

## Danish Missionary Society in Japan, Part 1: 1955-1963

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*Hvidovre, 16 July 1956*

*Dear Reverend Rendtorff! Dansk Missionsblad of 25 May 1956 announces that D.M.S. wants to send missionaries to Japan, when somebody reports ready to go. My wife and I report ourselves for the job. Since May, we have carefully been considering whether we ought to or not. Now, we have found the courage. We are aware, of course, that D.M.S. may not be able to use us, especially for health reasons. But we want to give it a try. The idea of going into the mission field is not new to us. It has been with us and stirred us for years.*

Thus begins the application from Ove and Fritzie Bartholdy. DMS was The Danish Missionary Society, founded in 1821 and the biggest missionary organization in Denmark up until its merger with The Danish Santal Mission in 2000 resulted in a new organization, Danmission. DMS' monthly *Dansk Missionsblad* had reported the board's decision of April 1956 to commence work in Japan. The Bartholdys were the first to apply and the first to be sent to the new field. Ove Bartholdy's application ended, "*Should the medical examination prove us unfit, we will understand this as God's guidance.*" This was not meant prophetic, but health became an issue later.

The idea of working in Japan had been deliberated by the DMS board since

1889. Every time, it had been rejected for the lack of resources. What caused the change of policy in the mid-1950s? An outline of the answer starts off an examination of motivations and intentions of the DMS in Japan and those of its first missionaries.

## **DMS and why (not) Japan**

The following summary and discussion is indebted to Rev. Harald Nielsen with whose permission I quote from his forthcoming study on the policies of DMS, section 9.5.9 “Japan” (Nielsen 2019). I have made the English translation of quotations from this and any other Danish source.

In 1889, The Danish Missionary Society worked in India but was considering alternatives including southern Madagascar, Japan and northern China (Nielsen 2019: 9.5.9.1). Although the chairperson, Rev. A. V. Holm, recommended Japan, in 1891 North-China was chosen at the request of a majority of the board enthusiastically backed by Rev. Vilhelm Beck, leader of The Church Association for the Inner Mission in Denmark (Danish: Kirkelig Forening for den Indre Mission i Danmark), (DMS Bestyrelsesmøde Protokol [Board Minutes], 1891, 24 June, cf. Nielsen 2019, footnote 3). In 1907, DMS was asked for support of Japan’s Lutheran Church by Rev. J. M. T. Winther. The first Danish missionary to Japan, Winther and his work had been supported by a Danish Lutheran Mission society and The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (UDELCA) since 1898. In collaboration with other Lutheran missions from the US and Finland and local Japanese he helped building up the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) (cf. Hermansen 2011, 2013, 2017). The next step was establishing a pastors’ seminary, so when Winther went on furlough in 1906, one of his tasks in Denmark was to solicit the help of DMS. He later claimed that he persuaded all the members of the DMS board to support his request, but that the general secretary Rev. Ludvig Løgstrup strongly had rejected the whole idea; “he nearly *cursed* me never again to voice the issue, which he firmly believed

would provoke a split or at the very least so much resistance that a war would hardly be inevitable” (Winther 1 August 1951)<sup>1</sup>. Experience told Løgstrup that enthusiasm for a new field did not always convert into the funds necessary for the commitment (Nielsen 2019), and dividing the funds at hand among more projects was not an option he could endorse. In February 1908, another disagreement regarding Japan resulted in a split between the board and Løgstrup, who then decided to step down (cf. Løgstrup 7 July 1908). Meanwhile, Winther and his colleagues raised enough funds for both a seminary, opened in 1909, and a secondary school for boys that opened in 1911. Winther did not forget DMS. In 1951, he conveyed the decision by JELC to encourage the Danes to follow the trend that had seen many missionaries relocate from China to Japan; “From a mundane perspective they do so, because the doors of China have been closed. But I think Our Lord has seen the great need for genuine evangelical workers here in Japan, and the wide-open doors we see everywhere, and therefore that He is behind this development” (Winther 1 August 1951). The chairperson of DMS, S. H. Sørensen, promised to look into the request, though the economic situation and other commitments made him less than optimistic (Sørensen to Winther, 15 August 1951). The board discussed the matter in September and decided to have Rev. Kaj Olsen go to Norway for negotiations with the Norwegian Missionary Society (Det Norske Misjonsselskap NMS) and The Norwegian Lutheran Cooperation (Det Norske Lutherske Misjonssamband, NLM), already active in Japan. In the minutes, general secretary Rev. Conrad Rendtorff noted, “Also when it comes to Japan, the board finds it impossible to commence a new work there, while the possibility of sending a few of our former China-missionaries will be examined” (BP, 1951, 10-11 September, p. 390, DMS/RA, cf. Nielsen 2019, fn. 8). Although backers of DMS encouraged the organization to reconsider, Rendtorff replied that provided “our friends will see us through the year without a deficit,” the board would reconsider. However, again

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1 August 1951 from J.M.T. Winther to the chair of DMS, S.H. Sørensen (Winther Letters)

in 1952, a request of support for the establishment of an International Christian University in Japan had to be turned down (cf. Nielsen 2019, fn. 14). Three years later, in 1955, the board believed the time was up for a new commitment, and examined the options of both Ethiopia, at the recommendation of the Lutheran World Federation, and Japan, at the encouragement of Winther and JELC. The secretary general of the NLM had advised DMS that Japan was the strategic point for Christian mission of the age, and that a field on Shikoku was ready and open to the Danes (Nielsen 2019, 9.5.9.2). The board decided to send Rendtorff to investigate the situation in Japan.

Here it is worth noting if Rendtorff negotiated with Japan following the principles of partnership with independent churches as established in 1947 at the Conference of International Missionary Council (IMC) in Whitby. These principles were further worked out in 1952 at the IMC conference in Willingen. They emphasized that church formation was no longer the priority of mission, opposing the decision in Tambaram 1938. In Willingen, it was acknowledged that mission was to be built on a dialogue that respected cultures and religions as equal, because the mission was not a mission of the church but the mission of God (*missio Dei*) (Nielsen 2019, 9.5.9.2).

These observations are important to our story, because some of the managers of DMS were involved in the work of the said conferences particularly the future general secretary for overseas missionaries Rev. Erik W. Nielsen, who was the research secretary for IMC, 1950 to 1959 (cf. Nielsen 2012).

It turned out that the Norwegians and Winther had no intention of following the said principles, and neither did Rendtorff apparently, for in his report to the general assembly of DMS in 1956, he told his audiences that *the fields are ripe for harvesting*, that the Lutheran missions wanted DMS to initiate work on Shikoku Island, and that the mission of DMS would be focused on church-building (Nielsen 2019, 9.5.9.2).

Evidently, DMS planned to work with the other missions rather than the local church and a letter of 18 December 1956 from Rendtorff to Rev. George Olson, Augustana Mission, USA, made it clear that the Danes wanted a field of their own (cf. Nielsen 2019, fn. 24). The board decided to commence work in Japan and send missionaries to Shikoku, as soon as possible (BP, 1956, 11.-12. april, p. 63, DMS/RA, cf. Nielsen, fn. 25). As mentioned above, the board announced its decision in *Dansk Missionsblad* of 25 May 1956.

### **The first DMS missionaries**

DMS' first missionaries to Japan were Ove (1929-2008) and Fritzie (1932-) Bartholdy and Karl Emil (1928-2017) and Ellen (1928-) Melchiorson. In the history of DMS they are only mentioned as having been there, but, for reasons to be discussed, with little success. Ove B. had passed away before I commenced this study, so his voice is only preserved in his writings. In 2014, the remaining three agreed to meet with me for interviews. I wanted to learn their motivations for doing mission in Japan and their experiences.

Fritzie Bartholdy (Interviewed 25 April 2014)

“Ove and I were the first missionaries sent by DMS to Japan. It became our fate to face all the problems and mistakes made in the beginning. Frankly speaking, sending us to Japan wasn't really well prepared, to say the least.”

Fritzie Bartholdy, née Jacobsen, was born and raised in Copenhagen. She graduated from high school as a *nysproglig*, i.e., majoring in modern languages, but the economic situation of her home had her relent her dream of going to a teachers' college. Instead, she married her high school love, Ove Bartholdy, and worked as a secretary while he finished his theological studies. Fritzie's father was an IM missionary, in particular serving the drivers of taxis and trucks in Copenhagen. He would hand out tracts and hold Bible groups at home. His own conversion as a young adult had convinced him that everybody should have a similarly strong experience.

“I never felt myself to be a sufficiently firm Christian and so had no intention of becoming a missionary.” Ove’s father was George Bartholdy, a renowned pastor of Elias Church in Copenhagen. “In the mind of my father-in-law, to become a bishop was good but to become an overseas missionary was better.” The sister of Ove had married pastor Thorkild Græsholt and they were DMS missionaries to India. “My husband was attracted to the idea of being a missionary in Japan. ‘Forget about it,’ I told him, ‘I can’t go and tell anyone *my faith is better than yours.*’ He wouldn’t listen, and eventually we went.” The couple was examined by DMS.

FB: This is where I felt the most let down by DMS. They never asked my opinion about anything. A few days before the commissioning, the chairman S. O. Sørensen did ask me, if I had a call. ‘No,’ I answered, ‘I don’t, and I am very much against going to Japan. But things have been decided, so we are leaving.’

Sørensen then told Fritzie that without a call, she did not qualify for the blessings for missionaries. She felt let down and never forgot that decision. “So, we ended up being three years in Japan, and my husband was ill most of the time. The strange part is that a medical doctor on the board of DMS knew Ove had been hospitalized with ulcer, so he ought to have known it would not be wise to send him. Perhaps the name Bartholdy in itself qualified and made him ignore the fact? I don’t know.”

FB: We did not know much about Japan before take-off. In preparation, Ove contacted Harry Thomsen (Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists) in Kyoto. DMS deserves praise for letting me join Ove and study English with him in England for half-a-year. Later in Japan, I met Norwegian missionary wives who had not been given a similar chance and they could not see the doctor on their own. Ove also studied things Japanese, so when we returned from England he

toured Denmark to tell about Japan, though he had yet to see the country for himself. In Kobe, I attended a Japanese language school in the morning while Ove cared for the children, and then we changed guard for the afternoon.

We had two children at the age of one and three when we left for Japan, and there we had another two children, all together four sons. Number three was born at a hospital in Kobe, and I gave birth to number four at home in Ikeda on Hokkaido. No, pregnancy care had yet to be invented; people were more concerned with not getting so many children. The many abortions were a big issue. The midwife in Ikeda was a very skilled woman and obviously used to help while sitting on the floor. She found our furnishing odd, but simply climbed into the foot of my bed for the delivery.

The Bartholdys travelled with the newly opened SAS connection Copenhagen-Tokyo over Anchorage. After 28 hours, they landed in Japan on 7 November 1957 and were greeted at Haneda Airport by Harry Thomsen. After a night at the home of ELC missionary Olaf Hansen, Thomsen put them on a train to Osaka, where the Danish missionary J. M. T. Winther welcomed them and guided them to Kobe. “For years, Winther had been advocating the sending of missionaries from Denmark, so clearly he was happy to have us. It was sad nothing much came of it<sup>2</sup>.”

In Kobe, the couple benefitted much from their fellowship with Norwegian missionaries. They bought a car and lot no. 272 for a summer cabin in the Nojiri Lake Association (*Nojiri*), in Nagano Prefecture<sup>3</sup>. Fritzie has fond memories of the bonding by Lake Nojiri. The Bartholdys lived next to the Lutheran International Schools

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2 Winther wrote in his diary, “Bartholdy is a flimsy man of mid-height, he looks pale and not too strong; she appears healthier, with a light auburn hair and the same height as he; they both appear nice and kind. (...) I soon got on such good terms with the young Bartholdys that the younger Anders smilingly came running to me and Peter followed shortly.” (Winther, Diary 1957 November 8)

3 Ove informed Rendtorff of their decision in his second letter from Japan (OB t. CR 19 Dec. 1957). On NLA, see Neve 1985; also Allen and Ingulsrud 2016.

(the Norwegian School) in Shioya, Kobe. Across the street lived the Hayashi family. Ms. Hayashi was in her 50s and became the housekeeper for Fritzie. She introduced them to Japanese society, for instance by letting the Bartholdys attend the funeral of her husband. Later it puzzled Fritzie that although she did not have any children, Ms. Hayashi had declined an invitation to join the family at their summer house by Lake Nojiri, because her husband had passed away less than a year earlier; an indirect lesson on Japanese norms, one might argue. Getting used to Japan also meant making mistakes; Fritzie remembered one time they were going to Nojiri; “We made a stopover in a town. We arrived at night and found an inn. The next morning, we realized it had been a bit noisy because it was the local brothel. I suppose some were puzzled by seeing our car with its big stickers reading *Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church* parked outside that establishment,” she laughed.

Fritzie was never directly involved in the missionary work. She had language studies, two pregnancies, and a family to attend to. She joined her husband for Bible studies in local congregations or at the Kobe Lutheran Bible Institute. JELC never invited her to attend meetings, wherefore she only learned of the various issues via her husband.

In 1959, the second missionary couple sent by DMS arrived in Japan. Asked about the relationship with Ellen and Karl Emil Melchorsen, Fritzie explained, “I think we had a peaceful and good relationship. Ellen and I are very different in nature but we still got along well. I have heard of cases where the relationship between missionary-wives in particular sours and makes matters difficult. That was not our situation.”

“When Rendtorff was in Japan to investigate the possibilities, he recorded all his findings and agreements in a little black notebook. Unfortunately, he lost that book before his return to Denmark resulting in much confusion, because he did not know exactly whom he had met or what agreements they had concluded.” Because DMS was to start working in Ehime prefecture on Shikoku, Ove went to the island



a couple of times on fact-finding tours with Harry Thomsen. Shortly after arriving in Japan, Ove learned that the Swedish-American Augustana Lutheran Mission had reserved Matsuyama, the capital of Ehime, for expansion of its activities in Hiroshima (cf. OB t. CR 19 Dec. 1957 and OB t. EP 18 Jan 1958). He was not aware that already in January 1957, the minutes of DMS board had recorded, “we note that the Augustana Synod plans work on Shikoku. Still, the board of DMS wish missionaries from DMS to find a location on Shikoku, because our attention was first attracted to that island” (cf. OB t DMS 3 Oct 1963; for the exact wording see DMS Minutes of Board Meeting 29-30. Jan. 1957). In January 1958, Ove Bartholdy first met Rev. Dr. Kishi Chitose<sup>4</sup>, president of JELC (1947-1966), at the Augustana Mission headquarters in Hiroshima. Kishi encouraged DMS to get a formal relationship with JELC either “1. in direct subordination, i.e., leave it up to JELC to decide where the missionaries should work. This is what Kishi prefers. Or 2. in direct collaboration, i.e. let DMS decide on the location” (OB t. EP 13 Feb 1958). Ove believed the second solution would be best, and Rendtorff agreed on that in his reply (CR t OB 26 Feb. 1958). Ove sent a draft of the agreement in English with his Danish translation in a letter dated 2/3 1958 (OB t. CR 2 Mar. 1958). Ove argued for a collaboration with JELC, “because we are in Japan, not to create a new church or a branch of the Danish Folk Church, but to serve the Japanese Lutheran Church in mission it cannot handle on its own.” He also found it among the duties of the missionary organization, “to co-operate with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church in stationing of missionaries and in determining the type of work they should do.” As for the location, Ove directed his attention towards Tokushima Prefecture, east of Ehime and closer to the Norwegians in Kobe and Osaka, whom he felt spiritually more akin to than to the American Lutherans. However, as Fritzie recalls it, “at one point, JELC concluded that Hokkaido was similar to Scandinavia in

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4 Kishi Chitose 岸千年 (1898-1989), son-in-law of rev. Yonemura Tsunekichi 米村常吉 who first housed J.M.T. Winther in Tokyo, and then became a pastor of JELC in 1901 on the invitation of Winther.

nature and otherwise. The church believed this to be providence; we were meant to go to Hokkaido. Ove was disappointed, but he had come to serve the church, so he would go where it wanted him<sup>5</sup>.” And so the negotiations ended with his signing a contract with JELC on behalf of DMS in 1958<sup>6</sup>.

In August 1959, the Bartholdys moved to Hokkaido. They then sold off their Nojiri-cabin and the following year had a cabin constructed in a similar missionary-summer-colony in north of Sapporo at the shore of a cove on the west coast of Hokkaido<sup>7</sup>. “It was nice to be by the sea,” Fritzie noted.

Also in 1959 DMS’ new secretary general for missionary affairs Erik W. Nielsen (EWN) arrived on his first visit to Japan. EWN outright rejected the agreement with JELC because Ove had failed to advise the DMS board and had not been authorized to do any signing (Nielsen 2019). Beyond formalities, EWN found the agreement contravened the trend in mission, for which he was a key advocate. As secretary for IMC, Erik W. Nielsen had worked hard for the adoption of the new

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5 Ove first reported the change in JELC’s attitude in August (OB t EP 31 Aug 1958). Nielsen notes that “Ove Bartholdy strongly suspected that JELC had decided to remove him from Shikoku at requests from the economically strong Augustana Mission” (Nielsen, 2019).

6 According to Nielsen 2019, OB was asked by the board of DMS to negotiate on its behalf, and he kept it informed. In May 1958 the board established a working group to revise the proposals from Japan. The general secretary Rendtorff had become chair of the board, and the board replaced him with two general secretaries: Rev. Erik Petersen in charge of home affairs and Rev. Erik W. Nielsen in charge of the overseas work. The latter was to start on 1 January 1959, wherefore he was not included in the said working group. In September 1958, the board approved the agreement, “provided the acceptance of the changes proposed by the working group.” One of the changes was the acceptance by JELC of DMS’ authority to decide on the deployment of its missionaries. JELC accepted. Consequently, OB believed he was authorized to sign the agreement. Nielsen observes, “There is no evidence of the board having been informed about the result of the negotiations or OB’s signing.” (Nielsen 2019). On the other hand, the minutes of the board meeting in January 1959 read, “The board approves the preparation of Hokkaido as the future location for DMS’ work in Japan instead of Shikoku.”

7 According to letters from Ove B. to Erik W.N., the family first rented one of two summer cottages owned by the Missouri Synod near Otaru (OB to EWN, 4 July 1960) and then decided to have their own cottage build and to stay there in July and August 1960 (OB to EWN, 19 July 1960), DMS archive.

model of mission that respected all parties as equals. Now in Japan, EWN wanted to showcase the new model. This is how Fritzie remembers it:

FB: Erik W. came from London with the new ideas for mission. When he was appointed secretary, he knew what he wanted. He told the men *You must wait. The two of you should each pick his own barbershop here in Ikeda and wait for JELC to decide what it wants you to do*<sup>8</sup>. So we waited, and the people in Ikeda asked *What are they doing?* It took a lot of patience. *Wait and things will clear up*, we were told, but they did not clear up. I suppose pastor Yoshida, too, was bewildered for what to do with us. The Japanese were not used to that mode of work or to the mission societies waiting for them to take the initiative. Erik W. knew he was in the right, theoretically right, but he did not possess sufficient psychological wisdom for the right implementation. His approach was *Now, you have been messing up for so many years, and things have to change. This is how it should be done.*

CHM: Could you tell me about your husband's illness and "the failure"?

FB: The situation in Japan was not becoming to Ove's nerves. With the relocation to Hokkaido, I suppose JELC meant for us and Melchiorsen to have Ikeda as our base and initiate some work. We had an agreeable relation with pastor Yoshida in the church. Ove managed to start a few Sunday Schools, but most of the time he was the pastor's driver. That disappointed Ove and we got the impression that pastor Yoshida was afraid that Ove would attract the attention, should he be allowed to work more<sup>9</sup>. Then came the order to wait.

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8 See also Letter EWN to OB and KEM, 15 Jun 1960 in Box 199, DMS/RA cf. Nielsen 2019, fn.37

9 EWN to OB 20 July. 1960. Referring to OB's letter of 4 July that mentions plans of purchasing a house and a lot together with the local church: "In your surmise that such plans are symptomatic for the Japanese church simply to enjoy the benefits of the missionary societies'

It is stressful to arrive in a strange country with huge ideals only to realize that one can hardly put them into practice. I don't remember, exactly how long we had been in Ikeda when the stomach disorder began. Eventually Ove sought treatment in Tokyo. The doctor removed two third of his stomach<sup>10</sup>. We were not given appropriate information on the post-operation care or diet. Consequently, I did not know what to serve him, and he kept losing weight. After our return to Denmark, we lived in one of DMS' apartments at the headquarters in Hellerup north of Copenhagen. One day, on a local train Ove happened to talk with the person sitting next to him. He turned out to be Hans Jørgen Fenger, MD and a specialist on gastroenterology at Rigshospitalet [Copenhagen University Hospital]. Doctor Fenger invited Ove for an examination and ended up doing a reoperation that restored the function of the stomach. I was also told what Ove could eat, so things progressed much for him.

In January 1961, Erik W. Nielsen visited Japan for the second time. Almost a year had passed since Ove had had his big operation, but upon seeing the enervated missionary the secretary immediately concluded *you have to return to Denmark for recovery*.

FB: We met with the DMS board when we came home. Chairperson Rendtorff recommended Ove to relax and then consider returning to Japan. I told

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purse, while it pays little interest to the work of the individual missionary I suppose you are likely quite right, but then it is not unique to the Japanese church. Mission work is in a similar stage practically everywhere; in Asia and Africa. As far as I can tell, this is significantly connected to the traditions and past policies of mission on one hand, and on the other hand perhaps also related to the level of development of the churches in Asia and Africa." (Bartholdy Letters).

<sup>10</sup> In her letter to Erik W. Nielsen, Fritzie informed him that Ove had attended a meeting in Tokyo and decided to get an examination there, because his local doctor had been unable to cure him. Doctor Dr. [Richard A.] Nelson at [medical director of] Tokyo Sanatorium Hospital had then operated Ove on 14 April 1960. (FB to EWN 16 Apr 1960).

him that if we could go within one year, I would be willing to do so, but if not, Ove would have to go on his own, because I did not want our children to suffer in that kind of chaos. The board was stunned because it was not used to having a wife speaking her mind so loud and clear as I did.

After an initial recovery, Ove served as parish pastor until 1973, when he was permitted early retirement due to illness. Then, in 1979:

FB: Ove was attracted to the charismatic movement. One night he attended a séance, it felt like an electric current ran through his body. Suddenly, he was able to eat what had been proscribed for twenty years. He recovered so he could work normally and had the retirement revoked. Becoming a pastor again proved a little difficult, for some church boards picked a different candidate when they learned how Ove had been cured. *After all, who wants a pastor who believes in miracles?* (Laughter)

Going back to the time in Japan, we talked about communication, for my study of J.M.T. Winther has indicated this to be an essential tool for mission, directed at locals both in the receiving and the sending communities. One must convince both parties of their need for the message so that they get willing to pay for its delivery. How was the communication with Denmark?

FB: Ove often sent letters to *Dansk Missionsblad* and contributed to the newsletter for DMS' supporter groups. We did not receive many letters; there was an unspoken understanding that we would do the writing.

CMH: Were you asked to give talks about Japan after your return to Denmark?

FB: Once Ove had recovered, yes, he travelled all over Denmark. It seemed to be psychologically a good thing for him to do, rather than keep brooding over the failure in Japan.

CMH: I have the impression that children's education is a common issue for missionaries. What was your situation?

FB: Our older sons attended kindergarten in Japan in Ikeda. Peter, the oldest, liked it most of the time. An exception happened around New Year 1959-60. The children were making "new year cakes" and a journalist from the local paper came to cover the event, and Peter was put at work for a photo option. Peter did not like the attention, "We are so many, so why me?" Normally, he went happily. One of the other kids and he became friends who would also play together outside of the kindergarten hours. The second son, on the other hand, did not like it at all, so he stayed home. Peter was scheduled to start primary school in April 1961, but then we returned to Denmark in March.

CMH: What did you take away from Japan besides the dolls and some books on display here in your house?

FB: Nothing in particular. As a full-time housewife with two, then three and at the end four children, I did not have much time outside the home. While we lived in Ikeda, we went shopping in the bigger neighbor city Obihiro for things aside from the daily necessities. On two occasions I participated in a retreat for missionaries in the middle of Hokkaido. I remember one autumn in particular; I was on my own, and being used to rising early I took a stroll in the forest. Beautifully colored trees by a lake and so peacefully quiet – an unforgettable experience. I also remember the crowds of people everywhere. Once we were returning from Nojiri, our car acted out. It wasn't something we couldn't handle by ourselves. We thought we were in the middle of nowhere, but in no time a group of people had gathered who observed and commented on what we did.

Fritzie Bartholdy is a sensitive and sensible person with clear ideas of what she wants, rather a realist than an idealist. She often used phrases such as "that's it," and "so

be it.” In her view, DMS lacked planning of its mission in Japan, wherefore the first years ended up being frustratingly chaotic. She did not state any position in relation to the theories behind new wave in mission advocated by Erik W. Nielsen. Judged by her observations of the realities “in the field”, most actors in Japan seemed not changing their habits, quite like most board members of DMS, cf. Harald Nielsen’s conclusion (Nielsen 2019). Yet, the limbo created by the policy change impacted her husband’s health and their lives negatively. Their time in Japan was too short for much to happen besides getting used to life under new circumstances when establishing themselves first in the big city of Kobe with many foreigners and then in small town Ikeda with hardly any in two years. Professor Gunvor Lande, missionary to Japan 1965-1978, documents in her 1978-study *Norske Misjonærkoner* [The Norwegian Missionary-Wives] that Fritzie’s experiences were far from exceptional. Lande found that, the Norwegian missionary families were frequently relocated due to the furlough system. The wife would establish a home, run it for 5-6 years, pack away everything for the furlough-year in Norway, where she would often run an interim home, and then have to start all over somewhere else upon the return to Japan, because another couple had taken over the old place to keep it running. The rootlessness was a stressful experience for many. Perhaps because the two moves, first to the missionary hub in Kobe and second to a new field had been expected, Fritzie Bartholdy did not categorize them as particularly stressful, but her reaction to the suggestion of being sent off to Japan again revealed her concern for the children, similar to her Norwegian colleagues.

For practical reasons more than from a lack of interest, Fritzie often stayed at home with her children on Sundays while Ove attended the worship service and played the organ in Ikeda Church. She sometimes cooked with Japanese women to share a Danish recipe. Sharing cultures in this way was a well-known method of missionaries, though Fritzie did not mention whether the Bartholdys used the occasion, as others had done, and added any Bible-study or worship element to the cooking.

The experience did not lead to any breach with DMS. After their return

to Denmark, Ove Bartholdy toured the country on behalf of DMS to give talks in supporters' groups and served as a parish pastor of the Danish Folk Church. In those days it was still natural to everybody that Fritzie, the pastor's wife, helped out and participated in local DMS supporters' groups. In one parish, the local school asked her to become a teacher of English, a benefit of her training in England and Japan. It was her dream come true. In 1993, when Ove was a parish pastor on Funen Island, a travel company launched with a very cheap offer on Denmark-Japan travels. Though the Bishop of Funen had recently instructed his pastors not to go on vacation during Easter, Pentecost or Christmas, he permitted Ove to participate in the celebration of the Centennial of JELC on Pentecost that year, wherefore Ove and Fritzie happily went with one of their sons for a revisit of Japan, including Ikeda city on Hokkaido.

#### **Karl Emil and Ellen Melchiorsen (Interviewed 24 April 2014)**

“Japan is a wonderfully secular country,” Karl Emil Melchiorsen, told me when I met him and his wife Ellen in their home at Venø. “I like Japan and the Japanese people very much.” “The pastor's wife in Ikeda town on Hokkaido called me *itazurako* – a trickster.”

Venø is a small island located in the North-Western part of Jutland in Limfjorden, with about 200 permanent residents and the smallest church in Denmark. At the time of the interview, Ellen and Karl Emil Melchiorsen lived in a two-story villa, a few hundred meters from the ferry that connects Venø with the mainland.

KEM: My father bought this lot back in the early 1960s, and we inherited from him. While I was a pastor in Aars parish, we used a then existing house for our vacations. Then, in the early 1980s, we built the present villa and the old house was taken down just last year. We used to till our four acres of land, growing potatoes and vegetables. We took care of the shrubs etc. We can still accomplish what we used to do, only now it takes a bit more of time.



The last sentence was typical of Melchiorsen's sense of humor. As we talked, there was much laughter. The couple came across as strong individuals bonding well.

Karl Emil Melchiorsen was born on 4 May 1928 in Sønderbjerg, Struer Municipality. His family was a member of a local Inner Mission Society, so for him it was natural that he wanted to be a missionary. When he wanted to study theology, his father consulted with a trusted local pastor, who recommended the Department of Theology at Copenhagen University, in part because the alternative at Aarhus University was theologically liberal. Besides, in Copenhagen he could lodge free with some relatives. His master thesis dealt with the Indian Bhakti Religion, indicating a curiosity towards other non-Christian belief systems. Out of university in 1952, he worked as a secretary for YMCA and as an assistant pastor in Copenhagen (cf. Kristeligt Dagblad, 4 maj 2013).

Ellen Melchiorsen was born 9 February 1928 and grew up in Thisted, where her parents had a grocery store. As an obedient daughter Ellen attended Sunday service with her family. Her parents were members of the local DMS fellowship and often invited visiting missionaries home, so in her youth, she prepared lunch for such visitors. She participated in the local YWCA's organization for youngsters and teens. At the recommendation of a teacher, she went to Frederiksberg City, located within Copenhagen City, to study at Marthabo with other future pastors' wives, YWCA secretaries and other women. They studied the Bible and Church History with professors of theology from Copenhagen University.

EM: The prominent Professor Søe was one of my teachers<sup>11</sup>. He could be absentminded. We sat at a table with him at one end of it and me at the other. One day, a woman, who had been sitting next to him for half a year, had had her hair

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<sup>11</sup> Professor Niels Hansen Søe (1895-1978). An influential member of the Inner Mission. Before his university career, he was a parish pastor in Denmark, 1925-30, and the Danish pastor in Shanghai, 1930-33. (cf. Kyndall 1979-84)

done. He suddenly looked at her and said, “Oh, but I see we have a new attendant today.” Another day, he was talking about mass psychosis. “*Massen* [the masses] is furious; *massen* is so and so...” At one point I couldn’t help myself but laughed. He asked, “Why do you laugh?” “Well, you see,” I explained, “You sitting there and I sitting here, this reminds me of my grandfather. His name is also Madsen.” [In Danish a homonym with *massen*]. He might as well have gotten angry with me and kicked me out, but he laughed, gathered his papers and said, “Class dismissed for today.” Professor Søe had been the Danish pastor in Shanghai when the Japanese attacked the city in the 1930s and his sensitive nature could barely handle the recollection of the atrocities.

Ellen completed her studies at Marthabo, but troubles with her back forced her to give up on becoming a nurse, so she returned to Thisted to help out in her father’s store. Ellen and Karl Emil married in 1950.

In 1956, Karl Emil “was headhunted to work as secretary in DMS” and on 16 august 1957, he applied to DMS, declaring that himself and his wife “prepared to work in Japan for ten years as of 1 March 1958” (Melchiorsen papers, 1957). A few months later, he abolished the time limit. In preparation, Karl Emil first studied at Hamburg Mission Academy in 1958. He was next ordained missionary in a ceremony at Thisted Church. He felt it strange that the representative of DMS, a layperson, had the authority to commission an ordained pastor; he also thought the Danish Folk Church should be the sending body for missionaries. Thus readied, with a stipend from the World Council of Churches, he took his family to Berkeley Divinity School of the Pacific in California for a one-year study. This gave him the opportunity also to study Japanese under professor Douglas E. Mills. “Getting started on my Japanese Language studies before arriving in Japan was an advantage, I felt. However, it is so much easier to study a language in its native environment, and I focused on doing so once we were in Japan.”

When they left Denmark, DMS planned to open its “mission field” on Shikoku Island. None the wiser, Karl Emil, his wife Ellen and their two children, two and six years old, arrived in Kobe in 1959, to join their colleagues Ove and Fritzie Bartholdy<sup>12</sup>. Only then did he learn that plans had been changed. “The most influential mission theologian and general secretary of mission in DMS, the late Erik W. Nielsen, had decided on abandoning the old fashioned, imperialistic concept of ‘mission fields’” is how Karl Emil describes the situation.

In Kobe, the Melchiorsens also met J.M.T. Winther and remember him as a kind old man. As Ove Bartholdy had informed Erik W. Nielsen, the two DMS families first vacated by Lake Nojiri, then in August moved to Ikeda-chō, a small town on the southeast side of Hokkaido Island (cf. OB t EWN, 8 May 1959)<sup>13</sup>.

A regular Sunday service in the Ikeda Lutheran Church gathered about fifteen people including pastor Yoshida and his wife.

EM: It was exciting to come to that town. The people were sweet and wonderful. In the beginning when we went out, we would have a trail of children behind us, glaring through the shopping windows where we went in. One day, I was walking down the street, when a woman emerged from a beauty parlor and offered me a treatment for free. I was persuaded, and when I returned home, I looked like a clown. (Laughs).

KEM: One Christmas Eve, around four, as the night had started to settle in, we heard the most wonderful singing outside our windows. From where did it come? we wondered. Looking out, we saw the snow falling on the little congregation standing and singing us Christmas hymns. Of course, I went down and invited them up, and we *hyggede os* (shared a time of coziness) with coffee

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12 The Melchiorsens arrived in Tokyo on 13 June 1959 (cf. OB t EWN 27 May 1959)

13 Hokkaido Ikedachō 北海道池田町 had 6767 inhabitants in 2018 down from about 17000 in 1960 cf. [http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/池田町\\_\(北海道\)](http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/池田町_(北海道)).

and so on. That is how they were. Through and through. I have nothing but praise for the Japanese.

CMH: What were your ideas of mission?

KEM: I had no ideas. Well, the idea of a mission *field* was there, but new ideas came around and confused me. Firstly, I focused on studying the language and secondly, I prepared my sermons when called to do services. Therefore, in Ikeda, I concentrated on my language studies and took private lessons. I did not believe in translating something I had written in Danish first but would write directly in Japanese and have Hiroshi Itoi, a Japanese friend, check the language. He may have relied on Buddhist terminology sometimes. I don't know, and if he did it was not important to me. My Danish colleague wanted to start an agricultural school. A foolish project in my opinion, as I didn't think DMS would stand behind it, and, true enough, Erik W rejected it outright as old-fashioned.

The daughter of Melchiorson attended a local Japanese school. Asked by her father, if she found the language difficult, she had replied, "No, it is like Danish, except the words are different."

After Ove Bartholdy had his stomach operation and then returned to Denmark on sick leave in 1961, the Melchiorsons were the only DMS missionaries in Japan for two years. At Karl Emil's request, JELC permitted them to move to Tokyo, where they settled in a Finnish Mission-owned house near the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, becoming next-door neighbors to Dr. Kishi, the president of JELC. Karl Emil signed up for a Japanese language course at the International Christian University, and completed it in two years.

CMH: What expectations did DMS have?

KEM: Nothing. They never said anything.

CMH: What did the church expect of you?

KEM: I do not know. What happened seemed random to me. I began working

in the Tokyo Lutheran Student Center, located in [the Church Headquarters in] Ichigaya<sup>14</sup>. I would talk with the young people and preach in the church. In the morning, I went together with Dr. Kishi. He preferred us to use English, even though I was able to speak Japanese at that time. I was also placed on the board of Betania Home, an institution for single mothers, and on a hymnbook commission.

CMH: Can you describe the work of that commission?

KEM: No, I really do not remember.

CMH: Does that mean the commission was not of your interest, but one had asked you to join?

KEM: I cannot even remember being asked, or if I was simply told to join it.

CMH: How about the sermons. Did you find your own style very different from the Japanese?

KEM: I did them my way, but I never heard complaints about my Japanese.

EM: Karl Emil was very good in Japanese. When I closed my eyes and listened to him, I could hardly tell that he was not a Japanese.

CMH: How did living in Japan become you?

KEM: I liked it very much. The Japanese mentality was easy to deal with and I really liked their secular approach to life. They were ordinary human beings, so it was hard to imagine that these were the same people who did all the horrendous things they did in the war. They are like the Germans. I have very good German friends, some of whom I met while I studied in Hamburg before going to Japan. Now, we went there not so long after the war, and I wish I had taken the time to locate and talk with some of the veterans back then. Once, I translated a sermon

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14 KEM was associate director of the center from November 1962 to May 1963 cf. the May 1963 reference by the director of the center, rev. Ishida Yoshirō 石田順朗 (1928-2015).

by Dr. Kishi into Danish for publication in *Dansk Missionsblad*<sup>15</sup>. He mentioned the Holocaust. But not a word about the Japanese crimes that were as gruesome. It was as if he ignored the fact or wanted to forget about it.

EM: Our daughter attended a local school in Tokyo and she was very happy about it.

KEM: Yes, for the first three years she went to a Japanese school. Then, I thought it better for her to go to the Norwegian School in Kobe, so we sent her there, and it was a good school.

EM: Our son went to the local kindergarten but he felt less comfortable with everyone wearing a hat, a bib, a bag and dancing. At home, he dressed up as a cowboy and played with his friends.

KEM: He once felt the war. Some neighborhood boys, not his friends, asked him to act the Americans and then they were the Japanese beating the enemy.

EM: We lived in Tokyo. This group of boys came to our home and asked if he could play with them. He wanted to go, so he went, but I did not like the situation, so I followed them. And then I suddenly heard my son pleading, “Sumimasen, sumimasen (I’m sorry, I’m sorry).” They believed he was an American and therefore deserved to be beaten. Well, I intervened and saved him.

CMH: What contact did you have with other missionaries?

KEM: First of all, we lived together with the Bartholdys from when we arrived until they had to leave. I had a good contact with Jens Winther in Kobe, and with Harry Thomsen from the Nordic Christian Mission to the Buddhists. The Danes aside, in Tokyo one of my good neighbors was the American B. Paul Huddle<sup>16</sup>.

15 “Navnet Jesus” *Dansk Missionsblad* January 1962, pp.4-8. Original “Iesu to iu na (Katsurei hi)” イエスという名 (割礼日) in 説教集—教会歴によるI降臨節—聖霊降臨 [Sermons for the Liturgical Year I – From Advent to Pentacost] (聖文舎編集部 ed., Seibunsha, 1960年), pp.31-41.

16 Benjamin Paul Huddle (1916-), missionary in Japan 1940-1941, and 1948-1970

CMH: Harry Thomsen organized visits to religious headquarters, taking many foreign missionaries along, did you go?

KEM: No, I did not go, and we hardly visited other religious places. We missed that, because I focused my energy on language studies and sermons.

EM: We met many of the missionaries during the summers at Nojiri. I remember being with the Thomsens, and our children would play with all the other missionary kids there. We wives made excellent friends. Played tennis and everything. The place had a special tradition. There is a lake at Nojiri. On a moonlit night they would place a grand piano on ship or a float. Then each family went in its own small rowboat and encircled the piano float. Someone would play and the rest sang hymns in their own language according to the tune. I feel a chill down my spine merely talking about it. It was so beautiful and a magnificent choir in the silent night. Moonlight. Togetherness. Everything so beautiful<sup>17</sup>.

CMH: In your application to DMS, you wrote you were prepared to go to Japan for ten years. Eventually, you returned to Denmark in 1963 after five years and submitted a request of dismissal. What happened?

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17 At the end of August 2017, I met rev. Lardner C. Moore in his cabin by Lake Nojiri. He had been and still was in charge of the event dearly remembered by Ellen Melchiorsen. "We are having this evening song on the last Sunday of the season. Back then, we tied a number of boats together, put a plate on the float and loaded on a grand piano. Then we shipped the float to the Island (in the middle of the lake). I led the singing while the current and the wind slowly carried the float, and we finished when it reached the harbor by the colony. Fortunately, we never had any accidents. Later, we have changed so now the piano is set up on the pier for that evening song. I am going to lead it again this Sunday evening," he told me. Rev. Lardner passed away in the spring of 2018.

KEM: I wrote:

*To the Board of the Danish Missionary Society  
As I have found the Board's management of the  
Japan-mission much dominated by coincidences, a lack  
of knowledge of the situation and understanding of the  
difficulties the Board has thereby caused its missionaries, and  
as no longer believe I can continue under these conditions, I  
herewith ask for my dismissal.*

*Regards*

*K. E. Melchiorsen*

*p.t. Holbæk, 10th September 1963*

On one of his visits to Japan, Erik W told me: *You can go home now, if you like. If you do, we will cancel the sending of the Leth-Larsens*<sup>18</sup>. So of course, I stayed.

Once I was back in Denmark, I gave a talk at a DMS gathering in the Holbæk Town, telling what I felt was wrong. I also had a longer article in *Kristeligt Dagblad* with the headline *Mission between the past and the present* (Mission mellem fortid og nutid) (*Kristeligt Dagblad*, 7 Feb 1963). The board obviously did not like it. Professor Søe we mentioned before was a board member of DMS at that time and an editor of *Kristeligt Dagblad*. He had an article of reply with the heading “*Eine grausame Salbe*” [A Gruesome Charge].

Karl Emil showed me his letters of application and of his request for dismissal. They were equally terse in style. He also showed me a letter “To Whom It May Concern” written on 20 May 1963 by Dr. R. Nelson of Tokyo Sanitarium Hospital,

<sup>18</sup> On Frode Leth-Larsen in Japan, see Hermansen 2014.



explaining the diagnosis and treatment given so far to Melchiorson of “many digestive complaints” and during 1963 an “impending nervous breakdown.” “I have no doubt that his symptoms are caused by tension brought about by his particular administrative situation. This bears an ominous similarity to the circumstances under which Rev. Bartholdy went home a year or two ago,” is how it ended

CMH: Did the board react in other ways to your speech or article?

KEM: No.

CMH: I wonder how a mission board makes its decisions on its strategies?

KEM: I don't know. My sense is, it all depends on the general secretary. In our case, it was Conrad Rendtorff. It was he who went to Japan back in the 1950s, but I think he must have lost his notes before returning to Denmark. I am quite sure he was in contact with Dr. Winther and probably also the JELC, but otherwise, the beginning of DMS involvement in Japan is rather vague to me.

CMH: What did you do once you left DMS?

KEM: Through family contacts I learned the primary school in Resen needed a teacher, so I started in August the year we returned. Later, I was the parish pastor in Aars Village from 1968 till my retirement.

CMH: Have you had any contacts with Japan or Japanese after your return?

KEM: Not many. But there have been occasions where I met some Japanese. For instance, for some time there was a Japanese at a slaughter factory in Aars Village. He was the controller for a Japanese import company. He would call his boss in Brussels to report on the quality of the meat. He did not know English or Danish for that matter, so he felt relieved when he visited us once in a while. There was also a factory dealing in electronics. It had a group of Japanese visitors once, and I stepped in to do the translation. Later, the owner asked me what I

had done, for the atmosphere had changed once I started talking with them in Japanese. While I was still in Tokyo, a small group of Japanese pastors came and asked me to teach them Danish. It included the Koizumi brothers. They planned on visiting Denmark. I did not meet them when they came, though<sup>19</sup>.

Although many years have passed since the Melchiorsons left the country, the walls in their house were decorated with prints and drawings, of Fuji-san in particular, displaying their fondness of Japan. The couple appeared easy-going. Karl Emil came across as humorous, observant and focused man. Initially, KEM's ability to stay focused seemed like fixation when it came to the changes of mission organization, or his answers to the questions regarding expectations from DMS and JELC. However, considering that the rather drastic changes happened as he was acquainting himself with the language and the culture, and given his ambition of preaching in Japanese rather than in translation, it is understandable that he chose to focus on language studies. The recommendations he got from Japanese employers testify to his mastery of the language, not a little feat in three years. And the quality of his bible study course in the Lutheran Student Center was praised by a Japanese I met in Japan in 2016, who asked me if I knew Karl Emil Melchiorson, for he had taken KEM's class in Tokyo more than 50 years earlier.

## Conclusion

Melchiorson may have been oblivious of the fact, but Ove Bartholdy tried to help him by putting pressure on the Board for it to reconsider its handling of Melchiorson's application for dismissal (OB t. DMS Board, 3 Oct 1963). He threatened

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<sup>19</sup> The two Koizumi brothers were invited to Denmark by DMS. K. Jun (-2013) was a pastor of JELC from 1959, whose career started in Shugakuin Church, Kyoto, with Harry Thomsen. He was the president of JELC, 1998-2001. K. Maki moved to Denmark.

to publish an article in *Kristeligt Dagblad* with the title “Honesty Requested” (Ærlighed Udbedes). After some negotiations it was never published. Melchiorson, on the other hand, thought his case deserved scrutiny, and therefore asked his friend, the late professor of Missiology at Aarhus University dr. Johannes Aagaard to keep his material for future investigations, he told me. That is still a task for the future.

It is, of course, futile to speculate on what might have come of it, had the missionaries been permitted to work on Shikoku, but chances are they might have succeeded given their flair for the language and open-minded attitudes. Their theological differences could have caused internal frictions, but might also have complemented each other for the benefit of the total. What we do know is that the experience took its toll on the participants. Most directly on the missionaries, but the general lack of understanding for the new style of mission seems to have been a cause for Erik W. Nielsen to leave DMS in 1964 (cf. Nielsen 2019). Fifty years later, the interviewees still remembered their increasing frustration with that change of strategy by DMS, but their memories also reflected a shared satisfaction with Japan and their positive attitudes towards the Japanese.

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