

Thomas Clay Winn: From Missionary to Educationist

コリン・スロス
Colon Sloss

When Thomas Clay Winn and his wife Elizer came to Japan in December 1877 he was a stereotypical missionary. He didn't want to stay in Yokohama with the so called Christians there who lacked Christianity. He wanted to get out into the country and preach the word of God to the heathen Japanese. In fact he wanted to go to the hardest place in Japan, where no Christian had ever been to proselytize.

On the other hand, Kanazawa was a hard place. Few foreigners, far less any missionaries had been there in the 1870s. Moreover it was the home of the Shinshu sect of Buddhism, in fact no region could claim to be more Buddhist. In fact it was a populous region in Japan at that time and had seen very little Christian influence.

Umezome Nobuo has written about Kanazawa people at that time:

"There very quite a lot of men who wore bamboo hats. Most of those who took bamboo hats were 'crop heads'. Women, generally speaking, tied chignons on their heads. Either men or women often slipped 'haori' or 'kappa' on top of their kimonos. Big people charged around town And there seemed to be delivery men called 'runners'." ⁽¹⁾

At first Thomas Winn seemed every inch the foreign missionary. In one of his letters to the Foreign Board of Missionaries he writes about the need for a western house:

"... in this inland country it is not safe to live in such a place & especially in a poor Japanese house with little sun light. What I want to request is this: if we can get permission to remain in Kanazawa will we get permission to build a house as cheaply as possible." ⁽²⁾

Moreover, from a biography of Winn that first was published in 1932 just after his death:

"Their first house was furnished by the government officials. It was located at Nagamachi on the banks of the Onikawa, a river flowing diagonally through the city. Since the house was not a bright western house with glass windows which we were used to, but a dark gloomy house typical of the northern Tohoku district it was very unsatisfactory." ⁽³⁾

Many years later, however, he seems to have forgotten about this:

"If I was locating in Japan today I would not put up a house in such contrast to the native houses as our foreign houses are. All my first term of service in Kanazawa, my family lived in a Japanese house. I would do pretty much the same, were I called to rebuild or relocate now." ⁽⁴⁾

Perhaps the most extraordinary letter, and one that explains the title "from missionary to educator" was dated September 1890, 13 years since he first set foot in the land.

"I had preconceived notions too as to what my work was to be. I had made up my mind very positively that I would never teach school. I would do evangelistic work pure & simple. The truth is that the mission put me at once into a school and I've done more or less teaching ever since I came to Japan. I found it to be for my happiness and usefulness. It was necessary to back down from decisions I had made before leaving America! If I had only maintained my position that because I could not do just as I wanted to, I would do as the Mission requested, mine would have been a very different missionary experience than it really is." ⁽⁵⁾

Thomas Winn was a Protestant missionary. More specifically he was a Presbyterian. At the time that this was written (2006) the differences seem fairly academic, but at the time it would have mattered very much to Thomas Clay Winn. The Presbyterians believed in "the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism... together with the Directory for Worship and the Form of Government, became known as the Westminster Standards." ⁽⁶⁾

Presbyterians also believe in the Nicene and Apostle Creeds. ⁽⁷⁾ In short the Presbyterians believe in the word of God speaking to the believer, related to this they also believe in God's sovereignty and confession. More difficultly they also believe in predestination.

It is important at this stage to mention the Reformation. Although it has become related to Martin Luther and his famous 96 Theses, the Presbyterians have their roots in the Swiss Reformation and more properly follow in the traditions of Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and John Knox. In the protest about corruption and the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterians, rather than Lutherans and Anabaptists, are part of the Reformed tradition.

The doctrine of predestination seems to have originated with John Knox who wrote an essay with the same title ⁽⁸⁾ Knox and five others wrote the Scottish Confession which was later replaced by the Westminster Confessions. ⁽⁹⁾ Election is an difficult concept in that it clashes with the idea of free will. However, for Presbyterians it simply means they believe they believe in faith by grace alone. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Predestination doesn't seem to be a problem for present day Presbyterians. ⁽¹¹⁾ However, Winn must have had a position on the problem. In 1978, Lingle and Kuykendall say the following. They quote the "oft-heard" exclamation, "Presbyterians believe in

predestination."⁽¹²⁾ They point out the last sentence in the Westminster Confession says "The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable council of his own free will, whereby he extendeth or with holdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin to the praise of his glorious justice."⁽¹³⁾ Lingle and Kuykendall say this is beyond human understanding, an example of God's "sheer mystery" or a "paradox of predestination and free will", but the idea of God's Elect seems to fly in the face of democracy, and perhaps for this reason has been dropped. For the purpose of the present essay it is worth noting that Winn probably believed in it.⁽¹⁴⁾

In fact the issue of Election caused a split in the Presbyterian ranks. These people called themselves "the disciples of Christ", and they formed the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In 1810. They felt "the doctrine of election too fatalistic"⁽¹⁵⁾ It is important to state that Thomas Clay Winn was not a Cumberland Presbyterian.

The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek presbutaros meaning "elder". "The reformed adopted a nonhierarchical form of Church government, with General Assemblies, SYNODS, Presbyteries, and Sessions, composed of elders-clergy and lay, who taught and exercised CHURCH DISCIPLINE."⁽¹⁶⁾

Tomas Clay Winn was born in Flemington, liberty County, Georgia on June 29 1851.⁽¹⁷⁾ His father was one John Winn, a preacher and a teacher at Knox College. His mother was Mary Winn.⁽¹⁸⁾ His grandfather was also said to be a preacher in Henry, Illinois⁽¹⁹⁾ At the age of 7, he moved to Ganesburg in Illinois. He attended Knox College but did not graduate. He went on to graduate from Amhurst College in July 1873. And Union Seminary in New York in April 1877. He was ordained as a Presbyterian Priest in Ornedá in September 1877.⁽²⁰⁾ In May 1877 he was named a Missionary to Japan by the Foreign Missionary Board Presbyterian Church in the United States North.⁽²¹⁾

There seems to be limited material about Winn's family background, but he appears to have come from a strong Presbyterian and missionary family. His aunt was the famous hymn writer, Pheobe Brown, and his uncle was the first missionary to Japan for the Dutch Reformed Church and Bible translator, Samuel Brown. It is said that he was able to meet 14 relatives in Yokohama.⁽²²⁾

Although not all Scots Irish are Protestant and not all Protestants are Presbyterians, we can say that the majority of Scots Irish in America were Presbyterians. Winn came from the Scotch Irish,⁽²³⁾ The Scotch Irish in 17th Century Northern Ireland were treated as dissenters a bit like the native Roman Catholics. It was hoped that these Scotch Irish would form a "wall between" which would support the "colonial policy" of "divide and conquer"⁽²⁴⁾ In fact the Presbyterians first formed as a Presbyterian within Cromwell's army in a war with the Catholics in Ireland.⁽²⁵⁾ The British controlled the Catholics and the Presbyterians by means of the Penal Laws which discriminated against these people.⁽²⁶⁾ The Scotch Irish are significant for Thomas Winn in a number of ways. As far as Presbyterians in America are concerned the same thing could be said. Of particular importance is Francis Makenie, a Scotch Irish who could be said to be the father of American Presbyterianism. And (it was he) who established the rule that Presbyterians should obey civil law wherever they find themselves.⁽²⁷⁾

Major events that happened include the War of Independence with the British and the American Civil War. While it is impossible to know where he stood on the war, it seems that he stood with the North on the Civil War. Although he was born in Georgia, it makes sense since he never owned slaves and was later a Missionary to Japan, where his sympathies lay. Moreover, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which could be called an anti-slaving manifesto, was said to be a favorite of his wife.⁽²⁸⁾

The New Side Old Side split is similar. Dennis Kelleher says confidently that Winn was a New Side Presbyterian and he probably was.⁽²⁹⁾ The Old-New split was familiar. The old side wanted a return to a more narrow view of the Scriptures. They didn't like revivals, faith healing, or enthusiasm. The new side were absolutely the opposite. These issues also were influenced by the dispute about slavery. Genoves explains the position. "Many of the New Side churches retreated from Calvinistic orthodoxy and tolerated, when they did not promote, abandonment of longstanding commitments to the doctrines of predestination, original sin, human depravity and much else. Meanwhile, the Old School, especially as represented in the great Presbyterian intellectual centers of Princetown, New Jersey and Colombia, South Carolina, held the line for the Westminster Confession and for as strict a Calvinism as could possibly be sustained."⁽³⁰⁾

It seems the even the Presbyterian Church in the United States was split by the New Side-Old Side split, but Winn seems to have been part of the New Side. This is why his board described itself as the Presbyterian Foreign Missionary Board (North). As opposed to the South who were probably on the old side. The two sides came back together in 1869 on the basis of the Westminster Confession.⁽³¹⁾ However, when Winn began his Mission the split and the Civil War were not so far away.

Originally Winn came to Kanazawa as an educator although he seems to have been motivated by a sense of Mission. According to him "They know my purpose in remaining here for not only when I came but also a few days ago I told them in the plainest manner what it is."⁽³²⁾ In obeying civil law, Winn was following the teaching of Francis Makenie'.⁽³³⁾

Winn was mainly interested in preaching Presbyterian Christianity. And he established a Church in Kanazawa. The local powers were more interested in his powers as a teacher, mainly of western science and at first he taught at a government school.⁽³⁴⁾ For Winn to stay in Kanazawa at that time he had to be registered as a teacher, so the Missionaries established a boys school and then a girls school.⁽³⁵⁾

The girls school is more important mainly because it survived longer than the boys school, but also because it was the first middle school for girls in the region. This is no surprise, In America they had already gained a reputation as female educators.

"The period between 1831 and 1861 saw incorporation of numerous "female seminaries" in Ohio (one report in 1862 listed twenty three) many founded by Presbyterians." ⁽³⁶⁾

Unlike many people in America and Japan at the time, Presbyterians believed women were the intellectual equal of men, and could handle higher education with science and latin.

In one of his letters Winn wrote of establishing a girls school in Japan on the "Mt Holyoke plan." ⁽³⁷⁾ This has lead to much speculation that Winn was determined to establish "the Mt Holyoke of Japan". It probably merely meant that Winn wanted the school to be as cost cutting as possible with the girls doing the work which would be done by servants in other establishments. On the other hand, Mary Hessor the main teacher at the school was a graduate of Western College and favorite of Miss Peabody the headmistress. Western was known as the "Mt Holyoke of the west".

"Miss Peabody and her teachers took great satisfaction from the realization thast they were following the "Holyoke Plan" in every detail and even the bells of the Western Female Seminary were ringing on the same schedule as those at Holyoke." ⁽³⁸⁾

Mt Holyoke was founded by Mary Lyons in 1837. it soon became the model of Presbyterian girl boarding schools not only in America but also around the world.

"Mount Holyoke Female Seminary" was a total institution inspired by evangelical Protestantism. At the beginning of the year 'the division of the school into two great classes of those calling themselves Christians and those who had no hope' of being Christians occurred. The conversion of those who had yet to make 'their peace with God' was a major concern of Christian members of the Seminary family." ⁽³⁹⁾ Lyon at Holyoke was interested in inculcating the ideals of self sacrifice and disinterested benevolence. ⁽⁴⁰⁾ She was influenced by the New Divinity ideas of Jonathon Edwards and Samuel Hopkins ⁽⁴¹⁾ This itself was a return to an earlier American Puritanism. ⁽⁴²⁾ There are disturbing aspects of the Missionary women and Winn's attitude to the Japanese and their culture because in order to "save" someone it is necessary to look down on them. In a sense Lyon believed women with their greater access to other women were ideally equipped as Missionaries. ⁽⁴³⁾ So Mount Holyoke was part of the second Protestant "Great Awakening" which was essentially a "willingness to be damned for the glory of God." ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Winn was sent to Japan by the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board in New York. He was not a Missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

This was a mixed board for Presbyterians and Congregationalists which was founded in Boston in 1810. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ This board later was limited to Congregationalists. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ When Winn came to Japan though, the Presbyterians were a stronger presence. Over the years he had various disagreements with the board. ⁽⁴⁷⁾ But he remained a Presbyterian Missionary for 54 years.

Looking back in time Winn seems the archetypal Missionary who was active in Kanazawa for 20 years.. As well as establish a Church there he went on Missions to neighboring Toyama and Fukui Prefectures. He brought the bicycle and dairy farming to Kanazawa as well as many things more. But Winn had doubts. In one of his early letters he writes "Men of the very highest gifts will find ample use for them all and if possible no others should be chosen for the field of foreign missions. If you had always acted upon this advice however, I fear some of your Missionaries now stationed in a place called Kanazawa, Japan would never have (illegible) such a mission." ⁽⁴⁸⁾

He may have had doubts about his worth as a Missionary he does not seem to have had similar doubts about his value as a teacher. In the same letter he says the Prefecture will get a good deal if they employ his as a teacher "and from what I hear of some of the former teachers they have had I have no hesitancy in saying that for other reasons". ⁽⁴⁹⁾ It was reported that at first Winn was not thought to be strong enough to be a Missionary and he was apparently often ill when a child. ⁽⁵⁰⁾ After becoming a Missionary the illness struck him again when he was studying Japanese in Yokohama. ⁽⁵¹⁾ Although successful as a Missionary in Kanazawa Winn twice offered his resignation to the Mission Board. ⁽⁵²⁾ This seems to have been rejected.

NOTES

- (1) *Meri Hesoru no Shougai* p.196
- (2) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. p.5
- (3) *Thomas Clay Winn: The Life of an American Missionary in Early Modern Japan* p.22
- (4) *The Letters of Thomas Winn* p.151 It is worth noting that 14 years separate the two letters
- (5) *The Letters of Thomas Winn*. p.82
- (6) *A Brief History of The Presbyterians*. p.34
- (7) *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*. Volume 3, p.1550
- (8) *Presbyterian Creeds*. In 1557 Knox published Predestination p.85
- (9) See *Presbyterian Creeds* pp.78-98
- (10) *Presbyterian Creeds* pp.88,89
- (11) Although mentioned in the *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* it is hardly mentioned in *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*. (1996).
- (12) *Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs*. p.102
- (13) *Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs*. p.103
- (14) In 2003's *Transformation of American Religion* it mentions that while most main stream religions have been losing members the

Moonies are growing.

In *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, it says that although the numbers of Presbyterians have been falling. They have even let faith healers use their church. pp.188-208

- (15) *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* pp.72,73.
- (16) *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (volume 3) p.1550
- (17) *Biographical Notes of Thomas Winn* p.2
- (18) *Thomas Clay Winn: The Life of a Missionary in Early Modern Japan*. p.3
- (19) *Biographical Notes of Thomas Winn* p.10
- (20) *Biographical Notes of Thomas Winn* p.2
- (21) *Elizer Uinn Den*. p.66
- (22) *Thomas Clay Winn: The Life of an American Missionary in Early Modern Japan*. p.14
- (23) *Kanazawakyokai 100nenshi* p.7 Winn's father John was said to be of Scotch Irish descent.
- (24) *Presbyterian Missionaries in Meiji Japan: Thomas Winn A Reluctant Educator*. pp.6,7
- (25) *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*. p.37
- (26) *Presbyterian Missionaries in Meiji Japan: Thomas Winn A Reluctant Educator*. pp.6,7
- (27) *A Brief History of Presbyterians*. pp.38,39,43
- (28) *Elizer Uinn Den* pp.44-46
- (29) *American Presbyterians Missionaries in Meiji Japan: Thomas Winn, A Reluctant Educator*. p.15
- (30) "Religion and the American Civil War" p.79 quoted in *American Missionaries in Meiji Japan: Thomas Winn, a Reluctant Educator*. p.15"
- (31) *A Brief History of Presbyterianism*. p.92
- (32) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. October 13, 1880 p.11
- (33) Maknemie followed the court ruling in his dispute with Lord Cornbury *A Brief History of Presbyterianism*. p.43. Of course it was also common sense. Presbyterians not being known for going against the rule of law.
- (34) *Thomas Clay Winn: The Life of a Missionary in Early Modern Japan*. p.23
- (35) *Hokurikugokin 100nenshi* p.99
- (36) *The Western College for Women*. p.21
- (37) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. p.27 Catherine Beecher has written "There is an expectation, ... that economy will be practiced in the establishment, and that the funds, gathered little by little, will be reserved for the good of the institution" Catherine Beecher in *The Western College for Women*. p.5
- (38) *The Western College for Women*. p.11
- (39) *Mary Jane Forbes (1845-1910) Mother of the Japan Mission*. p.16
- (40) *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*. pp.5,11
- (41) *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*. p.17
- (42) *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*. p.4
- (43) *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*. p.12
- (44) *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*. p.17
- (45) *A Brief History of Presbyterians*. p.76
- (46) *Mary Jane Forbes (1845-19) Mother of The Japan Mission*. p.4
- (47) Usually these were about money. The biggest fallout concerned Winn's proposal to establish what he called an "Industrial Department" to manufacture toothbrushes for sale in the United States to pay for an Orphanage See *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. pp.157-162.
- (48) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. p.7
- (49) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. p.6
- (50) *Thomas Clay Winn The Life Of an American Missionary in Early Modern Japan*. pp.1-3
- (51) *Elizer Uinn Den*. p.74
- (52) *The Letters of Thomas Clay Winn*. pp.40,

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