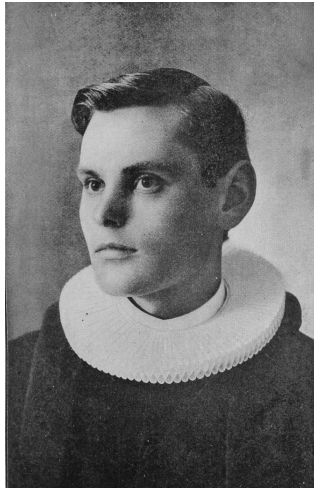


# Winther and The Japan Mission of “The United Danish Lutheran Church in America”

Christian M. Hermansen

*It was on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1898, that a young Dane landed in Japan for the purpose of investigating whether the isles of Japan might not be more suited for Danes than the continent of China. Several years previous some warm-hearted Danes in the Danish part of Schleswig had banded together to send one of their own number to China to do work for the Lord there. Less than four years in Central China had however sufficed to break down his health so that he had to go home again to recuperate. When better he started again for China, but had then along as a younger co-laborer a teacher. It was decided to go by way of America in order to give the younger man a chance to learn some English. While there the elder man broke down again so that it was found wiser not to let him go further. The young man was then asked to go alone to which he consented on condition that he was allowed to frequent the Danish Lutheran Seminary in Blair before starting. Accordingly*



**Rev. J. M. T. Winther (Peery 1900)**

*he studied there and was also ordained by that Church shortly before he started in 1898.*

*Owing to some misunderstanding no money reached the young man for several months after he reached Japan, and when it came he had already learned so much of the language, that he thought it would be wrong to waste it, especially as he had become acquainted with Dr. Peery and seen how much need there was for Lutheran work in Japan.*

*Two years of close cooperation with that excellent missionary served as the best possible introduction to independent work which was started in Kurume in 1901. As the work grew and demanded larger and larger sums of money, the personal friends who stood behind the missionary found that it exceeded their anticipations and also their abilities. But the friends which the young man had gained while in the Danish Seminary in Blair were ready to aid him with ever increasing amounts, and finally after direct correspondence with the old friends in Schleswig it was decided at the annual convention in 1903 to take over the work altogether, and send out the first Lutheran woman missionary, Miss. Ella Johnson, who remained in the field until 1906 when loss of hearing made it necessary for her to return to America.*

*As the first native worker the Rev. T. Yonemura deserves a large place in any review of the work however brief it be. He has for almost 20 years labored with devotion hard to equal and with success seldom paralleled. Personal contact with him during the year the young Dane stayed in Tokyo was the reason why he came and devoted his life to the work of Lutheran Church which last year gave him the well deserved honor of electing him as President.*

*During the 20 years the work has been carried on incessantly in Kurume. In 1909 work was started in Hide, a large town 28 miles into the interior, East of Kurume. In 1910 the United Danish Church sent out Rev. J.P. Nielsen to carry on the work in Kurume, as the first missionary had been appointed to wake up*

*work in the new theological seminary started in Kumamoto. In 1915 work was started in the two important cities Moji and Shimonoseki, and in 1917 in Amaki. The four workers stationed in these places were all young men won in Kurume and trained in the Seminary at Kumamoto, the three oldest of them were ordained in 1918 and one of them sent to America in 1920 to prepare for theological work at the Seminary. In 1916 the last recruit from the Danish Church, Rev. D.G.M. Bach, was sent out and after a little while stationed in the Moji-Shimonoseki district.*

*At the time of the merger nearly 300 Japanese had received baptism thru ministrations of the workers connected with the United Danish Evangelical Church of America. (Letter 1921, 4562)<sup>1)</sup>*

Thus summarized J. M. T. Winther in English the short version of the mission to Japan organized by the United Danish Lutheran Church of America in 1921. It was not the first time nor would it be the last he told that story. “The young man” appearing in the first line is none but Winther himself. Brief as the tale is, one get a good impression of his style and talent for storytelling – using captivating details to create vivid images but moving fast-forward when it serves the story better.

Here it is clear that Winther arrived in Japan on 7 September 1898. Not mentioned are intermissions necessitated by illness (5 May 1906–18 Oct. 08), two furloughs (2 Apr 1921 to 3 Mar 1928; 24 Apr 1935–23 Oct 1936) and World War II (left 8 Apr 1941, returned in 30 Mar 1950)<sup>2)</sup>. Of course, in 1921, he could not know the length or the existence of the last three items, nor that he would otherwise stay in Japan and work till he died

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1) The pagination is Winther’s and though not always consistent, it is most helpful wherefore I include it here and in the article as such.

2) Dates as listed in W’s letter to Paul Winemiller, 4 December 1966. (GL 6200)

in Kobe on 2 March 1970. But it is clear from other sources that no matter the length, he all the time wished to do so.

I am currently doing a research on Danish Christian mission in Japan in order to find the details on the individual missionary, his / her board, his / her field of work, and as far as possible a feedback from people who knew them and learned or worked with them (cf. Hermansen 2012). This article will focus on some of these aspects in the case of Winther by looking into details mentioned in the history above. An overview of sources so far identified is followed by a short outline of Lutherans in Japan, before turning to the history of Winther, his personal background and that of the United Danish Lutheran Church in America, his work in Japan and the importance of *information* of which the history above is a part.

## **Materials and Sources for the Research**

Central to any study on Winther will be the written materials he left behind. Most of it is currently in the archives of Kobe Lutheran Bible Institute and Seminary. That material includes a set of his diary, family and business letters, pocket notebooks, a birthday calendar and some photographs plus manuscripts for his scholarly publications.

The diary is probably complete in the sense that all entries written are compiled and bound, but does not cover all his life. The first volume begins on 1896 July 21. Before the first entry is a note to the reader, “Please, handle this book carefully, as I wish it to be kept for the future. Kindly send it to Sören Kr Th Winther / Brejning pr. Ringköbing.”<sup>3)</sup> In other

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3) “Denne Bog bedes haandteret med Varsomhed da den ønskes opbevaret til Fremtiden. / Den bedes sendt / Til / Sören Kr Th Winther / Brejning pr Ringköbing.” (Diary 1896, unpaginated page). For the sake of space, I shall

words, never certain when the end might befall him, Winther took his precautions, so that others might read his personal story. Probably for that same reason, he later copied the first volume with a few editorial corrections, and both editions were written in a beautiful, legible hand.<sup>4)</sup> Even within the first year, came the first lacunas around June 1897. Later, in the third volume begun on 1898 March 1, p. 169 has an entry from 1899 February 18. On page, 170, the first entry is dated 1906 May 16. It says,

*More than seven years and not a word herein. Why? Life became monotone, not much to write about, and besides my letter writing took all the time I could spare on writing. Letters to journals like "Danskeren" (The Dane), "Dansk Luthersk Kirkeblad" (Danish Lutheran Church Magazine), "De Unges Blad" (Magazine for the Young) and "Missionsvenner" (Mission Friends) besides letters to friends and my parents in particular in which I have described everything private and public in details, so why repeat it here? Especially since I now make carbon copies of all my letters, it is useless. But now?*

There are things he will like to be able to reflect on in the future that may be of little interest to others, he goes on (Diary 1898, p. 170). So his purpose of keeping a diary had changed considerably compared to 10 years earlier.<sup>5)</sup>

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refrain from rendering all quotes in Danish along with my English translation.

- 4) The two editions differ in size and length. The older, smaller and, shorter was bought in Denmark's western port town, Esbjerg, whereas the newer was bought somewhere in the US. The first edition ends on 1897 September 10, while the second goes on till 1897 October 1. Both contain memorabilia from later ages, a board game from the Russo-Japanese War, for instance, which would testify to them having been read by Winther.
- 5) The quoted entry makes it clear that Winther wanted to share his life; the diary was a means as were the letters. The two media complemented each other. 1898

The second long lacuna comes between 1908 August 1 and 1927 October 21, the day he started his third journey from Denmark to Japan. From 1927, he kept the diary very faithfully. All pages were typed, and, as he had done with his letters since 1903 earlier, he carbon copied the diary and sent the copies to his children and parents.<sup>6)</sup> Not all pages are easily read, for Winther obviously saved as much as he could by exhausting the carbon.

Thus the letters in the Kobe archive are most important for filling in the gaps of the diary, and they do so to a large extent. Unfortunately what exists is the carbon copies, and the oldest is from 1903, wherefore the four years between the 1899-02-18 diary entry and this letter are mostly undocumented. Besides, some of the copies are almost illegible, as the ink has gone. Winther has classified them as family letters and business letters and paginated them accordingly in some periods.

There is a deplorable lack of letters from the period between his second return to Denmark in 1921 and his third journey to Japan at the end of 1927. He had left Japan on an indeterminate furlough, in order for his three children to get an education, and for six years, he worked as a pastor in a couple of Danish congregations on the Danish west coast. He stayed in contact with Japan, and in 1925 organized a tour for and guided the also then world famous Japanese Christian leader, Kagawa Toyohiko.<sup>7)</sup> Winther specifically refers to a correspondence he had with Kagawa in preparation of the visit, so I have searched for it but so far found nothing, not in his

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Apr. 13 says Winther had not had time to keep the diary and refers to a letter to his parents (CB 93-104) for details (Diary 1898, p. 19)

6) I owe this information to pastor Laurids Breum Jakobsen, private correspondence. Pastor Jakobsen has authored a dissertation on Winther's theology, submitted to and approved by the Department of Theology, University of Aarhus, Denmark (1986).

7) For details on this visit, see Hermansen 2014.

archives in Kobe, not in Kagawa's in Tokyo, not in his Danish parish church.

Also lacking in his archives are the letters he received, except from the last 10 years or so of his life. From a practical point of view this is quite understandable, but like listening to a person speaking on the phone, the listener, here the reader, often is left with several blanks to fill in by imagination.

In the US are at least two archives of relevance to the study of Winther and the Lutheran church in Japan. One is the Archive of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America located in Elk Grove Village near Chicago, Illinois. Mergers of Lutheran churches have made it the current resting place for what is left of formal correspondence between the church organizations and missionaries, including The United Danish Lutheran Church of America. The other archive is the Danish American Archive and Library in Blair, Nebraska. This town used to house the Dana College and seminary Winther graduated from in 1898, but as the institution's name reveals it houses much material from Danish-Americans as such, including friends and supporters of Winther.

## **History of the Lutherans in Japan**

### **United Synod, South**

For all we know, individuals belonging to a Lutheran church in the US or Europe may have been coming to Japan since the Dutch established its trading post there in the early 1600s. At least one Dane, Martin Spangberg, came in 1738, 1739, 1742 in service of Russia's zar (Nagashima 2003, 66-98). Even more likely was it the some came after the diplomatic policies of Japan opened up to countries aside from Korea, Ryukyu and The

Netherlands in 1854. Yet, none of them seem to have established a church let alone started a mission to the Japanese. That, at least, was the conclusion drawn by Rev. Robert B. Peery in 1899 (Peery 1900, vii-x). He and his wife were the second missionary couple sent by the (Lutheran) United Synod, South,<sup>8)</sup> the first being Rev. James A. B. Scherer and his wife, who began proselytization in Saga, Kyushu, in 1892. The Synod had begun preparing a Japan mission in 1887, following an investigation that concluded, “it will cost no more to send a missionary to Japan than it costs to send one to India” and “there are not any Lutheran missionaries [in Japan]” (Huddle, 67). Due to illness, the Scherers had to return to the US in 1897. The following year, Rev. Charles L. Brown and his wife arrived to take up work together with the Peerys. At that time, a small group of Japanese Lutherans had been established in Saga, and outreaches to surrounding areas started as well (cf. Peery 1900 and Huddle 1958, 65–85). That same year arrived J.M.T. Winther, sent by a Danish Lutheran Mission Society in Schleswig, Germany.

### **The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America**

In the early 1870s, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark had sent pastors to serve the Danish emigrants. The pastors were predominantly liberal Grundtvigians, and some emigrants of a more conservative persuasion decided to start their own fellowship (The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Society in America) in 1884 while yet others did a similar thing in 1894 (The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in

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8) “The United Synod [of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the] South was formed in 1886 by the union of the General Synod, South, the Holston Synod and the Tennessee Synod” (Huddle, p. 66). The three synods mentioned shared in a German ancestry and geo-political location in the Southern States of the USA, North - and South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. (Wikipedia)



North America). On 30 September 1896 began the “unification meeting” (foreningsmøde) between the two bodies in Minneapolis.<sup>9)</sup>

“23 September At the request of Rev. Hansen, I wrote a Unification Hymn (Foreningsssalme) to used at the meeting in Minneapolis” (Diary 1896, p. 21). The hymn was published in 500 copies and used at the end of the meeting’s first day (Diary 1896 September 30, p. 56)<sup>10)</sup>. It had six verses to be sung with Martin Luther’s tune to “A Mighty Fortress is our God”. It prayed for God’s protection of the unity that Satan constantly tries to split. Verse six:

*As You have led us hitherto / Through days now left behind us / In future days  
You will us lead / Your power is almighty / In You, oh God, we will / “United”  
stand as one / “Evangelic” gospel we / Press to uncharted goals / a “Lutheran  
Church” forever.<sup>11)</sup>*

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- 9) Diary 1896, pp. 32-106 (Sep. 30 – Oct. 4) have all the details of the meeting, including several speeches in extensor by key persons. The summary of the church situation is based on Jensen 1970. For more discussion of the differences between Grundtvigian and Inner Mission, see below.
- 10) Later, in his self-biographic sketch of 1958, he recounted the story: “By the way, on my way to the [unification] meeting I had met Rev. G.B. Christiansen, who later became well-known as the Church’ chairman and coordinator for more than 25 year, and I believe the first Danish pastor in America to become Knight of Dannebrog. Having heard I authored songs, he tested me: in two hours I had to write a hymn using the melody “A Mighty Fortress is our God”; it should have six verses, and had to include the name of the two bodies about to be united and the name of the new united church. My “hymn” was written, accepted, printed and actually sung when the unification had been completed.” (Winther 1958, 12). This is not quite in tune with his own diary notes more than 60 years earlier, and the hymn could not possibly have had the new name, yet to be decided at the moment of writing it. But it sounds good.
- 11) The Diary 1896 has two copies of the hymn stuck into it. Here, I quote from Bishop Edward A. Hansen’s English translation of the first volume of the diary, in which he also includes the hymn. I would render the last five lines differently:



**United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1 October 1896. J. M. T. Winter sitting no. 6 from our left in the second front row.**

He signed the hymn “J. M. T. Winther, Kina Missionær” (Missionary to China).

The new church body felt itself obliged by “the great commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 and so from the beginning had four missions: Indremissionen (Inner Mission to the estimated 350.000 Danes in America); Indianermissionen (the Native Americans); Mormonermissionen (particularly Danish believers of the Mormon church); Jødemissionen (Jews) were reported on in the Second Annual Report 1898 (AR 1898, 16-20). In mission as in business the money often reveal the level of

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“By You, oh God, we thus / “United” standing will / On “Evangelic” ground! / Till the end of the world / A genuine “Lutheran Church!” (Ved Dig, o Gud, vi saa / “Forenet” ville staa / Paa “Evangelisk” Grund! / Til Verdens sidste Stund / En ægte “Luthersk Kirke!”) The major differences in our translations are in the last two lines, in particular the rendering of “ægte,” which means “true, real, genuine” etc. I think, Winther wanted to emphasize the new church body had this quality in contrast to other bodies that label themselves “Lutheran”.

commitment. The financial statement of 1898 lists the expenses as can be seen in table 1 (AR 1898, 40).

4 / 9 were spent on mission and most of that money went to mission among Danes, native Americans got about seven percent and mission to India slightly more than four percent.

Six years later, in 1904, when the mission to Japan had been an official program for a year, the annual financial statement gives the following figures for donations to the various mission projects: Inner mission (\$2824.24); Mission to the Indians (\$889.88); Mission to the Mormons (\$469.65); Mission to Japan (\$1632.12); various missions (\$89.24), thus indicating a comparatively strong commitment to the activities in Japan (AR 1904, 16). It must be mentioned that the total worth of donations that year amounted to \$68521.60 of which \$43000 were for the 97 pastors' salaries (on average \$443)<sup>12)</sup>.

The Annual Report of 1904 also informs the reader that the UDELCA accepted to send the next missionary to Japan, Søster Ella Johnson, who left on 25 October 1903 for Japan. Her title as "søster" (sister) could indicate she was ordained perhaps Deaconess?<sup>13)</sup> Her work was to be in the

**Table 1. UDELCA' expenses 1898**

Purpose	1898
The Society's inner mission	\$ 3110.11
Teachers' salaries	\$ 1942.50
Loan and interests	\$ 2354.04
Various	\$ 965.91
Mission to the Indians	\$ 618.70
Suffering Armenians	\$ 79.52
Santal mission [India]	\$ 300.75
Mission to the Jews	\$ 3.00
Tamul mission [India]	\$ 3.00
Inner mission in Denmark	\$ 3.00
Total	\$ 9395.58

12) I do not have the figures for mission expenses of that year, but they were undoubtedly higher.

13) Some churches call their members sisters and brothers, but that does not seem to have been the case in UDELCA publications.

Kindergartens and among women, which she did satisfyingly, but health problems forced her to return to the US and resign from her commitments in 1905.

Returning to the situation in October 1896, the UDELCA accepted Winther as a student at its school in Elk Horn, Iowa, and later at Trinity Seminary in Blair, Nebraska. He was classified as an outsider of the society, because he was supported by a different Danish group, but otherwise treated as everybody else. The Annual Report specifically mentions that he was training to become a missionary to China (AR 1898, 41). Though he had only been studying for two years, he graduated from the third year in May 1898 with 94 points (of 100), the best of the four that year.<sup>14)</sup>

## **Winther's Tale**

Jens Mikael Thøgersen Winther was born in Opsund, Brejning Parish near Ringkøbing on 25 October 1874, the son of small-scale peasant Søren Kristian Thøgersen Winther and Kirsten Marie Jensen. Both parents were born into relative affluence in a richer part of Jutland, but when they were forced to make a choice between staying or following their religious commitment, they chose the latter, never to return to their parents' homes. This may sound puzzling so here are a few facts about Denmark in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

1864 was a dramatic year in other parts of the world as well. In

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14) The records of the UDELCA Theological Seminary has these grades for Winther: Old Testament Exegesis 95; New Testament Exegesis 94; Isagogics 92; Dogmatic 96; Ethics 87; Church history 95; Homiletics 96. This record was kindly retrieved for me by Ms. Nancy Carroll, Wartburg Seminary and ELCA Region 5 Archivist Wartburg Theological Seminary, received 10 Sep. 2013.

Denmark, it was traumatic. Up till then, the country had for centuries covered the land between Skagerrak, the sea between Norway and Denmark to the north, and Eider River running through Hamburg to the south. The southern half of the territory was split into the Duchy of Schleswig and the Duchy of Holstein. In 1848–50 the two duchies had unsuccessfully attempted to fight for separation from Denmark. The peace treaty following this the First Schleswig War gave them some autonomy, so whereas the remaining Denmark abolished the absolute monarchy, the Duchies continued an aristocratic rule. When Denmark attempted to force through a higher degree of democracy in 1863, the Duchies sought and obtained support from a Prussian–Austrian alliance, and in the Second Schleswig War of 1864 Denmark lost much of her most prosperous possessions. Winther’s uncle was wounded beyond full recovery, and his father lost his hearing on the right ear, when hit by an irate German soldier for disobedience (Winther 1948, 28).

In his *Denmaaruko koku no monogatari* (The Story of Denmark), Uchimura Kanzō described the country’s recovery after 1864 was partially achieved through a reforestation of the southwestern part of Jutland. The soil of that area was a sandy, very low quality heath. During the latest ice age 18000 years ago, the said area had been free of the ice cover, wherefore melting water from the ice had washed away most minerals in the upper layer. Human cultivation had extracted much of what the icewater left, and deforestation had worsened the situation. To make it useful fields, the peasants had to plow deeper than one meter, a seriously hard work in an age of few mechanical tools, especially for the poorest peasants. To prevent the wind from blowing too much soil away on the mostly flat stretches, fast-growing fir were planted along the sides of the fields.

Though Søren Winther (1 April 1845 – 2 March 1920) had been

destined to inherit his father's farm, he happened to get acquainted with a preacher of The Danish Inner Mission in his neighborhood, the poor small-scale peasant Peter Madsen (1831–1876) in Hinge village.<sup>15)</sup>

The Church Society for Inner Mission in Denmark (IM) was a revival movement started in various places in the 1850s as a reaction to what people considered a bureaucratic faithless state church. It was partially inspired by such critique voiced by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), in part by similar revival movements in Europe. The organization that survives till today was started on 17 September 1853. For many years, between 1861 and 1901, it was strongly influenced by pastor Vilhelm Beck (1829–1901). It was and still is characterized by a literal reading and fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. In Denmark, and apparently among the Danes in the US, IM is often juxtaposed with the line of theology that traces its roots to another Danish pastor N.F.S. Grundtvig (1782–1872), who was not without conflicts with the state church, but who exerted an extraordinary influence on Danish church and education. By its critics, IM is characterized as dark and destructive of human freedom, while the Grundtvig line is seen as light (enlightening) and liberating. Strong proponents of IM like Winther see the Grundtvig line as light (not serious) and faithless.<sup>16)</sup>

Søren Winther began to help Peter Hansen from Hinge in his work, first by singing his songs, later by preaching as well. It brought him into conflict with his family, and as a consequence in 1873 he moved with his newly wedded wife into the meager heath on Jutland's west coast. Once

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15) On Peter Madsen Hinge, see Jørgensen 2011.

16) Even in 2014, many Danish parishes have two pastors where one will serve the Grundtvig line and the other the IM line. The dichotomy has been a source of inspiration among Danish artists.

there, he joined the even more conservative Lutheran Mission Society.

Winther's mother Kirsten Marie Jensdatter (5 October 1850 - 17 February 1932), like his father, exerted a strong, recognized influence on his life. From he was very young, she apparently told him to go and preach the gospel to the heathens (Winther 1950; Winther 1958, 6).

For most of his biography, Winther himself is the only source we have, wherefore it is difficult to verify many of his claims especially those regarding his younger years. He claimed to be able to read before he was five. It is hard to know for sure, but we know that though he only went to the local elementary school, with classes mostly in the winter, when the teacher was not busy with his farm, he managed well to learn Danish and arithmetic - the teacher is said to have a hard time teaching him the more advanced levels of the latter (Winther, C. 1971, 50-52). He had of poor health till he reached 14, so his father was hesitant to invest in Winther's higher education at the risk of loosing it by his early death. Instead, he got him a job with a local dairy, and in a few years he gained strength through the hard physical work. Winther claimed he could lift and carry 125 kg in each hand (Winther 1958, 8) an impossibility. His brother, in an obituary, gave the figure of 80 pounds, i. e., about 40 kg, in each hand, still impressive but not impossible (Winther, C. 1971, 53). While working and maturing physically, he also wrote hymns and stories published in Christian papers in Denmark and Norway. At the age of 19, he studied at a winter school for teachers, Staby Vinterlærerseminarium.<sup>17)</sup> He got a job and his pupils liked his teaching (Winther, C 1971, 54).

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17) A Japanese edition of his biography (Kyūshū Gakuin 2012, 37), has misunderstood, the nature of this seminary, “ウインターはスタービー神学校を卒業すると (when Winther graduated from Staby School of Theological)”. The biographer has clearly relied on Peery (1900, 88) who referred to a, “School Teachers' Seminary” in his entry about Winter.

However, at one point that year, 1895, he felt lost (depressed?) and in his darkness asked God to show a path of return to a life in light and joy, even foreign mission, if God so wished, and instantly he felt relieved and convinced about God's plans for him (Winther 1958, 9). This trust in God's intentions remained fundamental throughout his life, logically leading to a life in prayer and reflections in a wish to stay tuned with those intentions.

Shortly after that night of enlightenment he received an invitation from a mission body. In 1958, Winther argued, his foreign mission hymns, first commissioned by a local pastor, later missionary to India, William Nielsen, had caused this first contact from that Danish Lutheran Mission society in Ballum, Schleswig, because its missionary to China, Frederik Nielsen called Lydum, liked to sing them (Winther 1958, 10). In 1915, he wrote, "I believe it was via the Danish Mission Society's missionary in India, Rev. Wm. Nielsen the friends up there first heard of the boy from west-Jutland who longed to go overseas. Anyway, he was invited for a visit to southern-Jutland (Winther 1915, 22)." The sequence is perhaps irrelevant, but the 1958 version has become the "authorized" version, quoted for instance by Prof. Nabetani in his Winther biography (1974, 38). It literally sounds better, and more romantic, when humans are connected via hymns and it also emphasizes Winther's talent on one side and can be interpreted as God's providence on the other, whereas the 1915 version is more down to earth, with a clearer human factor involved the way we often connect through somebody who knows somebody. One could also imagine, a connection existed between the Lutheran Mission in southern-Jutland and the one in Winther's area, where his parents were active from the beginning, but none has been mentioned in the material so far checked.

I have searched for a description and records of the Lutheran Mission Society in Ballum, but even the Danish Lutheran Mission's archives do not



have any, I have been informed. The pieces of information we have are: Its postal address was Ballum, Husum, Slesvig – Ballum today being a small village literally on the coast of Jutland, due west of Tønder. The society's leader was Thyge M. Thygesen at least since sometime in the 1890s, for Winther later addressed his correspondence to him.<sup>18)</sup> Mr. Thygesen was married to Margrethe, ne Hansen (Jakobsen 2011). Margrethe was one of three sisters, her siblings being Karen who had married Rev. Niels Hansen and lived in the US, and Andrea (17 July 1871–18 July 1949), who later married Winther.

Their mother had died in 1878 and when their father died in 1882 Andrea Hansen moved in with relatives in the village of Nørre Farup near Ribe town in Denmark. In 1892, she donated half her inheritance to sponsor Frederik Nielsen Lydum as missionary to China. In 1893, she moved to her sister and brother-in-law in California and 1896–99 trained as a nurse at Augustana Hospital, Chicago (Winther, nd.).<sup>19)</sup>

Missionary Lydum had returned to Denmark after four years in China. Exactly what had made him ill is not clear, Christian Winther speculates that he had malaria (Winther, C 1971, 55); another option would have been stress from loneliness – Winther 1915 (22) mentions that Lydum got married while back in Denmark, and that he requested an assistant before returning to China; that they were three travelling together from Esbjerg to the US is clearly noted in Winther's diary (1896, p. 10, 11), but not evident in his 1921-account or later. Mrs. Helene Lydum disappeared from the

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18) Diary 1896, 16 (15 August), has "I wrote a letter to Thygesen". At the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting 1903 of UDELCA, when Winther was adopted as the Church's missionary, the meeting had a letter of acceptance from the Lutheran Mission society in Ballum, signed by its leader, T.M. Thygesen (AR 1903, 19).

19) Some of her letters mostly from her years of nurse training are preserved in DAAB and will be examined in a subsequent article.

story, for no obvious reason. What IS evident in the diary is the fact that Lydum and Winther held different values. Winther seems not to have agreed with Lydum's decision to change their third class tickets to second class on the ships between Denmark and the UK and the one to the US (Diary 1896, p. 15: August 8), because he wanted to thrift the money they were entrusted with, I suppose.

### **The first period in the USA.**

In the US, Rev. N. Hansen became a most important contacts. He had moved from California to Jamestown, Kansas, where Winther was invited to stay for some time. He provided Winther with opportunities to train English, preach on various occasions, encouraged him to write the unification hymn, and the chance to get to know his sister-in-law, Andrea Hansen.<sup>20)</sup> He later accompanied Andrea to Japan, and officiated her wedding to Winther in Kamakura on 1 September 1899.

Among his teachers at UDELCA's schools first in Elk Horn, Iowa then in Blair, Nebraska Winther got particularly close to and was inspired by Professor Peter Sørensen Vig (1854-1929).<sup>21)</sup> There are careful records of speeches by Vig in Winther's diary, and long study notes in a separate volume for that purpose.

Winther was ordained at the UDELCA Annual Meeting in Greenville, Michigan (AR 1898, 86) in 1898. As part of the ceremony, the candidates read their vitae, later included in the annual report. Winther mentioned that after being adopted as missionary for the Danish group, "It had

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20) Winther first declared his feelings for Andrea in a letter of 15 Jan. 1898, but was turned down in a letter of 5 Feb. 1898 (Diary 1897, p. 75, 88). The waiting was a very stressful period for Winther.

21) Biographic details on Vig can be found in Den Store Danske, s.v. Peter S. Vig.

decided that I should seek a place for mission in Japan, because the climate there was assumed to be more healthy for Danes.” (AR 1898, 98).<sup>22)</sup> He would later recall that Vilhelm Beck, the charismatic leader of the Danish Inner Mission, personally had approved his ordination, “likely the only pastor in that situation” (Winther 1958, 13).<sup>23)</sup>

### **Winther in Japan**

*Owing to some misunderstanding no money reached the young man for several months after he reached Japan, and when it came he had already learned so much of the language, that he thought it would be wrong to waste it, especially as he had become acquainted with Dr. Peery and seen how much need there was for Lutheran work in Japan.*

This section of Winther’s tale comes in several versions over the years. The first part about money arriving late is constant in all of them, but some go on to tell that he only had money for the first part of the journey to China

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22) “Samtidig bestemtes det, at jeg skulle søge mig en Missionsplads i Japan, da man antog, at Klimaet der var sundere for Danske.” Jensen 1970 (2) refers to the same source but has it that the sending body “left it up to him, if he would rather prefer to go to Japan, because the climate there was more suitable to Danes than in China.” Winther’s brother recounted the situation “[The sending body] knew Chinese to be a difficult language and had heard it might be easier to start a work in Japan, because all the so-called “educated classes” knew English – not a reality though – but in the end, my brother was told to go to Japan and examine the conditions there, and, if found too difficult, continue to China (Winther, C. 1971, 55). Both Jensen and Christian Winther thus saw a more open ended solution than voiced by Winther. Peery, writing in 1899, noted “It soon became evident that he [Lydum] could not return to China, and the mission [Lutheran Missionary Society in West Slesvig, Germany] then decided to send Mr. Winther to Japan” (88).

23) So far unverified, though I have searched for correspondence in DAAL and asked at The Inner Mission’s Archives in Denmark.

(Jakobsen 2011). In an earlier of his own versions, Winther wrote that he had already spent eight months studying the language before he got money to investigate the situation outside the capital, a fact others might call a coincidence but the author felt certain was the guidance of God (Winther 1915, 24-25); and in the later 1958-version, his commitment to Japan came one night, when he realized that he was able to understand and translate into Danish or English a sermon he heard in Japanese – the very next day, he was invited to come back to serve the mission to the Mormons in Utah, but he felt God’s guidance in his experience. “When the awaited money came in May, enabling me to go to China, I had not the least doubt that Japan was my field” (Winther 1958, 15, Nabetani 1974, 70-72).

It is naturally impossible to cover all places, persons, and events of importance to Winther and his mission during his first 23 years in Japan. The 1915-report on “Our Japan Mission” divides the time between 1898 and 1915 into four parts: the beginning (1898-1901), the first period of work (1901-1905), the period of disappointments, (1905-07) and the second period of work (1908-1915). They could be headlined “Language and Saga”, “Converts and Kurume”, “Illness and Denmark,” and “Education and Kumamoto”. 1915-1921 was a continuation of the second period, but with added issues of worries about the children’s education and the formal unification of missionary work carried out by UDELCA and the United Synod, South.

In Japan, Winther’s most important locations were first Tokyo, then Northern Kyushu, where he and his family lived and worked in many places, and Karuizawa, Nagano Pref., where he had a cottage to rest during the summers and network with missionaries from other places in Japan.

Outside Japan, the US with his mission and many contacts, along with Denmark and Schleswig were directly important to him. In a wider

perspective, regional political movements, including Japan's war with Russia, 1904–1905 and the First World War 1914–1918 also influenced his work. At one level the wars changed the Japanese attitude towards Christianity; for instance, they would ask why a presumably Christian part of the world would kill people of its own faith, and see WWI as evidence of the hypocrisy and failure of Christianity – quite a challenge for Winther to address; at another level WWI made contacts with family and friends in Schleswig, as a part of the German Enemy, difficult. Both wars put a strain on the economy for Winther, the church and Japan.

In Winther's report of 1915, some of the Japanese to appear early on are Yonemura, Kiuchi, and Inadomi. Only the first of them is mentioned also in the shorter English 1921-version, testifying to his importance, but that does not mean the others were not.

Yonemura Tsunekichi (米村 常吉 18 Apr. 1862–5 Mar. 1940) and his wife accepted Winther as resident in their home, shortly after he arrived in Japan, and helped him in other ways as well. Yonemura was affiliated with a Scottish Presbyterian Church at that time, but after it withdrew from Japan in 1900, he was unemployed and then accepted Winther's call to come to Saga in Kyushu and assist him building the congregation in Kurume. He was then ordained pastor of the Lutheran Church in 1901 (Winther 1915b). It may be a coincidence, but as Winther left for Denmark in 1921, Yonemura moved on to start a congregation in Kyoto in 1922; that same year he became the vice-president of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and remained so throughout the 1920s (Tokuzen 2004, 249). The two families remained friends.<sup>24)</sup>

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24) In 1935, Winther passed through Kyoto and stayed with Yonemura for the 21 April Easter Sunday service. It happened to be the last he celebrated with that congregation, as he had decided to start a second congregation in the northern

Mr. Kiuchi was a judge in Kurume, and one of the first contacts for Winther in the town. He ended up becoming the first to receive baptism from Winther on 16 March 1902, and remained a support of the church till he died two years later (Winter 1915, 32-33).

Dr. Inadomi Hajime (稲富肇 1893-1955), became a front figure of JELC in America. A local American paper introduced him with lots of praise in 1940: "An outstanding Lutheran leader in Japan, Dr. Inadomi came to this country from the Kyushu Gakuin boys' school of which he served as principal. When he was 7 years of age he was brought by his father to a Danish missionary. The father said, "Please make a good man out of this naughty boy." Seven years later, the boy was baptized in the Christian faith. Dr. Inadomi was educated in Lutheran schools in the United States and, when he returned to this country recently, he was awarded a doctor of divinity degree by Roanoke college of Virginia in recognition of his religious services in Japan. He is a national committeeman of the Japanese Y. M. C. A. and has taken a keen interest in translating Christian literature into his native tongue." (Oshkosh 1940). The brief details of Dr. Inadomi service at Kyushu Gakuin, the Lutheran School in Kumamoto, are: it lasted 1922-1946, as chaplain 1925-1933, president and chairperson of the board 1933-1946 (Kyūshū Gakuin 1912, 1081). The current president, Prof. Uchimura Kimiharu has said of Inadomi:

On the path professor Inadomi Hajime walked, he shouldered a heavy cross.

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part of Kyoto (Diary 1935, 292). Records of JELC show that the new group prospered. After World War 2, the northern group moved to a new location and was renamed Japan Evangelical Lutheran Kamogawa Church. On the passing away of Yonemura, see Diary 1940 Mar 5.

It was very hard to keep up a Christian school during the war years. In those days he would frantically pray and ask God ... how can I protect the school, the students, and the graduates. Professor Inadomi lived through the most harsh and unforgiving times in our school's history, but he felt every individual to be a precious human being, and like Professor Tōyama the first principal he treasured every student like “a sheep” (Uchimura 2006).

Nevertheless, complying with the GHQ's purge of wartime leaders and accepting responsibility for his loyalty during the war, Inadomi resigned after the war, and went on to be a pastor of a church in Osaka (Kyūshū Gakuin 2012, 583–584)<sup>25</sup>).

Unnamed but influencing the work of Winther and any other missionary were those who resisted and actively protested against Christianity. Especially in the early years, they are part of the tale, whether they shouted outside or threw stones inside the preaching chapels set up along roadsides, or if they refused to rent out houses to the missionaries for whatever reasons (Peery 1900, 26). The story of how he ultimately found a house in Kurume he was allowed to rent, only because it was in a poor condition and known to be haunted – not even prostitutes would stay there for a whole night – was one of Winther's favorites. Haunted or not, in September 1901 the Winthers moved into lot no 81, Kushihara chō, Kurume (Kurume Kyōkaishi Hensan Inkai; 1981, 30).

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25) In this text, Mrs. Inadomi Iyo is quoted from her recollections of the situation in 1945, as published in *Kono takara wo tsuchi no utsuwa ni*, a tribute to Inadomi Hajime. She remembers him saying, “*shikamo ooku no wakamono wo senshi saseta watakushi ga*” しかも多くの若者を戦死させた私が、“and, I, who forced so many young people to die in the war” (Kyūshū Gakuin 2012, 584, cf. Inadomi 1966, 359).





even more people. He trusted God would help and utterly resisted the idea of taking the break other missionaries did when they went on furloughs after five or seven years in the field. Perhaps it was God's interference, perhaps simply stress that wore him down; in 1906 his weight had decreased from over 92 kilogram to 58 (Winther 1958, 19). In order to recover Winther left Japan, first going to the US, but after a stay at a Chicago hospital, the situation was unchanged – he just could not resist preaching a few places on a Sunday, though the doctor had ordained rest – he and his family boarded a ship for Europe and ultimately Denmark. He later wrote, the very day he got on that ship, his appetite returned and he soon began to gain weight (Winther 1958, 19).

In Denmark he tried to persuade the board of the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) to support his work in Japan. He claimed to have the consent of everybody, except the general secretary who vetoed the idea out of the conviction that a diversification of commitment would endanger the mission's ongoing work in China. During 1907, Winther went alone to the US for fundraising and to agitate for sending more missionaries to Japan, and for opening a school. One result was the recruitment of Jørgen Peter Nielsen and his wife who arrived in Japan in 1909. Another result was UDELCA decision to formalize cooperation with the United Synod, South, and The General Council in its Japan mission, including the projected school and theological seminary in Kumamoto under leadership of missionary Brown, the United Synod, South (Huddle 1956, 102). Like the mission boards had made their agreement in Roanoke, Virginia in July 1910, so the missionaries did in Kumamoto in December the same year.

According to Huddle, Winther, having returned to Japan in 1909, soon moved to Kumamoto to teach at the theological course together with the missionaries Brown and Stirewalt and the Japanese pastor Yamanouchi

Naomaru (Huddle 1956, 101). Only four students were enrolled and death prevented one of them from graduating (see Letters, Breve fra Japan no. XXVIII, XXIX and XXX on the funeral of Imai), but the work was believed to be crucial for the building of the church. Later, “The theological school was conducted at the middle school as a department – – “Kyushu Gakuin Shingakubu”” (Huddle 1956, 104). The middle school itself was for boys, and enrolled two hundred and five for two classes in its first year 1911 with Charles L Brown its chair of board and Professor Tōyama Saburō (遠山參良 1866–1932) its president (Kyūshū Gakuin 2012, 1081; figure cf. Huddle 1956, 104).

1911 was not exactly a turning point for Winther, but he would later refer to a visit in that year as most important to him. A well-known Danish theologian of the Inner Mission persuasion and author, Carl Skovgaard-Petersen, was preparing himself to head The Danish Bible School in Copenhagen, scheduled to start in 1912 (Holt 1961, 655). In part to do so, he made a tour around the world, specifically to study other religions by meeting the “best men” (Skovgaard-Petersen 1911). Winther had studied his theology with Professor Vig in 1897 and met him in Denmark during his furlough, which may be why he was contacted and asked to organize Skovgaard-Petersen’s stay in Japan (Winther 1958, 21–22). He later remembered the journey had taken six weeks (Winther 1958, 21), but in June 1911 he wrote to his sister Helene, referring to the trip, that, “I almost think, I have learned more in these three weeks than otherwise in three years.” (Letter 19 June 1911, 2661). The amount of time notwithstanding, it gave him an opportunity to meet many leaders of religions in Japan and confidence in his self-studies of theology and other subjects, because Skovgaard-Petersen encouraged Winther to come to Denmark and get a degree in Theology, remarking that he easily could pass

the formal examination. “This had the opposite effect on me; I did not want a diploma, I wanted more knowledge, better overview and deeper insights” (Winther 1958, 22).

1911 also was the year the church in Kurume could inaugurate its first regular church building. The congregation had consolidated itself in the absence of its missionary, much to the pleasure of Winther.

Though the work both at hand and at the distance thus seems to have progressed satisfyingly, life kept posing challenges for the Winther family. In his letters from 1915 and onwards, Winther repeatedly asked for help with the education of his children. Until that time, Andrea had been homeschooling all three, but Nellie demanded more than her mother could give her. The Winthers could see three options; to send the children to a boarding school, to take them back to Denmark, or to have a private teacher. For a long time, Winther tried to persuade his brother Christian to come, and he applied for financial support from his board, and some years of his brother’s life. It did not work out. Then, Nellie was sent to an American boarding school in Shanghai in 1915. After one year she came back to Japan. Her father wrote her approximately once a week, and during the first months of 1916, he got more and more firm that she could not continue, because the economy was getting worse. Consequently, they planned to send the two daughters to the Canadian Academy in Kobe, which just then had opened up for missionary children outside the Canadian Methodist Mission (Letter to his parents, 6 July 1916, I-VIII). This, too, was not cheap, but more affordable than Shanghai. The children were to board with “a respectable elderly couple, J.C.C. Newton. We have known each other for many year, and like each other not a little” (IV).

The board in the US, and apparently other missionaries around him, believed it advisable for Winthers to go to Denmark on a furlough. He did

not agree and wrote many letters against the idea, but ultimately the family of five went. The alternative to Denmark had been the US, but to get schooling for the children there they would have had to become US citizens, which the parents did not desire then (Winther 1958, 23).

Let us end this part by observing that while Winther had his personal struggles with the board, and possibly fellow missionaries, the organization of JELC continued to develop, and so did the cooperation between the missions. In summary of Huddle's longer explanation: 1918, several Lutheran groups in the US created the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA); two of them had mission in Japan but had been working together for a decade, so it was easy to unify that work and the UDELCA agreed to join them in that respect. The UDELCA would continue to call, send and finance missionaries to "its field" in Kurume and vicinities but would do so via the mission board of the ULCA. In 1919, the ULCA came up with a proposal for Mission and Church in Japan, and this led to The First Convention of the Lutheran Church in Japan in 1920. It was an important step towards Japanese leadership and responsibility for the church (Huddle 1956, 116-121).

## **Information**

The rather detailed recount of Winther's life so far has been possible because he wrote so much. The risk here is, as stated above, that one has to rely on his version almost exclusively. Finding sources to verify his stories or fill in the blanks is not easy. In a few instances, we have found discrepancies across time that we may attribute to either slips of memory or a wish to dramatize a bit here and there and tell a good story.

His talent for telling stories cannot be doubted. It attracted people to

the Good News he wanted to share. It persuaded donors to contribute to the Christening of Japan. It not only informed readers in Schleswig, Denmark, Norway, Japan and the US about the situation of the church and the people in Japan his letters helped strenghten mission organizations in those areas.<sup>26)</sup>

The reader of his diary will soon be drawn into his tale, if the reader likes details. Sometimes this particular kind of writing can be hard to follow when information he took for given are skipped – I am still searching for a Pastor Birkelund, whom he visited in Chicago on the 30 May 1898 (Diary 1898, p. 29–30); Birkelund is of interest, because he was Winther’s informant on Japan, and could have been the country fellow from whom Winther expected a letter of introduction after he arrived in Yokohama but never got.<sup>27)</sup>

Winther’s writings connected him to many people. I have not yet found the important private letters he sent home between 1896 and 1903, so much information is unknown to me, but at least many of the public letters have been printed and thus preserved. Like other missionary writings, they were sources for the target groups’ of understanding of the situation, if biased by the observer’s intentions. Rarely did the political world enter the picture Winther drew of Japan. He made an exception when he wrote “De Sidste Ti Aar I Japan” [The last ten years in Japan], first published in *Nordisk Missionstidsskrift*, 1915, vols. 1–4 (Winther 1915c).

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26) I heard this from the archivist of Lutheran Mission in Denmark, and it can be deduced from the amount of letters and stories of his published in the magazines of UDELCA. In the years he was in Denmark in the 1920s, Japan was only thinly present in the Annual Reports of UDELCA.

27) Birkelund aside, W’s Japan information came from books including [Albert Benjamin] Simpson [1893] *Larger Outlook on Missionary Lands* (Diary 1897, p. 88 (1898 Feb 6)), and “Things Japanese” by Basil Hall Chamberlain.

The book successfully summarizes the political conditions for Christianity in Japan, and demonstrates Winther's good sense of details. Unlike the absoluteness of the word of God, no human being is considered perfect, wherefore his portraits of leading politicians and illustrious Christians are not pure glorifications. Whereas he could be very critical of other denominations' Christian qualities in his diary, in *The Last Ten Years* he emphasizes the developments towards a higher degree of interdenominational cooperation though the groups can never be unified. He addresses a number of occasions where official Japan has shown a more favorable attitude towards Christianity. On describing gatherings of celebration of the first 50 years of mission, he discusses the role of and Japanese Christians' critique of the missionaries, and concludes that after all, most Christians acknowledge the positive effects of their work. The last part of the book is dedicated to recently dead personalities starting with eight Japanese Christians or people who have had a significant influence of Christianity in Japan, then continuing with eight foreigners of a similar importance. In both groups is included one woman.<sup>28)</sup>

The change in attitude towards other denominations, could have come around thanks to Winther's involvement in organizational work for missionaries. He contributed to the interdenominational Japan Christian Yearbook for a number of years, and he organized a summer seminary in Karuizawa, where many, like him, had a summer cottage. One year, for instance, he invited Uchimura Kanzō, even if they disagreed on the need for missionaries and what a church should be like (Letter to Uchimura, 30

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28) I find his balance of native and foreign workers important and suppose he wanted thereby to demonstrate an achievement of the missionwork. Equally important is his conscious inclusion of women. Perry (1900) had also mentioned them, but confined the description to one page of 191 pages.

June 1913).

## Conclusion

The preceding has been intended to give some impressions of Jens Mikael Thøgersen Winther. A God-fearing, strong willed, largely autodidact Dane, very dedicated to sharing the Word of God with everybody but with the Japanese in particular once he got to know them. He was most concerned with following God's will. His diary witnessed his struggle to empty his head of self to have it filled with God (Diary 1898, p. 20: Apr. 28). He once wrote an apology to a Danish count, visiting Korea and Japan, for not showing up as promised, because a young man with spiritual needs had come to Winther (Letter to Count Moltke, 9 July 1909, 2072-2074).

I have not discussed his theology because that requires more studies on my part, but he was proud of being a conservative Christian. As such he was in principle intolerant of other interpretations, but as I have argued, he softened a little at the end of his first 23 years in the field and was at least prepared to hear others out if unwilling to accept their positions.

Reading Winther's tale is fascinating. Despite holes and missing information, when read in the context of the histories of local culture, be it Denmark, the US or Japan, his anthropological observations, reflections and comments from his stand point of Christianity help us better understand him and his age.

We know now that he would sometimes improve a story. This naturally leads to a critical reading, but checking the facts in *The Last Ten Years of Japan* against what I learned to be facts of 1915, for instance, has convinced me that Winther had a principle wish to convey the truth, as he knew it to be.

Words written by Winther proved to be connecting; more than merely informing they literally and spiritually moved people. I have not tried to introduce or transmit the humor in translating his texts; it is often understated and a bit dry, characteristic of people of West Jutland in my experience. How he translated it into Japanese, I do not know. On the other hand, expressions of thanks to him by Japanese both in the past and the present demonstrate that his love for the people showed and was perceived by them.

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DAAL: Danish American Archive and Library

ELCAA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in American Archives

KLBIS: Kobe Lutheran Bible Institute and Seminary

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