

## **History of the Church in Japan: Part 6: 1924-1946: Mission closed; World War II**

**By R. Lanier Britsch ()**

In 1924 the Japanese Mission was closed after a twenty-three-year history. Despite many challenges, the mission did produce some lasting contributions, translation work in particular, and a few converts were brought into the Church who remained faithful through the years until the work was recommenced following World War II.

Following the closing of the early mission in 1924, Japan moved steadily into the period of ultra-nationalism that eventually resulted in the Sino-Japanese War and World War II. During the 1930s the Japanese government required all citizens to visit Shinto shrines and to worship the emperor. The government took the position that "bowing to the portrait of the emperor was simply a patriotic gesture and that attendance at the Shinto shrines was devoid of religious significance." This was hard for the Christians to accept, but in 1936 the churches were forced to submit to the government's position. (J. Herbert Kane, *\_A Global View of Christian Missions\_* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 252. and D. C. Holtom, *\_Modern Japan and Shinto Nationalism\_* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 97.)

When Protestant and Roman Catholic ministers, missionaries, and priests left Japan on "furlough" during the late 1930s, they were not allowed to return. . . . By 1941, most Americans and other foreign missionaries had returned to their own lands. During the war, Japanese Christians and their churches were subjected to many pressures. Compulsory emperor worship was introduced, all hymns referring to the Lordship of Jesus Christ were removed, and Sunday School materials were used by the government as a potent vehicle for the dissemination of government propaganda.

When the war finally ended on August 14, 1945, the Japanese nation was exhausted, prostrate before the Allied forces. Although the Japanese people had been told that the American and other Allied troops would be harsh overlords, such proved to be untrue. The Allied forces, in turn, were surprised to find that the Japanese people, a people who had fought bitterly, even ferociously, were submissive and cooperative subjects of the Occupation government.

On January 1, 1946, Emperor Hirohito issued a proclamation that he was not a divine or quasi-divine person and that the Japanese people were not superior in any way to other races and peoples. "By this statement," writes Richard H. Drummond, "the traditional spiritual basis of the Japanese government and society, the doctrine of the divinity of the emperor, which had been developed with increasing explicitness for over half a century, was at one stroke demolished. For many Japanese the act was psychically more shattering than military defeat and surrender, and it left literally millions to reconstruct their spiritual foundations and standards of value. . . ." (Richard H. Drummond, *\_A History of Christianity in Japan\_* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 272-73.)

It was in this spiritual vacuum that dedicated LDS servicemen first taught the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The time was right for the growth of all Christian churches as well as many new religious movements that sprang from the Japanese people themselves. Protestants and Roman Catholics frequently refer to the period from 1945 to 1951 as the "Christian Boom." Circumstances were definitely right for the establishment of the LDS Church during that period.

In 1944, Edward L. Clissold, who was at that time a member of the Oahu Stake Presidency, president of the Hawaii Temple and the Central Pacific Mission (the mission to the Japanese people of Hawaii), and an active-duty Navy officer, was sent to military government school at the University of Chicago. While there he was trained as a government administrator and expected to be assigned as a provincial governor in Japan when the war ended. As he anticipated, Clissold was sent to Japan immediately after the conclusion of hostilities. But contrary to his expectations, he was assigned to work in the education and religion section of SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers, literally General Douglas MacArthur's own office).

During his short tour of duty in Japan (he remained there for only two months), Brother Clissold became acquainted with not only with a number of LDS servicemen and the operation of servicemen's groups, but also became thoroughly familiar with the officers within the section of SCAP that had greatest influence on the development of religious affairs in postwar Japan.

In addition, Clissold did what he could to find the remaining Japanese Latter-day Saints from the previous mission era. On October 30, 1945, he placed a small ad in Japanese in a Tokyo newspaper, saying: "URGENT NOTICE—I would like any member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Near-Day (sic) Saints (Mormon Church) to contact me as soon as possible. Daiichi Hotel, Room 548. Lt. Col. Edward Clissold." Brother Nara Fujiya, who had shepherded the Japanese Saints from 1924 until 1933, responded to Brother Clissold's notice. As a result, a few other Japanese members were located and integrated into the activities of the LDS servicemen. (Yukiko Konno, "Fujiya Nara: Twice a Pioneer," *\_Ensign\_* 23 (April 1993): 31, 33.)

In February 1946, the Clissolds returned to Honolulu to resume their business and Church activities that had been curtailed by the war. Brother Clissold was soon called as both a stake high councilor and stake mission president.