There is a Hawaiian saying "Ho'i ana oe, nana i ke kumu," or "Go and look to the source." The sources used in this program are recognized authorities on various aspects of Hawaiian culture. In addition to being musicians, poets, composers, and performers for many, many years, they also represent Tong, Tong years of devoted Mormon church service.

In this group of kupuna are Doctor Mary Kawena Pukui, lexicographer, author, composer of more than three hundred songs and chants, and recipient of two honorary doctorates; Edith Kanaka'ole, composer, chanter, author, translator, poet, dancer and recipient of state, national, and international awards in ancient Hawaiian dance; Alice Hanakelua, composer, translator, hula dancer, and slack-key guitar artist whose best-selling album was made when she was eighty-two years old; Alvin K. Isaacs, prolific composer of a wide range of Hawaiian music such as hulas, chants, contatas, marches, hymns, and movie scores; and John K. Almeida, often called the dean of Hawaiian composers.

In visiting with these people, a number of common threads or responses emerged from discussing how they perceived the Gospel as affecting their culture and art. First, all agreed that the Gospel, if properly understood and practiced, posed little or no threat to their culture. In 1977, Kawena Pukui stated that some aspects of Hawaiian culture ought to be forgotten, especially because the Gospel offered better alternatives. In her book, Nānā I Ke Kumu, she strongly asserts that Christianity gives answers to questions raised rather than answered by the old Hawaiian religion, and that, even more importantly, Christianity helped to explain why the Hawaiian was as spiritual as he was, even prior to the coming of the first missionaries. For Kawena Pukui the strength of the Hawaiian was spiritual, and that nothing that he did was without cosmological or spiritual importance. Indeed, all of life was a spiritual exercise, in which art, i.e., singing, dancing, composing, weaving, carving, and painting, served two important functions. First, to remind men of their interrelatedness with the universe and the Gods who dwelled there, and secondly, to demonstrate the kind of God-like behavior men should display. Thus, singing, dancing, and performing were all part of not only entertaining men, but also of instructing them. For a Hawaiian then, the implications of the 29th Section are extremely significant, "...all things unto me are spiritual, and not at anytime have I given unto you a law which was temporal..." for the Hawaiian, indeed, all things were very, very spiritual.

Secondly, the gospel uses art, especially music, to develop personal strength. It was one thing for Christianity to say, "Blessed are they that mourn," but sorrow and grief became much, much easier to bear when they were tempered with the promise that "...it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them;" in the Hawaiian word "Aloha" is the promise that those parting are destined to meet again, whether in this life or the next. In the words of Alice Hanakelua, "Thank God for my music, for without it I would have died long ago. Thank God, for the Church, because it taught me to enjoy and appreciate the joy and beauty of singing."

Aunty Alice is the rule, rather than the exception because the history of the Hawaiian people is a history of a basically happy people constantly awash in seas of conflict and turmoil. Certainly, a people who could survive the almost total decimation of their population in less than a century, must have
had spiritual strengths and resources of great magnitude.

So what gave the Hawaiians the will to survive? Perhaps the best answer is in the lines of the Hawaiian Hymn, "Hawaii Aloha," .."Na Ke Akua e mālama ma'i ia oe..." "Ma mea Biino Kamaha'o no lono mai..." which translated means, "God protects you..., " ...The holy light from above..."

Another response to the question of the relationship of the Gospel to the Hawaiian Arts, is that the Gospel teaches us to want to share our knowledge of the arts and the culture with others, and that in doing so we become greatly blessed. "Aunty" Edith Kanaka'ole, in her acceptance speech for her Distinguished Service Award from the BYU-Hawaii Campus, on June 23, 1979 advised, "...Don't forget, to especially give of yourself all that which you have; it's the only way it may come back to you a hundredfold." For her, then, culture was only useful and beneficial as it was shared. Thus, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the life of service it teaches was totally compatible with "Aunty" Edith's Hawaiian background.

Fourth, the Church's doctrine of the sacredness of families struck and continues to strike a responsive chord in Hawaiian culture. In a society such as the Hawaiians had, the family was everything. To a very large extent, a person's claim to immortality was through his family. Protection, security, identity, and fulfillment came together when one was in a family. Many Hawaiian chants are genealogies, carefully preserved, and added to from generation to generation. The tradition of recording and retaining genealogies was oral, and the means were either through chants or songs.

A later trend in Hawaiian culture was the use of the "pele înôa," or the "name song". This involved the dedication of a song to a person, or to a person's family, as a sign of respect, and constitute presently, a large portion of the body of Hawaiian music.

The famous Hawaiian dancer, the late Iolani Luahine, was asked how she reconciled her church membership with many of the apparent pagan or heathen aspects of her performances. Her answer was startling. She said that when she did those dances, they were no longer Pagan, because the people watching her knew both--who she was and what she was. Thus, for her, a Christian, the dances now became Christian, if especially they were seen and understood in their instructional and entertainment contexts, rather than in their original religious ones. What Aunty I'o very firmly believed and lived as a dancer, was that among other things, her art was meant to cheer people up, and to allow both they and the dancer to have some fun. For her then, the Gospel perception, tolerance and even encouragement of culture as a means of having and promoting fun was so extremely important.

Certainly, for all those who are Hawaiian or who are Hawaiian in heart, there is no great conflict between what the Gospel teaches about fun, and what the culture teaches about fun.

In an interview with Kawaena Pukui in 1977, she stated, "I'm a chronic scribbler." By this, she meant that ever since she was a young girl, she had been writing things down, either in journal form, or for professional publication. One of the great losses currently being experienced in the Hawaiian community is that most Hawaiians do not speak the Hawaiian language, and that those few who do, do not speak the Hawaiian of earlier times.

Certainly if culture helps to give a person an identity, then language, as an aspect of culture, plays a critical role in establishing and defining that identity. This appreciation of the Gospel for culture has not been lost on the Hawaiians, or for that matter, any of the other Polynesian peoples.
The Mormon Church has always been viewed as being an encourager of the performing and the exhibiting of Hawaiian arts and crafts. Many of the journals of the early Mormon missionaries talk about the gathering of the saints at conference, and the great singing and dancing contests and festivals that were always part of those conferences.

Indeed, the Lale tradition of the Hukilau became famous, through a song written by a visitor to a church gathering, and all that takes place or should take place now at the Polynesian Cultural Center, to a large extent existed in some form in Lale ever since the saints began to gather there in 1865.

In fact, many knowledgeable people in the Hawaiian music industry credit the modern revival of Hawaiian male dancing to the efforts of Professor Wylie Swapp and his troupe of Church College of Hawaii male dancers in the middle 1950's.

After the arrival of the early Christian missionaries in 1820, much of the old Hawaiian religion went either underground, or disappeared totally. What survived of the old religion after the initial onslaught of Christianity was assimilated into Hawaiian culture, as the "new" Hawaiian religion. However, the metaphysics of the earlier religion, saw God, nature, and art as being aspects of each other. Lost somewhere was the former Hawaiian belief that God and Art through culture, were compatible. As a result, for a number of years in Hawaii much of the hula and its metaphysical ties to the Hawaiian universe were either taught secretly, or not at all. Thus, someone such as Edith Kanaka'ole, whose chants were as much biological, zoological, and botanical, as they were cultural, was in every sense of the term, a real treasure. For her, the message of her Hawaiian culture and the message of the gospel were the same. We must live and love unselfishly, because that's the only way we enlarge our souls. Her favorite saying was, "Ulu a'e Ke welina a ke aloha" or the "the growth of love is the essence within the soul!".

There is currently smouldering among many young Hawaiians, the very real question as to whether they can be both all-Hawaiian and all-Christian. They perceive a real conflict between the two. For people such as Aunty Edith, Tutu Rawena, Aunty Alice, and Alvin Isaacs, there was and is no conflict. Art, Culture, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ teach us to love each other and to give thanks to supreme forces--both outside and within us. If we are honest in this pursuit, then this is all that can be asked of us, by either God, however He is defined, and by our fellowmen. Even more importantly, we should see that there is conflict only when we do not completely understand and appreciate both our culture and the Gospel.

So we say in gratitude to people such as Aunty I'o, Aunty Edith, and all the kupuna who have been our Kumu (teachers) "ina we like i'ini o ka po'e Hawai'i me kou i'ini, e mau ana no ka la'ui" -- "If we the Hawaiians had desires such as yours, then we should never perish as a people".

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