

sacre at Mountain Meadow: An American Tragedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Richard E. Turley is the LDS Church's Assistant Church Historian.

10. Former LDS Institute teacher Grant Palmer was disfellowshipped in 2004 for publishing *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002). In 2008, Peter and Mary Danzig, both members of the Orchestra at Temple Square, resigned their membership in the Church after Peter was threatened with excommunication for publicly criticizing the Church's stance on homosexuality. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Fallout from Debate over Gays Leads Musician to Leave LDS Church," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 24, 2008, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=8345693&citytype=NGPSID> (accessed June 13, 2011).

A Missionary Model Misapplied

Reid L. Nielson. *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010, 214 pp. Photographs, endnotes, bibliography, and index. Paperback: \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-87480-989-3

Reviewed by Andrew R. Hall

Reid L. Nielson, the managing director of the LDS Church History Department, takes as his topic a relatively small and limited chapter in early twentieth-century Mormon history but uses it to tell a larger story that goes beyond Mormon studies. From the time the Japanese Mission opened in 1901 until its closure in 1924, the number of missionaries never rose above 1 percent of the total LDS missionary force, and their results were meager. Yet in one short book, Nielson not only fully analyzes the Mormon efforts in Japan but also deftly describes the range of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American Mormon views of Asians, analyzes the nature of worldwide Mormon missionary efforts, and places those efforts within the context of the larger Christian milieu.

The LDS Japanese Mission was active for only twenty-three years, with a total of fewer than ninety missionaries sent over from the United States. They managed to baptize 166 Japanese converts, but few remained in the faith community for long; and by

1924, there were only a dozen or so active churchgoers. The resumption of Mormon missionary work after World War II nearly had to begin from square one.

The heart of Nielson's work is his comparison of late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American Protestant and Mormon missionary efforts. Latter-day Saint evangelists differed from Protestants in both the scale and methods of their activities in East Asia. Protestants, then at the heyday of their missionary efforts, focused their efforts on the largely non-Christian areas of East Asia and the Levant. Mormon General Authorities, on the other hand, focused their work on North America and Europe, where they sent nearly 90 percent of their missionaries, while never assigning more than 1 percent of their missionaries to East Asia. Nine to 10 percent of Mormon missionaries were sent to the Pacific Islands, while Latin America, like East Asia, remained below 1 percent throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.

By the late nineteenth century, Mormonism had developed a unique method of evangelism, which Neilson calls the "Euro-American Mormon missionary model." The model featured the use of amateur, short-term missionaries who lived on the charity of those they met in the field. They spent the majority of their time doing personal contacting, including distributing religious literature (tracting) and holding street meetings. They spent relatively little time providing education or social welfare for those they sought to teach. American Protestant missionaries, in contrast, tended to be long-term, highly educated, salaried professionals. They spent much of their time opening and running schools, hospitals, and orphanages, relegating direct evangelical messages to a secondary emphasis in their work.

Christian missionaries had their greatest success in Japan in the 1870s and 1880s, when Japan had just opened itself to the West, and the Japanese were especially impressed by the education and social welfare offered by the Western missionaries. In the 1890s, however, a wave of Japanese nationalism and distrust of foreign religions considerably slowed the evangelical work. The LDS missionaries arrived in 1901, during this fallow period. Despite benefiting from the work of others who had introduced the Japanese to Christianity and provided translations of the Bible,

the Mormons converted the Japanese at a significantly slower rate than the various American Protestant sects, even those who sent far fewer missionaries. Nielson attributes the poor results to the Mormons' inability to adjust the Euro-American Mormon missionary model to conditions in Japan.

In 1924 President Heber J. Grant, who had opened the mission as an apostle twenty-three years earlier, announced the decision to close the mission. A First Presidency announcement which ran in the *Deseret News* stated that the decision was made, "in consideration of existing conditions in Japan and because of the almost negligible results of missionary effort in that country since the mission was opened" (143). Neilson tries to go beyond that explanation by evaluating why there were "negligible results." He places the blame squarely on the Mormons' inappropriate application of the Euro-American missionary model, rather than on outside forces or the receptivity of the Japanese, as some participants and later observers have speculated. Neilson finds that, besides the unwillingness to take on educational and social work, the Church leaders failed to find explanations for their relative lack of success and therefore did not try to understand Japanese culture, adapt their message to the Japanese audience, or provide adequate language training to the missionaries. Also "the homogeneity of the missionaries' personal backgrounds, lack of missionary preparation and costly financial burdens, together with the church's relative neglect of the Japan Mission's need for human resources . . . compounded these problems" (121–22).

Neilson rejects as insignificant outside pressures, including the devastation of the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 and the rising antipathy towards Americans caused by the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred further immigration to the United States. He argues persuasively that neither event negatively impacted the evangelical efforts. Nielson also implicitly discounts the reasons most often given by the missionaries themselves, that the Japanese as a people had rejected their message, despite the missionaries' valiant efforts. This rejection was often linked to the racialist doctrine of the necessity of "believing blood" among the receiving population. For example, Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson in the April 1913 general conference said, "We have not had success among the Latin or Oriental races, or among the

Chinese or Japanese. There may be some of the blood of Israel among them, but so far we have discovered but a very little" (122).

While I applaud Nielson's efforts to examine flaws in the Mormon approach, rather than blaming the native listeners, his approach fails to treat the Japanese as active participants in their own choices. While Nielson succeeds in showing that American Protestant mission efforts were more successful than those of the Mormons in the early twentieth century, the fact remains that the early twentieth century was a fallow period for all Christian evangelical efforts in Japan. There clearly were historical and cultural factors at work, deeper than the short-term anger caused by the 1924 Immigration Law, involved in the Japanese rejection of Christianity.

For that reason, I hope that Nielson will continue the story with an examination of the growth of the Latter-day Saint Church in Japan in the years after World War II. From 1946 to the early 1990s, the Church enjoyed limited but significant growth, so that today there are stable congregations in all medium- to large-sized cities, nearly total indigenous leadership, and plans for a third temple. In the early 1990s, growth slowed down nearly to a halt; and since then, the number of active members has stagnated.¹ For example, the number of LDS congregations (wards and branches) in Japan actually shrank from 289 in 1993 to 286 in 2010.² Was either the growth or the subsequent decline due to major changes in evangelical models?

I would argue that the Euro-American Mormon missionary model has changed little, with the exception of better language and cultural training for missionaries coming from outside of Japan. Missionaries still spend most of their time in vain attempts to elicit religious discussions with an increasingly secular population, rather than engaging in education (other than poorly taught English language lessons) or social work. Even if they did switch their focus toward education and social work, it is doubtful that they could offer much to a country as wealthy and advanced as Japan.

Rather than changes in the missionary model, then, I think post-war changes in growth have more to do with the needs and interests of the Japanese themselves. Many Japanese after World War II were impressed by American military power and economic

success, and young American missionaries were among the most visible representations of American youth available. By the 1990s, however, the novelty of young American faces had worn off, and the murderous rampage of the doomsday Aum Shinrikyo sect scared many Japanese away from organized religion. Today the Church in Japan is stable, with strong leadership and many indigenous missionaries, but little real growth is occurring. The Church is not withdrawing from Japan this time, but it has cut the number of missionaries assigned to the country nearly in half since the peak years of the early 1990s.³ Cumorah does not footnote the second figure, but I can certainly vouch for it from my conversations with the mission presidents over the years. The number of missions in Japan declined from ten in 1991–95 to six since June 2010. By the way, the low 2011 numbers I am using are pre-earthquake; but several missionaries in the Tokyo and Sendai missions were asked to go home a month or two early after that calamity. Tokyo is back up to pre-earthquake strength in missionary numbers, but Sendai is not.

How do Japanese Mormons themselves think about this inconsistent history of missionary work and the limited spread of the gospel among their own people? Surprisingly, although the racist idea of the potency of the “believing blood” of Israel is thankfully fading in the general Mormon consciousness, one can still see remnants of it in Japan. Some Japanese members are animated by the far-fetched possibility of historical bloodlines going back to the House of Israel. Although it is not taught from the pulpit, members often share their theories of Mosaic law archetypes in traditional Japanese practices. For example, some speculate that the red *torii* gates to Shintô shrines are connected to the Passover lamb’s blood painted on the doorposts, and link the *mikoshi* portable shrines carried through the streets in festivals with the Ark of the Covenant. These theories were discussed in a series of articles by LDS Church translator Masao Watabe in the official Japanese-language Church magazine in 1961.⁴ Rather than accepting the nineteenth-century Mormon ideas of the geographic dispersal of Israelite blood in which they are not included, they have created their own discourses of inclusion. Neilson does not discuss these theories, which apparently did not develop until after the period of his study; nor is it a major theme about Japanese

Mormons, although a talk or lesson alludes to it once or twice a year. But it does suggest that for some Japanese Saints, at least some elements of the early “believing blood” arguments which Nielson discredits in this history still hold a certain appeal.

Despite my wish for more consideration of social and historical causes for native interest, I find this book to be a remarkable work, striking a fine balance between thoroughness and readability. Nielson provides a welcome bridge between Mormon studies and the wider world of missiology.

Notes

1. Jiro Numano, “Perseverance amid Paradox: The Struggle of the LDS Church in Japan Today,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 140–41.

2. Unit figures in Japan, www.cumorah.com (accessed July 2011); David Stewart, who maintains the Cumorah website, apparently derives these figures from the annual *Church News* for the respective years. My own observations from living in Japan periodically during the last twenty years confirm this stagnation.

3. www.cumorah.com (accessed July 2011), states: “In 2000, there were approximately 1,000 full-time missionaries serving in Japan, 18% of which were native Japanese. By early 2011, the number of full-time missionaries stationed in Japan was nearly half the number assigned in 2000.” It cites Don L. Searle, “Japan: Growing Light in the East,” *Ensign*, September 2000, 44 note 47.

4. Masao Watabe’s series begins with “Nihon no Kiso Minzoku wa Heburai Senmin no Seiei Nari (The Founding Peoples of Japan Were the True Descendants of the Chosen Hebrews),” *Seito no Michi*, August 1961, 460–64. See also Spencer J. Palmer, “Did Christ Visit Japan,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 5 (Winter 1970): 150–58, for an English language summary of some of the theories.

Elder Price Superstar

The Book of Mormon (current Broadway musical)

Reviewed by Michael Hicks

I’ll never forget the first time I heard my mother swear. I was in my thirties and had finally decided to talk to her about her second