The Holy Spirit and the Nineteenth-Century Mission to Hawaii

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Highlights and Lowlights

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Keywords mission, culture, cultural adaptation, cultural traits, civilization, economics, education, holism, holistic evangelism, population, Holy Spirit, success and failure, hope

Abstract

This article explores the missionary successes and failures of nineteenth-century Hawaii. It then explores the Holy Spirit connection to these successes and the lack of such a connection regarding the failures. It suggests missionary failures in the area of supernaturalism and Holy Spirit listening, failures to which the missionaries were particularly prone given their almost mono-focus on “civilization” and “education.” It then suggests native Hawaiian failures in, first, addressing their depopulation problem and, second, in attaining their aspirations of economic progress. Finally, facing these failures, it probes certain Holy Spirit perspectives as their potential solution.

What Happened: The Positives

The mission story of nineteenth-century Hawaii is one both of exhilarating successes and crushing disappointments. Ever since Captain Cook first made Western contact in 1778 with a previously isolated Hawaii, Hawaii had increasing and plentiful contact with Western traders. It was only in 1820 when seven missionary couples and four Hawaiian boys were sent out from Boston by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) that the gospel first came to Hawaii. But already in 1824 and 1825 they were reporting “the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the islands” that “brought thousands . . . into praying circles or societies.”1
Keen with interest, after some years, numbers of the notable high chiefs and chiefesses relocated just to be near the missionaries where they could learn the message of salvation. By their seventh year on the island of Hawaii, the Hawaiians had already built a church capable of seating 4,800 people and were occasionally preaching to crowds of over 10,000.

Then again in 1837–1838 waves of revival hit the islands in which the waves of “weeping natives” reminded the Hilo missionary, the Reverend Titus Coan—himself converted under Charles Finney—of the “great and powerful awakenings under the preaching of Nettleton and Finney” he had seen. In the autumn of 1838, a congregation of at least 10,000 assembled on the western shore of Hawaii to hear the gospel being preached. At Hilo Coan baptized 1,705 on the first Sunday of July in 1838; Bingham in the west of the island of Hawaii preached regularly every Sunday to a congregation of 3,000.

By 1853 the native Hawaiian church had already sent out their own native Hawaiian missionary, John Kekalas, to the Marquesas and out of a native population of about 71,000, over 56,000 were Protestants. The ABCFM moved to declare Hawaii Christianized and terminate the mission.

Contemporaries observed that, eventually, the “Bible was in every hut”—remarkable given that upon the missionaries’ arrival in 1820, Hawaii had neither a written literature nor an alphabet. The New England missionaries—with their Puritan-based educational emphasis—saw literacy and the creation of an alphabet as one of their first tasks, though needing first to learn the language themselves. Literacy was so eagerly embraced by the Hawaiians that by the second half of the nineteenth century they had a higher literacy rate than the United States!

And the Bible was no mere ornament on the shelf. Indeed, in Hawaii the chiefs had established the Bible as a basis of law, being careful to adapt it to their Hawaiian situation. This was all part of the wider holistic vision of the early missionaries: economic, social, and political well-being. All were embraced as relevant.

In 1836, with the approval of the majority of the chiefs, the missionaries sent back to their sending board, the ABCFM, and other interested philanthropists, a memorial outlining their wider holistic needs:

The people need competent instruction in agriculture, manufactures, and the various methods of production, in order to develop the resources of the country. . . . They need competent instruction immediately in the science of government, in order to promote industry, to secure ample means of support, and to protect the just rights of all. They need much instruction and aid in
getting into operation and extended influence those arts and usages which are adapted to the country.

They added a prescient warning of what would happen should the native Hawaiians not be helped to develop their resources themselves:

But foreign speculators may be expected to seize on the advantages which the country affords for agriculture, manufacture and commerce; and an inevitable flux of foreign population, induced only by the love of pleasure and gain, would doubtless hasten the waste of the aborigines; and at no distant period, the mere moldering remnants of the nation could be pointed out to the voyager.¹⁰

Trade and business introduced increasing prosperity for both commoners¹¹ (patchily) and chiefs (mightily, at least for the first decades¹²) while in the political sphere, by 1840 Hawaiians had developed their own constitution, starting with a “Declaration of Rights, Both of the Chiefs and People.” Its very first sentence ran:

“God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the earth,” in unity and blessedness. God has also bestowed certain rights alike on all men and all chiefs, and all people of all lands.¹³

Such a pronouncement is a moving testimony to the Hawaiian church’s awareness of their faith’s public implications; additionally, it is a near-revolutionary commitment to protecting the commoners against the oppression of otherwise all-powerful chiefs.¹⁴ But it was more: it was also a practical key to Hawaii maintaining its political independence in a nineteenth-century colonial world where, unfortunately, Western nations only conceded political recognition and independence according to that state’s perceived “standard of civilization,” written constitutions serving as one evidence of that.¹⁵

The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Positives

The Holy Spirit’s role was key in all these advances, as is evident from the very timing of the missionaries’ arrival in Hawaii. That is, after centuries of absolute adherence to idol-worship with its own strict taboos (kapu in Hawaiian)—“where men and women, even husband and wives, were not allowed to eat together, where commoners must prostrate themselves before high chiefs and where even the shadow of a commoner must not fall upon the high chief,” all with death as the penalty for transgression¹⁶—suddenly, before a single missionary had arrived (indeed, in the middle of the missionaries’ six-
month sea voyage from New England around Cape Horn) and without any awareness that they were coming, the Hawaiians overnight abandoned their idolatry. A shock rippled through the nation when, violating long-held kapu, King Liholiho publicly ate together with the Queen Mother Keōpūolani and his chief counselor Kaʻahumanu. The result was a spiritual vacuum that the gospel filled readily.

The Holy Spirit’s work was also evident in the individual human drama that triggered the 1820 mission to Hawaii: Obookiah’s story. In 1809 a desperate seventeen-year-old Obookiah, having lost his family through Hawaii’s constant warfare and having seen his aunt thrown to her death for violating a kapu, sought escape. He signed up on a New York whaler under Captain Brintnall. After a long voyage, the ship returned to New York, with Captain Brintnall then taking Obookiah on with him home to New Haven. That Obookiah signed with a New Haven native who furthermore wanted to take him home with him was surely of God. After all, New Haven, with its Yale University under the presidency of the Reverend Timothy Dwight, played a key role in the Second Great Awakening then freshly breaking out, with Dwight also being a founding member of the very ABCFM that eleven years later sent out the Hawaii mission. Obookiah was swept up in all this—even lodging for several months with President Timothy Dwight’s family—devoting himself to six years of training in preparation for returning to Hawaii, only to die of typhus fever in 1818. But rather than end the mission, his inspirational life and death only lit a spark in the revival-struck Northeast, rousing others to sign up for the mission. Within one-and-one-half years of his death, a mission had been recruited and sent off to Hawaii.

And, of course, the Holy Spirit’s role was not only central in the timing of the mission, in the human drama triggering the mission, but also in the very prosecution of the mission. That is, the brand of missionaries who went to Hawaii were very revivalistic. Their revivalistic Holy Spirit outlook is evidenced by their language, as with Hiram Bingham, the group’s leader, who peppers his memoirs with remarks like, “The outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the islands in 1824 and 1825 . . . brought hundreds at first, and thousands at length, into praying circles or societies.” Elias Bond would commonly begin even his negative annual reports to the ABCFM with comments along the lines of, “During this period of two years . . . neither prosperous or adverse . . . He has not vouchsafed to us in any extraordinary measure the converting operation of His Holy Spirit.” These individuals were no fringe outliers or special enthusiasts in the mission; they were typical representatives.
What Happened: The Negatives

Tragically, Hawaii’s mission story is not one of unmitigated success. Among the disappointments are the following:

- The indigenous population plummeted alarmingly, from approximately 300,000 when Cook arrived in 1778, to 134,750 in 1823 shortly after the missionaries’ arrival, to 71,015 in 1853 shortly before the ABCFM pronounced Hawaii evangelized, to 37,656 in 1890, three years before Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown. Multiple nineteenth-century Hawaiian kings identified this as their number one concern, but never were able to reverse it.

- The land reform of 1848 (the Mahele), strongly urged by the missionaries as a means to give commoners an interest in entrepreneurial business, failed to extend land ownership to most commoners; they ended up with only one percent of the land.

- Church growth and vitality, so encouraging in the first half of the nineteenth century, seemed to stall in its second half; and at the same time, the tension between the white missionary administrators and local, native Hawaiian church pastors escalated.

- Economic development—eagerly embraced by all levels of Hawaiians intended to better the lot of common Hawaiians, seemed, especially after 1860, to pass by most of them. The indigenous Hawaiians fell behind. We read that by 1880, “of the six hundred business houses in Honolulu not one is conducted by a native, while two hundred are controlled by the Chinese.”

- Largely driven by a split in power between native Hawaiians holding significant political power and an Anglo-Saxon minority (not all of whom were “foreigners,” as many were Hawaiian-born) wielding economic power, the political scene exploded in 1893. The chiefly Anglo-Saxon oligarchy—though not primarily “Big Sugar”—overthrew the native Queen Liliuokalani, followed five years later by the loss of Hawaiian political independence, when annexed by the United States. Contrary to the wishes of previous generations of indigenous Hawaiians, foreign-born Hawaiians, and missionaries, Hawaii was no longer a sovereign nation.

- An increasingly bitter opposition between the white administrators of the Hawaiian Evangelical Alliance and its rank-and-file indigenous Hawaiian pastors developed in the 1880s, and especially from 1893 onwards, when Queen Liliuokalani was dethroned by the largely white oligarchy. Sadly, racial tensions increased in a society where previously there had been little.
Additionally, deep splits opened up between pro- and anti-annexationist, indigenous pastors in the church.\textsuperscript{35}

Though cheered by the earlier-listed positives, these negative developments would have been deeply saddening to the early generations of both chiefs and missionaries. Their bright hopes for the nation had been large, broad, and holistic, as captured in Hiram Bingham’s recollection of those early days:

The next day, with several chiefs, he [the king] visited our families; and, on being assured anew of our unvarying intention to do him good, and not evil, to elevate the nation, and promote their prosperity and salvation, he confirmed the original permission granted us, to remain and labor as missionaries, . . . and requested us to aid him in building a palace three stories high; the upper story of which, he said, should be devoted to the worship of Jehovah.\textsuperscript{36}

Clearly, some of these hopes were dashed by the end of the century.

**The Holy Spirit and the Might Have Beens**

Hawaii’s ups and downs have been examined from various perspectives. The first half of the twentieth century focused far more on the positives of Hawaii’s assimilation into the United States. By contrast, since the 1960s, a darker focus on Hawaii as “dispossessed” predominates in academic circles. Within this focus are three broad schools: a “traditional” bemoaning “foreign imposition and assimilation,” a “recent variation” emphasizing Hawaiians’ heroic “resistance” to foreign imposition, and a “new” explanation in which the “‘elites’ assimilate for their own self-interests, while the commoners ‘resist’ assimilation and don’t benefit from the change.”\textsuperscript{37} Then, most recently, a number of native Hawaiian scholars have diverted altogether by fundamentally challenging this “dispossession” theme. They portray native Hawaiians as authors of their fate, not its victims. They were not imposed upon; rather, as independent agents, they intelligently chose and adapted foreigners’ ways for their own use, as they crafted constitutions, introduced the Great Mahele of 1848, and subsequently developed political structures. This new school of Hawaiian scholarship suggests that the real dispossession problems only arose much later in the nineteenth century, not with the Great Mahele of 1848 but with events such as the business community’s (not all but many) armed resistance to King Kalakaua in 1887, the
coerced overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani in 1893, and America’s annexation in 1898 against the popular will of ethnic Hawaiians.\textsuperscript{38}

The remainder of this article will not explore any of these perspectives; rather it targets the particular question of “how might a better access to the Holy Spirit have helped avoid some of the negative developments in Hawaii?” It will suggest two practices as potentially key: Holy Spirit supernaturalism (especially from the missionaries) and Holy Spirit listening (both on the side of the missionaries and on the side of the native Hawaiians) in the face of cultural habits.

**A Fuller Gospel of Supernaturalism**

Observers of the native Hawaiian church continually reported the revival of kahunaism—their spiritistic healing practices—a syncretistic kahunaism diluting a pure commitment to Christ.\textsuperscript{39} This was part of the reported decline in Christian enthusiasm in the second half of the nineteenth century. I suggest that one reason for this was a lack of sufficient full gospel “supernaturalism” in the missionaries’ worldview.

Their worldview was marked by a sort of typically nineteenth-century rationalism that dismissed supernatural activities—for curses, for healings—as rank “superstition.”\textsuperscript{40} They were viewed as unrealities in which only the unsophisticated believed. Typical of this nineteenth-century mindset was pioneering Presbyterian missionary to China, John Nevius, who—faced with forty years of experience in China (1853–1893)—wrote a book on his about-face concerning demonic possession. He could no longer deny its reality. His book’s very first paragraph reveals his typically nineteenth-century mindset:

> I brought with me to China a strong conviction that a belief in demons, and communications with spiritual beings, belongs exclusively to a barbarous and superstitious age, and at present can consist only with mental weakness and want of culture.\textsuperscript{41}

This sort of missionary rationalism created a real disconnect between missionaries and native Hawaiian Christians, not in every area, but in important areas. They should have known these things to be real. So, when exhorted to give up their belief in the aumakua (spirits) by the missionaries, the Hawaiians would simply answer, “How can I, when I see all about me so many signs of their presence?” They would point out the actual, physical manifestations of spiritistic practices and then ask the missionaries, “How do you haoles explain that?”\textsuperscript{42}

The impression they had gained from the missionaries was that, regarding healing, “Jehovah cares only for the soul, and does not hear prayer for physical ills.”\textsuperscript{43}
Unintentionally, the missionaries had made the Christian God almost irrelevant in one area of their people’s lives. Traditional kahuna practice filled the void left. In one sense, they were almost driven in that direction by the missionaries’ blind spot on this point. More Holy Spirit supernaturalism was the answer.

**Holy Spirit Listening—Acts 10**

Listening to God is always important, but it seems particularly important whenever the church seeks breakthrough in cross-cultural, pioneering situations. Certainly this was the case in the Christian church’s first-century pioneering breakthrough when it moved from simply being a sect within Judaism to being “Christians” equally at home in the Gentile world. This breakthrough went through three steps: Peter’s encounter with the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), Paul and Barnabas with the Jewish-Gentile converts in Antioch (Acts 11), and finally the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) where this extension of identity became official.

The whole three-part process started with listening: first Cornelius (Acts 10:1–6) and then, crucially, Peter (10:9–23). It never would have happened without this listening. Why? Because Peter’s ingrained, habitual course of action—reinforced not only by centuries of Jewish tradition but even by the example and principle of his own master, who had rebuffed the Canaanite woman saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 15:24)—made it actually impossible. On his own, even as a devout disciple, he would never have gone to the Gentiles with the gospel. Indeed, when faced with this new course of action by a direct command of the Lord, Peter’s knee-jerk reaction was an absolute refusal: “Surely not, Lord” (Acts 10:14). And he explained his refusal, saying, “I have never [done it that way].” It was simply not within his customary range of action. It was only listening to the Holy Spirit that made him consider a new way, thus beginning a revolutionary new development in the Christian church.

Applying this to the Hawaiian mission, it certainly seems that listening to God was a key to their initial launch. From the providential occurrences (Obookiah’s extraordinary life, Hawaiians’ abandonment of their ancient religion three months before the missionaries’ arrival) triggering the mission, the Spirit’s leadings are clear. They started well. But did the missionary fathers continue in this way? Did the later mission disappointments arise from the stony ground or rather from the sowers’ faulty seed? I suggest that two areas may have raised barriers to good listening on their part: their New England education emphasis and their Western “civilization” emphasis. Peter had his customary practices and the New England missionaries had theirs.
Listening and the Education Emphasis

“Your greatest strength is likely to also be your greatest weakness.” It is a phrase often heard from management consultants. And it is a phrase probably true of the New England missionaries in Hawaii, especially their educational emphasis. The great majority of them were university graduates, at a time when even in the mainland United States only a tiny percentage graduated from college. Indeed, many of nineteenth-century Hawaii’s most prominent foreign-born, non-missionary citizens had no such education. Charles Reed Bishop—Hawaii’s first banker and eventually privy councilor to kings—would have been typical, with his eighth-grade education.

This educational emphasis produced, as Yale’s Timothy Dwight put it, “the decorum and the dignity, which are indispensable in the desk”—a blessing to many, but also a source of offense to, and then division with, the rough-and-ready converts of the Western frontier swept into the Kingdom during the Second Great Awakening.

If this educational emphasis created a division within the American church, how much more so within the Hawaiian church. The Hawaiians, only just brought out of illiteracy, were never going to attain to university credentials so quickly, and yet one suspects this level was what the missionaries expected in their leadership model.

When Richard Ellis, the London Missionary Society missionary in Tahiti, traveled through Hawaii in 1822, he suggested to the American missionaries that for a native church leader Christian character, a zealous heart, communication skills, and some practical mechanical skills were the most important qualifications. Regarding a “liberal education” (i.e., university) he said, “we do not think it necessary for all.” Bingham, the leader of the American group, politely but firmly disagreed, saying, “But their standard of a missionary preacher, and their views of employing lay laborers, were somewhat different from those of our mission.”

It could well be that these particular educational expectations were one reason that relatively few native Hawaiians became pastors. In 1863, the very year Hawaii was declared by the ABCFM to be a “Christian nation,” there were only four to be found in the entire nation. By 1890 there were still only fifty-one native pastors.

Perhaps here a Holy Spirit emphasis would have helped the leadership blockage, even as in Acts 4:8, 13 we see the fisherman-leader Peter speaking with such effect that the rulers and elders react with, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

Early Hawaiian Christianity had its own model of just such simply educated but capable leaders and teachers in “Bartimeus.” A blind and illiterate early convert, we read of him in Richard Armstrong’s 1837 journal:
In my opinion, the most eloquent speaker in the nation. His knowledge of the Scriptures as well as of general subjects, is remarkable, considering his inability to read. No missionary among us can command Scripture more copiously and appositely, in an off-hand effort, than he. Even the parts that have not been printed in the native language seem to be familiar to him, from merely hearing them quoted in the pulpit and Bible class. But his mind, and especially his memory, possess power of the very first order. On moral subjects he often evinces astonishing powers of discrimination in comparison with most other natives. He is a short man and rather corpulent, very inferior in appearance when sitting, but when he rises to speak, he looks well—stands erect, gesticulates with freedom, and pours forth, as he becomes animated, words in torrents. He is perfectly familiar with the former as well as the present religion, customs, modes of thinking, and in fact the whole history of the islanders, which enables him often to draw comparisons, make allusions, and direct appeals, with a power which no foreigner will ever possess.\(^{50}\)

Hawaii was capable of producing such leaders, leaders for whom a “liberal education” was neither a benefit or a necessity.

**Listening and the Civilization Emphasis**

To their credit, the missionaries to Hawaii were very holistic. As Hiram Bingham wrote, “To save their souls was the main object, but that object was not to be singly and constantly pressed on the attention of such a people.”\(^{51}\) Unfortunately, however, this holism was cached in terms of “civilizing”:

> We longed to see them move and live, and stand up, an army to praise God, a civilized and Christian nation. . . . Their uncouth and disgusting manners were to be corrected, their modes of dress and living to be improved, their grossness, destitution, and wretchedness, if possible, removed; and taste, refinement, and comfort, substituted.\(^{52}\)

This was problematic. It is one thing properly to prize identifiable features of one’s own culture as superior to another culture’s specific features (or vice versa); it is another thing completely to dismiss the entirety of another culture as “uncivilized.” The problem here is tactical—that this made respectful communication more difficult and, consequently, a respectful reception of the transcendent gospel more difficult; the problem here is also fundamentally theological—it tends wrongly to identify one’s local and imminent culture with the universal and transcendent gospel. The best missionaries sought to avoid this sense of cultural superiority.\(^{53}\) But with “civilization” as a central
element to one’s mission, it was difficult to see how this sense of cultural superiority could be avoided.

Many critiques of missionaries have referenced the “demoralizing effect” of their nineteenth-century focus on a “civilizing mission,” which inescapably implied their “civilized” state against the Hawaiians’ “uncivilized.”\(^{54}\) Some have suggested that this demoralization, when taken to heart by the Hawaiians, may even have contributed to their depopulation, affecting Hawaiians’ will to live, and suppressing the birth rate.\(^{55}\)

This civilization emphasis worked another detriment: it induced deafness in the missionaries. That is, it seemed to disable the missionaries’ ability to take seriously some of the concerns and values of their “uncivilized” Hawaiian brothers and sisters. This may have contributed hugely to the ugly split between the white administrators of the Hawaiian Evangelical Alliance (AEH) and its native members when Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown in 1893. While most native Hawaiian pastors and church members stood passionately with their queen,\(^ {56}\) most of the white leaders of the AEH had thrown their support behind the Provisional Government replacing her. But these white leaders never seemed to take seriously the native Hawaiians’ view, and conflict resulted:

Rev. Oliver P. Emerson warned . . . “It is an actual state of war.” Dramatic battles played out that witnessed the expulsion of pastors from their pulpits, the boarding up of churches, the excommunication of near-entire congregations, heated land battles, the arrest of church trustees, and much more.

Native AEH congregations throughout every island actively contested attempts to dismiss their authority as leaders and Christians. . . . In one letter to the American Board, Rev. Hyde wrote about the numerous pastors who faced outraged congregations because of the pastors’ support for annexation, and mentioned that he himself had recently been told that one of his former students, now a pastor on Kau‘i, was praying that God would “wipe out the missionaries who had dethroned the Queen, robbed the people, etc., etc.”\(^ {57}\)

What is striking here is that the white AEH leaders never even seemed to consider the option of sitting down with their native Hawaiian brothers, hearing their concerns, and then discussing options. Rather it was a “my way or the highway” approach. Supporting the Provisional Government was insisted upon as “the Christian way,” and the native Hawaiian alternative views on the matter were simply dismissed.

But listening to the Holy Spirit inevitably means listening to people. So it was with Peter in Acts 10. He did not start his Gentile encounter with a pronouncement but
with a question: “May I ask why you sent for me?” (v. 22) He first wanted to listen to
them. And he listened so well that he actually “heard” them, learning something new
and important in the process: “I now realize” (v. 34) he said. This sort of listening ear
would have served the AEH administrators well, perhaps enabling them to learn
something new and important in the process, and ending up peacemakers in a time of
turmoil. But it was not to be.

**Holy Spirit Listening on Hawaii’s Side**

Listening to the Spirit was important not only for the missionaries and white
administrators of AEH; it was also important for the native Hawaiian church. Equally,
even as the missionaries may have been deaf in certain areas, so too may have been the
Hawaiians. Two particularly important areas are depopulation and economics. These
are highly sensitive areas and one must strive to avoid the presumptuous stance of the
“prescriptive outside analyst, who can see more clearly” than the locals; nevertheless
they are simply too important to avoid.

**Depopulation**

O. Bushnell, emeritus professor of medical microbiology and medical history at the
University of Hawaii, observed that, “Two sets of factors led to a decrease in population:
the first, those that provoked an actual loss of people from any cause; the second, those
that induced a lowered birth rate.”

Pernicious epidemics, annihilating thousands,
were a killer. Against these the Hawaiians could do little to protect themselves. But then
we are faced not simply with the question of, “Why was Hawaii so severely depopulated
on multiple occasions?” (the epidemics) but, “Why did it not recover and increase in
between those epidemics? Why did its population even in the in-between times
continually plummet?” The lowered birth rate—which was clearly drastic, in some
instances only two to six children being born to one hundred married women—had a
number of causes tied to avoidable Hawaiian behavior: venereal disease and family
implosion.

It is widely conceded that venereal diseases, specifically gonorrhea, caused sterility
in much of the populace. Venereal disease—evilly introduced by the ever-increasing
waves of Western seamen who came through Hawaii after 1788—was spread by the
sexual practices of Hawaiians that have been described, by secular, non-missionary
sources, as a “vividly sexualized society.” Unrestrained sexual practice is a behavior
pattern that can be changed, but there was repeated testimony that even with the
church, this was the “national sin.” Clearly, greater Holy Spirit restraint in this area
would have aided the depopulation scourge.
Additionally, Kirch and Sahlins see the “structural implosion of the family” occasioned by certain Hawaiian cultural practices and values as having “encouraged a low rate of reproduction” and thus Hawaii’s “demographic disaster.” They write:

What was true of the kingdom applied as well to the humbler domestic realm of the people: constant fluctuation of household arrangements and membership, due in good measure to shifting sentiments and attachments . . . . Above all, a prolonged period of mobility among younger adults devoted to the pursuit of pleasure. Great value was attached to _u‘i_, “vigorou[s] youth[ful] beauty.” Young women were reluctant to settle down and rear children because of the adverse effects on their figures. . . . Certain it is that infants were often left for the grandparents to rear while the mother went on her ways.

To the degree this is accurate, Hawaii’s depopulation problem may have been changed by native Hawaiian family practices more in line with Holy Spirit values.

**Economics**

Economics is important to Hawaii’s story. After all, it was the native Hawaiians’ falling behind—and the resultant gulf between native Hawaiians and the business community—that was a key factor contributing both to Queen Liliuokalani’s 1893 overthrow and to Hawaii’s 1898 annexation.

But if one grants that this economic gulf was important, and therefore that bridging that gulf would have been hugely helpful, still the question remains: How could the Holy Spirit have played any sort of role in this; and more specifically, how might the Hawaiians’ better listening to him have helped?

My argument here is not a straight-line one that argues a) for the modern capitalist economics encouraged by the missionaries as “more Christian” than Hawaiians’ traditional subsistence system, such that b) listening to the Holy Spirit would automatically have led to its embrace. Rather, my argument is: a) increasingly, starting well before the missionaries came, Hawaii’s leaders had opted for change and the embrace of Western ways; b) for that change to be successful, the adoption of certain values and practices was necessary; and c) the changes required were precisely the sort that the Holy Spirit nurtured, such that listening to the Holy Spirit on these points would have been important for economic enabling. The three steps in this argument are followed below.

First, it is clear that Hawaiians, from Kamehameha the Conqueror’s first meeting with Cook in 1778 onwards, voluntarily adopted Western values. Kamehameha’s
embrace of foreign advisors, Western weapons, and ships—by 1810 he had forty-two western sloops and schooners and many muskets and cannons—was key to his being the first Hawaiian to conquer and unite all the Hawaiian islands under one king. Looking Westwards politically, he also ceded his kingdom to Great Britain in 1794 in return for a guarantee of protection. And before one missionary had set foot on Hawaii, visitors observed Hawaiians in full Western dress and their important officials even having adopted foreign names: Billy Pitt, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, etc. Later, Kamehameha III (reigned 1825–1854) and his advisors, in order to protect Hawaii’s independence against foreign trouble-makers within and colonizers without, slowly began adopting a more Western way of governing (constitutional restraints on the monarchy, etc.).

On the economic front, the king and chiefs sent a letter in 1836 to American friends of Hawaii requesting “additional teachers, like the teachers who dwell in your own country . . . agriculturists skilled in raising sugar-cane, cotton, . . . and in making sugar, . . . makers of machinery to work on a large scale [etc.].” None of this was forced on the Hawaiians; they saw it to be the best hope for their future.

To succeed in this push toward Western-style economic development, a stress on three qualities would be important: hard work, saving, and work as a calling. However, all of these fit only uncomfortably within the Hawaiian scale of values. First, as early visitors, prior to the coming of the missionaries, to Hawaii observed, leisure was valued over hard work. Anthropologists recognize this as typical for what Miguel Basáñez calls “cultures of dignity” as opposed to Anglo-Saxon “cultures of achievement.”

Second, saving for future investment also contrasted with Hawaiian cultural values, two in particular. First, it contrasted with a traditional “production for use” value— aiming at subsistence—in contrast to the foreigners’ “production for exchange” value aiming at surplus. Second, it ran headlong into the “Polynesian political economy of grandeur” that devalued saving as community-neglecting “stinginess.” Hawaiians showed their greatness of soul and mana by their grandeur and generosity.

This cultural clash is perfectly illustrated in John Tamatoa Baker (1852–1921), an anti-annexationist politician, businessman, and rancher of Hawaiian-Tahitian-English extraction. Paradoxically, his success was due to the very economic values for which his own fellow Hawaiians criticized him. What he regarded as “making savings” and a businesslike hard-headed cost/benefit analysis was dismissed as “stinginess”:

In Baker’s case his role as a pseudo-aliʻi meant that other Native Hawaiians had certain expectations of him, particularly regarding his generosity. The openhanded generosity of the aliʻi, however, conflicted with the attitude
required to develop wealth in a capitalist society. . . . Baker, however, embraced his reputation for “stinginess,” which he cited as the secret to his success. 79

Because of this values clash, Hawaiians stayed away from the very sort of wealth-producing activities that would have been so helpful to them in avoiding poverty. As Cook says:

Unlike the Chinese, Japanese, and haole, Native Hawaiians tended to stay away from mercantile operations, in part because of the lack of capital and in part because of a lack of interest in shopkeeping. 80

It was not merely external but internal checks—sheer lack of interest—that blocked their economic progress. This seems clear from the fact that many nineteenth-century Chinese, despite prejudice and lack of English language mastery, prospered, even as millionaires. 81

Hawaii’s native leadership in both government and the church, having opted for a Westernized, profit-oriented economic system, could have succeeded better in it had they accessed relevant Holy Spirit values: hard work, thrift, and a concept of work and wealth creation as a “Christian calling.” Each of these is actually a biblical value, as even the sketchiest overview shows us:

• God’s command of a work/leisure ratio of 6:1 in Exod 34:21 and 35:2 is suggestive of the need to elevate the value of work vis-à-vis leisure, even as it is highlighted in God’s command to Adam in Gen 2:15 to work the garden for his sustenance.
• Thrift is repeatedly mandated in the book of Proverbs.
• “Work as a calling” flows from our being in the image of a God who not only valued “spiritual” things, but instead called everything in creation “good” (Genesis 1); it also is rooted in Col 3:23–24: “Whatever you do, work at it . . . as working for the Lord.” 82

With the widespread adoption of these perspectives, perhaps then things would have been different in Hawaii.
Success Story: Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop

Things were different for some, for Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop (1831–1884), great-granddaughter of Kamehameha I certainly. She embodied the original holistic vision of early chiefs and missionaries, and as a result made a multi-generational impact for good. Educated by missionaries in the Royal School, she managed to hold on to her Hawaiian identity while recognizing the importance of wealth creation based on the values of hard work, thrift, and work as a calling. She wanted these very things to be passed on to her people. So, at her death she put her vast resources—she owned nine percent of Hawaii’s land acreage, making her its largest landholder—into a trust dedicated solely to the betterment and education of native Hawaiians. Her will showed what she had in mind:

I desire my trustees to provide first and chiefly a good education in the common English branches, and also instruction in morals and in such useful knowledge as may tend to make good and industrious men and women. I also direct that the teachers of said schools shall forever be persons of the Protestant religion.\(^\text{83}\)

The result is that today, through the efforts and vision of this one woman, the Kamehameha Schools graduate annually 700 indigenous high school seniors with a quality education.\(^\text{84}\)

Her trust, the Kamehameha Schools, which enables all this, is valued at $11.5 billion, making it the ninth largest in the USA when ranked with all university endowments.\(^\text{85}\) It exemplifies the insight of the princess and of the early Hawaiian chiefs in embracing the wealth-producing economics introduced by outsiders. That is, the income that supports the schools comes not from the vast acreage of Hawaiian land held by the trust, but rather from the one percent of commercial real estate in Hawaii along with its varied financial assets.\(^\text{86}\) It is hard-headed economics, but with a big heart for Hawaii’s good. And it is working today.

**Conclusion**

This article, then, has explored the positives and negatives in Hawaii’s nineteenth-century development, suggesting how the positives were driven by an appropriation of the Holy Spirit’s work and values, while the negatives by a lack of such appropriation. In both ways the Holy Spirit was central. Because of the Holy Spirit’s involvement and because he is inescapably the God of hope (“May . . . you may overflow with hope by
the power of the Holy Spirit” [Rom 15:13]), we can have hope for Hawaii; he is not finished with her yet!

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Notes


3 Bingham, *A Residence*, 6491, 6544.


10 Bingham, *A Residence*, 10721, 10762


30 Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1874-1893, 277–78.

31 Helena Allen observes, contrary to popular opinion, that, “Most of the planters [as late as 1892] were opposed to annexation, as were many of the commercial and businessmen.” (H. Allen, The Betrayal of Liliuokalani [Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1982], 269); Haley concurs saying “sugar was not the reason.” (J. Haley, Captive Paradise: A History of Hawaii [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014], Kindle Electronic Location: 5771–73, 5987–88).

32 Gerrit Judd (1803–73), early missionary doctor and then cabinet minister, was typical in both working hard for and rejoicing in Hawaii’s political independence (see Judd to Rev. David Greene, Jan. 25, 1845, in Letters of Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, 1827-1872 [Fragments II], 170–74, cited in Kuykendall Kingdom: 1778-1854, 238). Even revolutionary firebrands Lorrin Thurston and Sereno Bishop only turned pro-annexationist late in their lives (see Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1874-1893, 509–10, 565).


36 Bingham, A Residence, 2924–30.


38 See Preza, “Empirical,” 19, 109; M. Perkins, “Kuleana: A Genealogy of Native Tenant Rights,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2013), 7; R. Stauffer, Kahana: How the Land Was Lost (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), 2. Mark ‘Umi Perkins is one of these “third wave” historians who completely overturns the negative conception held by the “second wave” historians concerning the Western-influenced land division (the Great Mahele) of 1848 as a “dispossession.” That is, he actually views it as a positive benefit to Hawaiians, observing, “My research . . . suggests that the land tenure system embedded Hawaiian rights in land rather than alienation [sic] Hawaiians from it.” (M. Perkins, “The Ten Most Pervasive Myths about Hawaiian History,” the universe, 13 March 2015, n.p., Nineteenth-Century Mission to Hawaii | 93
The 1850 Kuleana Act was a continuation of the process begun with the 1848 Māhele, which I contend was misconstrued by twentieth-century scholars. . . . I focus on kuleana, or native tenant rights—embedded rights to land for . . . commoners . . . that could be “divided out.” . . . All land titles originating from that process [the Māhele] (which constitute the vast majority of lands in Hawai‘i) contain the stipulation “ua k eke kuleana o na kanaka.” This phrase was translated on land titles as “reserving the rights of native tenants” . . . [which] were to a fee-simple title to land in which they could claim a hereditary interest. . . . It could therefore be argued that native tenant rights continue to exist for Hawaiians today. . . . (Perkins, “Kuleana,” vi, 3, 5–6).

Perkins is quite radical not only in contending that much of the past research on the Māhele has been “misconstrued” but also in suggesting that the native tenant right granted by the Māhele continues to exist, therefore essentially creating a cloud of title on most current land ownership in Hawaii! Hawaiians have a claim on them even today, he suggests. He goes on to write:

It is commonly cited that the final result of this process [the Māhele] was the maka‘āinana [commoners] receiving less than one percent of the lands. . . . An emerging view suggests that, in fact, the Māhele and Kuleana Act processes were beneficial to Hawaiians . . ., who, from 1850 until 1874, possessed most of the desirable land in Hawai‘i. . . . The Māhele and Kuleana Acts were not the travesties that scholars would have us think. . . . [I]t was the economics of their [native Hawaiians] situation and the processes of erasure and forgetting that led to alienation, rather than the design of the Māhele process itself (Perkins, “Kuleana,” 6–7).

Another important contributor to the new wave in Hawaiian research is Donovan Preza, Instructor in Political Science at Kapiolani Community College and Ph.D. student in Geography at the University of Hawaii. The very subtitle of his master’s thesis makes clear the direct challenge he presents to second wave “dispossession” themes: “The Empirical Writes Back: Re-Examining Hawaiian Dispossession Resulting from the Māhele of 1848.” Preza writes:

This research examines the transition of land tenure in Hawai‘i to a system of private property. Known as the Māhele, this transition was believed to have been the cause of dispossession of Hawaiians from land. This thesis questions presumptions identifying the Māhele as a sufficient condition for dispossession. . . . Analysis of these [land] sales revealed an alternate explanation for dispossession in Hawai‘i: the loss of governance. Ultimately this is a story of dispossession, how it has been understood, misunderstood. . . .Institutions of private property and law were not the critical dismemberment of Hawaiians; the overthrow and occupation of Hawai‘i by the United States resulting in the loss of governance and control over those institutions and law-making ability were (Preza, “Empirical,” v, 165).
Preza believes firmly in a Hawaiian “dispossession,” but he categorically rejects it having occurred in the 1848 Māhele, where the second wave of historians place it. In other words, it was not Hawaiians’ careful adapting of Western laws and land systems that was their problem; it was Westerners’ later disregard for these systems and their coercive political overthrow that caused dispossession. It was the illegality of the overthrow, in Preza’s mind, that ought to merit current challenge, not the Māhele.


50 “Journal of Mr. Armstrong on the Island of Maui,” *Missionary Herald*, July 1838, 244 (entry of 26 July 1837), https://hmha.missionhouses.org/files/original/52ce8e3fb08c2b56333adade6a9b54f0.pdf (8 February 2019).

56 Williams, “Claiming,” 114, 123.
57 Williams, “Claiming,” 120–21, 114, 123.
59 Bushnell, Gifts, 273.
62 See comments on Hawaii’s “vividly sexualized society” (Haley, Captive, 2196); “chastity was unknown among the Polynesians” (Bushnell, Gifts,138); for Hawaiians, with their “preoccupation with sex. . . . Sex was everything.” (M. Sahlins, Islands of History [Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987], 10, 26). Hawaii’s pre-contact worldview peculiarly elevated free sexual practice, as Lilikala Kame‘eleihiwa explains: “The object, then, was to elevate one’s mana in the eyes of the people and escape the pit of commonality. . . . There were two ways mana could be obtained: through sexual means and through violence.” (L. Kame‘eleihiwa, Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea La E Pono Ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony? [Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2012], Kindle Electronic Location: 1180).
64 Kirch and Sahlins, Anahulu, 200–1.
65 Sahlins, Islands, 22–23.
66 Many native Hawaiian commentators today criticize this decision. See Haunani-Kay Trask, “Natives and Anthropologists: The Colonial Struggle,” in Voyaging through the
Contemporary Pacific, eds. D. Hanlon and G. White (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2000), 261. The irony of these critiques, coming as they do from Hawaiian champions of “insiders”—i.e., of native, indigenous Hawaiians—is that they themselves are chronological “outsiders”: they are twentieth-century moderns who cannot fully “sit in the skin” of these early nineteenth-century Hawaiians.

67 Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1778-1854, 48, 50.
69 R. Cox, Adventures on the Colombia River (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 49.
70 Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1778-1854, 187.
72 Bingham, A Residence, 10834.
73 Some native historians argue that early Hawaiian leaders were fooled or pressured into mistakenly trusting missionary advice on these points (Osorio, Dismembering, 49; L. G. Dening, L. Kame’eleihiwa, and A. Anderson, “Book Review: Anahulu, The Anthropology of History,” The Contemporary Pacific [Spring 1994], 218.) Other native historians such as Donovan Preza and Mark ‘Umi Perkins believe otherwise.
75 M. Basáñez, A World of Three Cultures: Honor, Achievement and Joy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Kindle Electronic Location: 1069–70.
76 Kirch and Sahlins, Anahulu, 29–30.
77 Kirch and Sahlins, Anahulu, 57–58.
78 Spiritual power.
79 Cook, “Kahiki,” 330–31. From this disapproval of stinginess, native Hawaiian historian Lilikala Kame’eleihiwa draws out a systemic conclusion: “Hawaiian generosity was thus diametrically opposed to the basic tenets of capitalism” (Kame'eleihiwa, Native Land, 487). But her conclusion seems directly contradicted by English adventurer Gilbert Mathison’s observations of actual Hawaiian behavior already in 1822 (so, well before the ABCFM mission was truly established). That is, his Narrative describes in some detail the eager, indeed effortless, adoption of money-based, profit-getting trading—and their facility for driving a hard bargain—by every level of society: king, chiefs, and commoners (see G. F.
Mathison, *Narrative of a Visit to Brazil, Chile, Peru and the Sandwich Islands During the Years 1821 and 1822* [London: Charles Knight, 1825], 395–96, 408–9, 455).


