaki* 1-4 and onward). Regarding "the fears you had about Konjin and the Directions," it is written that when Konko Daijin got married, the bride took an alternate route to his house because the direction was ominous (*Oboegaki* 2-2-2). Also, various constructions and family situations are detailed (*Oboegaki* 2-3 through 7, 9, and 11 through 22). For "the apologies" he made for irreverence, these appear in the construction episode at age 37 (*Oboegaki* 2-20) and during his severe illness in 1855 (*Oboegaki* 3-1 through 8). Regarding his "practicing of faith in various kamis," some might assume this refers to his later years, but since the word "kamis" is plural, it is thought to refer to the faith practiced before his special relationship with Konjin began. This corresponds to the episode where he worshipped at shrines "on three days each month; on the first, the fifteenth, and the twenty-eighth" (*Oboegaki* 3-9) from after his illness until 1856.
By sorting it out this way, we find that the matters ordered to be written in *Oboegaki* occurred earlier than those in *Oboe-cho*. Moreover, these mostly cover events before Konko Daijin's serious illness in 1855, except for the brief note about the thrice-monthly worships. In other words, almost only events up to and including his serious illness were newly added in *Oboegaki*.

◇ The Significance of Konko Daijin's Serious Illness at 42 Years Old

The importance of the episode of Konko Daijin's serious illness in *Oboegaki* is also expressed in Kami's monologue:

> "As I write up to this point, I am filled with deep emotion.
> Then Kami-Sama encouraged, 'Konko Daijin, these deep emotions are not only your own. If I, Tenchi Kane No Kami, were a poet, I would express these emotions through poetry. However, I am incapable of doing so. I am overjoyed, and even overcome with emotion to see how man has been able to be saved and how Kami has been able to be realized. Continue with your writing.'"(*Oboegaki* 3-6)

Here, while writing about his illness, Konko Daijin and Kami share joy at seeing "how man has been able to be saved and how Kami has been able to be realized." This shows that the illness episode is seen not just as a recovery but as the origin of human salvation and

Kami's joy in *Oboegaki*. In contrast, the first request from Kami in October 1857 is regarded as the beginning of *Oboe-cho*.

What is this origin? It is the event of Konko Daijin's life being saved and his first experience of Kami's will through Jiro Furukawa, who was possessed by Kami. Especially important is that this was the first time he was advised to examine the Days and Directions, which later appeared in the 1873 Message of Divine Will (Meiji 6). Considering this and the Message beginning with "I, Tenchi Kane No Kami…," the episode can be seen as a crucial moment for Kami's realization in history, as Tenchi Kane No Kami was freed from being regarded as the divinity of Day and Direction.

This can also be seen by comparing *Oboe-cho* and *Oboegaki*. *Oboe-cho*'s cover has the divine name " Nittenshi Gattenshi Ushitora Hitsujisaru KIMON KANE NO KAMI DAIMYOJIN," and it states that Konko Daijin received blessings from Him. In contrast, *Oboegaki* traces the prehistory of the relationship between Konko Daijin and Kami back to his birth. This prehistory is for the human Konko Daijin but also marks Kami's process to reach the state of "man has been able to be saved" and "Kami has been able to be realized."

◇ "Biography" Different from the General Meaning

Regarding the significance of *Oboegaki* for both Kami and Konko Daijin, our predecessor TAKAHASHI Masao already pointed out:

> "Konko Daijin' is not only the biography of the Founder. It is the biography of Kami. It is a record of how Kami was born and how Kami's working is developing." *(Kyohou*, June 1.1958)

This was part of a lecture at the Kanto district ministers' meeting in 1958. The "Konko Daijin" here refers to the biography of the Founder published in 1953. It means that the biography is about both the Founder and Kami, intertwining the faith history of Konko Daijin with Kami's history as Tenchi Kane No Kami.

Similarly, the religious scholar Araki Michio wrote:

"A dual process is realized through the life of Konko Daijin: one side is the self-actualization of Kami through Konko Daijin's life, and the other is the self-actualization of Konko Daijin as the realization of Kami and the way of Kami." ("*Konko Daijin On-Oboe-gaki*" and "*Oshirase-Goto Oboe-Cho*" As A Religious Autobiography — Their Meanings in the History of Religions, Journal of the Konkokyo Research Institute, 23)

Though expressed academically, this idea agrees with Takahashi's point: the biography has two aspects — one, the story of a person who encounters Kami, is guided by Kami, and becomes the Founder by reviewing his life; and two, the story of Kami who guides Konko Daijin and appears in the world to realize His Will. These two aspects are different sides of the same coin.

◇New Fetal Movements of Kami and Human

Now then, let's review this indication based on the text of *Oboegaki*. This will be detailed in the next lecture, but the circumstance of Konko Daijin receiving forgiveness after accepting Kami's accusation of irreverence at the point of his serious illness corresponds to the situation of all human beings, which was pointed out as "people only examine the Days and Directions and commit irreverences" (*Oboegaki* 21-21-4) in the Message of Divine Will in 1873. Also, I think the context of the message about the ancestors of Konko Daijin and his misfortunes on December 24, 1858 (*Oboegaki* 6-9) can be said to be correlative to the phrase in the Message in 1873: "encounter hardships due to their accumulated offenses" (*Oboegaki* 21-21-4), in the sense that it tells about the relevancy between irreverence and misfortunes and the workings of Kami hiding behind them.

In other words, *Oboegaki* can be considered as the story in which the following two processes progress simultaneously: the process of the divinity which has gradually revealed itself through the history of the life of Konko Daijin as a person and comes to be expressed in the message in 1873, and the process of the divinity which was expressed in 1873 and comes to appear in the history which is traced back by the birth of Konko Daijin. And in *Oboegaki*, this story is written as the life of Konko Daijin.

It may seem like I'm saying the same thing again, but let me emphasize the important point: it can be said that *Oboegaki* describes the story of the birth of Kami and human beginning with the birth of Konko Daijin, as the experience of Kami as well as the experience of Konko Daijin.

Konko Daijin taught that "I pray to Tenchi Kane No Kami. He is a kami that has existed since the beginning of time. He did not appear in the middle of history. He is not a fad. He is here to stay. Even if you don't practice faith, you have already received His divine blessings" (*Gorikai* I: ICHIMURA Mitsugoro Vol.1:2.1).

That kami has come to appear with the name and the divinity of Tenchi Kane No Kami. A kami who was as good as not existing for people in spite of the fact that He had existed from ancient times appears. In that sense, it could be said that Kami is born, or Konko Daijin conceives Kami. We can see the significance of *Oboegaki* beginning with the episode of Konko Daijin's birth, and it connotes the significance of the birth of Konko Daijin.