

MacArthur encouraged religion in postwar Japan

by [Suzanne McGee](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

A new book on postwar Japan says Gen. Douglas MacArthur sought to fill the country's "spiritual vacuum" with religious and quasi-religious beliefs, from Christianity to Freemasonry, as an antidote to communism.

In *1945 Under the Shadow of the Occupation: The Ashlar and the Cross*, Japanese investigative journalist Eiichiro Tokumoto documents MacArthur's efforts to persuade missionaries to intensify their efforts, even encouraging mass conversions to Catholicism.

"There was a complete collapse of faith in Japan in 1945—in our invincible military, in the emperor, in the religion that had become known as 'state Shinto,'" Tokumoto writes. His book so far has been published only in Japanese.

A number of documents that Tokumoto used for research were declassified only recently, including accounts of a 1946 meeting between MacArthur and two U.S. Catholic bishops.

"General MacArthur asked us to urge the sending of thousands of Catholic missionaries—at once," bishops John F. O'Hara and Michael J. Ready later reported to the Vatican. MacArthur told them that they had a year to help fill the spiritual vacuum created by the defeat.

On the basis of his experience in the Philippines, MacArthur believed that the Catholic Church could find particular appeal because the tradition of seeking absolution for one's mistakes or misdeeds "appeals to the

Oriental," they reported.

In the wake of the missionaries' efforts, the Bible became a best seller in Japan, while the number of Catholics increased by about 19 percent between 1948 and 1950, Tokumoto said.

The missionaries' success, however, was short-lived. Relatively few of the 2,000 or so who flooded into Japan could speak Japanese. The 1960s saw a student backlash against perceived "elite" Christians who ran several major universities, including International Christian University, founded in Tokyo in 1955 with the then-retired general chairing the school's fund-raising efforts. —ENInews/RNS