

# Queen Keopuolani

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## The Hawaiian “First Fruits”<sup>1</sup> of the Christian Mission

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There are numerous names that stand out in Hawaiian history.<sup>2</sup> King Kamehameha I, of course, and his heirs who ruled over Hawaii remain prominent. Certainly most people, including tourists, are well aware of the last queen of Hawaii: Queen Liliuokalani. The list could go on and one from members of the aliʻi. The interest of this paper, however, focuses on Christians in Hawaii.

Hawaii has a rich Christian story filled with various Christian individuals, Hawaiian and foreigner alike. For example, Queen Kaahumanu, who played a peculiar and primary role in the overthrow of the *kapu* (tabu) system of the ancient Hawaiian ways will be remembered for quite some time. Similarly, Kapiolani’s actions against Pele are notable. Henry Opukahaia likewise sits in an influential spot in history as his vision compelled missionaries to come to Hawaii to share the gospel. Non-Hawaiian names like Hiram Bingham, Titus Coan, and Father Damien, who cared for those exiled to Kalaupapa on Molokai. Many people who live in Hawaii (especially Christians) have become familiar with such names. Their work has left a lasting impact on the Islands.

The aforementioned figures have shaped Hawaii into what it was and now is today whether people like the outcome or not. Of course, there are many other names that could be mentioned. However, while my wife and some other ladies at our church were reading James Haley’s *Captive Paradise*<sup>3</sup> for their book club, my wife pointed out a figure of whom I was completely ignorant—the Sacred Queen, Keopuolani.

Keopuolani is someone we actually have little information about, according to academic research published in *The Hawaiian Journal of History*<sup>4</sup> also attested in the primary resource of William Richards,

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<sup>1</sup> “First fruits” is from William Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani, Late Queen of the Sandwich Islands*, no. 50 (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1825), 36.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to give an ode of appreciate to Dr. Rick Bartosik who introduced me to much of the story of Christianity in Hawaii. Much of my understanding of Hawaiian history, as well as its Christian heritage and background, are in debt to him.

<sup>3</sup> James Haley, *Captive Paradise: A History of Hawaii* (New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> That little is known regarding Keopuolani is well attested to in works by, for example: Charles Langlas and Jeffrey Lyon, “Davida Malo’s Unpublished Account of Keōpuōlani,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol. 42 (2008): 29, 32; Esther T. Mookini, “Keopuolani, Sacred Wife, Queen Mother, 1778-1823,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol. 32 (1998): 1 (hereafter, “Keōpuōlani”; Marjorie Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife of Kamehameha I Keopuolani,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol 5 (1971): 7 (hereafter, “The Sacred Wife”).

*A Memoir of Keopuolani, Late Queen of the Sandwich Islands*.<sup>5</sup> In fact, there is no portrait of her.<sup>6</sup> However, what we do know of this sacred queen is rather significant. We learn from Esther T. Mookini that “Keōpuōlani ([which means] the gathering of the clouds of heaven), was the highest ranking chief of the ruling family in the kingdom during her lifetime.”<sup>7</sup> She is the mother to King Kamehameha II (Liholiho) and King Kamehameha III (Kauikeaouli).<sup>8</sup> And, relevant to our discussion today, she was paramount in the dereliction of *kapu* and the reception of Christianity. Furthermore, it was Keopuolani’s hope that her son, King Kamehameha II (Liholiho), her other children (Kauikeaouli and Nahienaena), and the people of Hawaii would live “in the right way” of Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

My hope in this paper is to provide a brief historical sketch of Keopuolani’s life from her childhood to her death. In such a brief account, I cannot dig into everything. Those who want to dive deeper into Keopuolani’s life would do well to interact with Richards’ *Memoir of Keopuolani* (1825) as well as the informative essays by Marjorie Sinclair (1971) and Esther T. Mookini (1998) in *The Hawaiian Journal of History*. Most accounts cite and refer back to Samuel Kamakau’s magisterial treatment of Hawaii’s history in *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii*.<sup>10</sup> For another primary source, one can find Davida Malo’s unpublished paper in *The Hawaiian Journal of History*.

I can only focus on some specifics. In particular, I want to highlight three aspects of her life. First, I want to point out her unrivaled position of rank in Hawaiian lineage by tracing her family ties. My purpose in pointing this out is to demonstrate that her power and position would possess enormous influence in the decisions she made. Such decisions are the other aspects of her life we will focus on. Second, we will look at Keopuolani’s role in abandoning the *kapu* system. Third, we will attend to Keopuolani’s view of the missionaries and Christianity as well as her conversion to the Christian faith. To conclude, I will offer some brief reflections on how Keopuolani’s character, confession(s), and conversion offer some valuable lessons for Christians—clergy and lay alike—in Hawaii.

### ***Keopuolani’s Life Before the Death of Kamehameha I (1778/80–1819)***

Keopuolani was born either in 1778 or 1780 on Maui.<sup>11</sup> Her name means “the [*ke*] collecting [*opu*] of [*o*] heaven [*lani*]. Or, The gathering of the clouds of heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William Richards notes that there was indeed a season of her life where “we know but a little of her” (Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 15).

<sup>6</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 4.

<sup>8</sup> Langlas and Lyon, “Davida Malo’s Unpublished Account of Keōpuōlani,” 29; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 6.

<sup>9</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 32–33.

<sup>10</sup> S. M. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii*, rev. ed. (Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools Press 1992 [original 1961]).

<sup>11</sup> Mookini provides both years as options (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 4). On the other hand, Richards writes, “Keopuolani was born in the year 1778” (Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 2). Sinclair states that it was 1778, noting that Kamakau posits 1780 (Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 3). While sources may list a different date, the location of Maui is corroborated.

<sup>12</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 2. Also see, Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 4.

### *Keopuolani's Kapu of High Standing*

She was, as noted earlier, of unparalleled rank in Hawaiian status. Her family, both on her father's and mother's sides, includes those of prestigious rank. Her Father "was King of Hawaii at the time of ... [her] birth."<sup>13</sup> Additionally, "Keopuolani's grandfather ... was king of Hawaii at the time it was visited by Capt. Cook, in 1777."<sup>14</sup> In fact, "Her ancestors on her father's side were of the blood of chiefs who had ruled the island of Hawai'i for as many generations back as the genealogies extend."<sup>15</sup> Her mother "was ... half sister to Tamehameha [Kamehameha],"<sup>16</sup> and was related to "Kahekili, ruling chief of Maui and O'ahu."<sup>17</sup> Given her ancestry, "She was *ali'i kapu* of *nī'auipi'o* (high-born) rank."<sup>18</sup> Otherwise noteworthy for her genealogical pedigree is that in Hawaiian mythology, her lineage traced back to the (so-called) gods.<sup>19</sup> As such, "She was born with divine rank,"<sup>20</sup> such that "Keopuolani's life ... was pervaded by the mythic quality with which ritual and custom surrounded it. She was like a goddess."<sup>21</sup> Mookini's account corroborates these statements as she says that her "mana was equal to that of the gods,"<sup>22</sup> and therefore, in the Hawaiian *kapu* system, "Keōpuōlani was reared under strict *kapu* because she was sacred; her *kapus*," writes Mookini, "were equal to those of the gods."<sup>23</sup>

With such a high standing in the old Hawaiian system, she was honored even at young age in the most venerable ways. Sinclair describes her "kapus" as being "formidable: if a man inadvertently stepped on her shadow or came into contact with her possessions or her person, he would be killed. To avoid such violence, it had become customary for the chiefess to go out only at night."<sup>24</sup> In another account, Mookini adds,

she never walked out during daylight hours. The sun was not permitted to shine upon her. As a result, extraordinary precautions had to be made before she could move about, and this she did only after the sun was so low as not to shine on her. Should her shadow fall on anyone, that

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<sup>13</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 10; cf. Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 3; Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 8.

<sup>15</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 6.

<sup>16</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 6; cf. Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 4.

<sup>18</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 4.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 4; also see, Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 5–6, 10;

<sup>20</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 3 (also see p. 4).

<sup>21</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 7.

<sup>22</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 1.

<sup>23</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 7 (also see p. 15). Also see Valerio Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 4.

would mean his immediate death. Should it fall on the ground, that ground would be *kapu*, and so she chose to be among people at night.<sup>25</sup>

Her *kapu* was that of “*kapu moe*, which meant that those who were in her presence had to prostrate themselves, face down, for it was forbidden to look at her. At certain seasons, no person was allowed to see her.”<sup>26</sup> However, Keopuolani was surprisingly merciful. Sinclair notes that Keopuolani “had an inherent concern and tenderness for people.”<sup>27</sup> In his *Memoir*, Richards says that she was remembered for “her amiable temper and mild behavior ... Often was her compassion manifested toward those who had broken *tabu*, violated the laws, or otherwise incurred the king’s displeasure. These, if their crimes were not heinous, or if they had any reasonable excuse, always fled to her, and were safe under her protection.”<sup>28</sup> Richards adds that “chiefs” would “say to Keopuolani’s praise, ‘She was never the means of any person’s being put to death.’ She was always remarkably strict herself in the observance of *tabu*, although she was mild in her treatment of those who had broken it.”<sup>29</sup> That she only went out at night was a sign that she was “gentle and considerate,” because she did this to protect the people so that her shadow would not fall on them (as that would result in “immediate death” for them).<sup>30</sup> James Haley adds, “There were times during Keopuolani’s reign when commoners’ shadows crossed hers, and she forgave them when she could have had them killed; in fact, there is no story that she ever had any of her subjects executed for breaking *kapu*.”<sup>31</sup> Her kindness and care matched the highness of her rank. And with that sort of rank, royalty (*ali‘i*) would see the advantage of having her in marriage. And this is, in part, what happened with Kamehameha.

#### *Keopuolani and Kamehameha I*

Keopuolani’s father, “Kīwala‘o,”<sup>32</sup> died in war “When she was about four,”<sup>33</sup> battling against Kamehameha. In light of this, Kolola, Keopuolani’s grandmother, took Keopuolani and “fled to Maui, for they had taken refuge with her brother, Kahekili.”<sup>34</sup> About eight years later, when Keopuolani was 12 years old, Kamehameha defeated Kahekili’s warriors on Maui<sup>35</sup>; meanwhile, Keopuolani, with her

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<sup>25</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 7. Richards’ account coheres with both Mookini and Sinclair: “In early life, she never walked abroad except at evening, and all who saw her walking at that hour, prostrated themselves to the earth” (Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 17).

<sup>26</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 7; cf. On this, Valerio Valeri writes, “The prostration taboo (*kapu moe*), [was] a prerogative shared by the gods and the highest-ranking ali‘i” (Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice*, 147).

<sup>27</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 7.

<sup>28</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 7.

<sup>31</sup> Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 6.

<sup>33</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 4; cf. Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 8.

<sup>35</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 8.

grandmother, Kalola, “escaped to ... Moloka‘i.”<sup>36</sup> While on Molokai, Keopuolani’s grandmother became ill, and Kamehameha decided to make peace with her and asked to have Keopuolani’s hand in marriage, to which her grandmother agreed.<sup>37</sup>

Keopuolani became one of Kamehameha’s wives “At the early age of thirteen.”<sup>38</sup> To Kamehameha, she bore, “Her second son, Rihoriho [Liholiho, Kamehameha II]”<sup>39</sup> as well as Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III).<sup>40</sup> When she bore her daughter, Nahienaena, “Keōpuōlani would not give her up,” and thus broke from the traditional *hanai* practices.<sup>41</sup> Keopuolani traveled with Kamehameha and “accompanied Kamehameha when he fought and was victorious” “at the battle of Nu‘uanu.”<sup>42</sup> Bringing Keopuolani to this battle would have certain impact as Richard points out, “Her person was counted so sacred, that her presence did much to awe an enemy.”<sup>43</sup> Describing this effect on battle, Veleri writes, “an ali‘i having the *kapu moe* can always end a battle by becoming visible and thus forcing everyone to throw down his weapons and fall prostrate.”<sup>44</sup> As we well know it today, Kamehameha would later take control over all the Hawaiian Islands and unite them under his rule. Despite his royal significance, Keopuolani still outranked the high king. In fact, “her rank was so high that when Kamehameha came into her presence he had remove his *malo* and prostrate himself ... After the children were born it was his practice to lie on the ground and let them sit and play on his chest—one of the ways in which he recognized that their kapus were sacred and superior to his.”<sup>45</sup> Haley says that Kamehameha “chafed under her rank.”<sup>46</sup> In 1819, Kamehameha died, and it was then that Keopuolani’s actions would have paramount effects on the Islands’ history thenceforth.

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<sup>36</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 9; Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 11. Mookini will use the language of her “capture” (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 11).

<sup>39</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 13. Richards says Liholiho was born in 1796 (p. 13) while Mookini writes that he was born in 1797 (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 12).

<sup>40</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 12.

<sup>41</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 12. Haley writes, “she was never awed by the sanctity of the forbidden. Indeed she demonstrated as much when she defied *kapu* by refusing to give her youngest daughter, Nahi‘ena‘ena, in *hanai* to anyone and raised her herself, although she was restricted by the *kapu ‘uha* (sacred lap) which decreed death to any child she tried to rear” (Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 47).

<sup>42</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 11.

<sup>43</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 13; cf. Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 12.

<sup>44</sup> Veleri, *Kingship and Sacrifice*, 149. Mookini points out this reference in Veleri in Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 12.

<sup>45</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 6. Haley writes, “She was one of the few women in the islands who possessed the *kapu moe*: Commoners had to prostrate themselves before her, and even her husband the Conqueror had to partially strip in humility at her presence. If foreigners beheld Kamehameha’s children playing on his lap, they would have been wrong to believe that he was merely being paternal and affectionate. Lesser children, not sparing his own offspring by lesser wives, would have been executed for such an affront. For him to allow Keopuolani’s children to play on his lap, or of him to lie on his back and let them play on his chest, was in fact his own submission to rank” (Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 47).

<sup>46</sup> Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 23.

### *Keopuolani and the Dereliction of the Kapu System*

After King Kamehameha I died, Keopuolani's son, Liholiho inherited the throne to the kingdom,<sup>47</sup> though he reigned with Kaahumanu, Kamehameha's (disputably) favorite wife.<sup>48</sup> The mourning of Kamehameha began, and, as part of the process, the once forbidden (*kapu*) foods "were 'ai noa (foods free of *kapu*)"<sup>49</sup> or "the free eating."<sup>50</sup> Historical accounts record that women could eat foods usually forbidden to them.<sup>51</sup> Normally the 'ai noa would end at the time a new ruler would come.<sup>52</sup> However, what would happen to the system of Old Hawaii was unexpected in traditional eyes.

### *Kaahumanu and Keopuolani's Actions Regarding Kapu*

Queen Kaahumanu and others, including Keopuolani, began to see the oddities of *kapu*.<sup>53</sup> Sinclair writes, "Kaahumanu ... felt the restraints to be no longer consistent with the glimpses Hawaiians were having of life in other countries," and as such, "they [Keopuolani and Kaahumanu] acted rapidly and overtly once the king was gone."<sup>54</sup> At Liholiho's coronation, the decisive steps of ending *kapu* would commence.

During the "installation of Liholiho as monarch ... she [Kaahumanu] suggested to the young king that he abolish the restraints of the kapu system."<sup>55</sup> "At the conclusion of her address to the young king," notes Alexander, "she [Kaahumanu] said, 'let us henceforth disregard tabu.' The young King remained silent and withheld his consent."<sup>56</sup> In response, Keopuolani stepped in to support Kaahumanu. In agreement with and to defend Kaahumanu, "Keopuolani put her hand to her mouth as a symbol for free

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<sup>47</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 15. Mookini: "when the funeral ceremonies were completed and the land purified, Liholiho was allowed to return to Kailua, Kona, to be received officially as the new king. His appointment as heir to the throne had taken place in 1804, when he was five years old ... He ['Kamehameha'] announced before the chiefs and people that Liholiho was to be the heir to the kingdom after his death and the god to go to Kekuaokalani, his second heir" (Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 14).

<sup>48</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 9. Haley regards Kaahumanu as Kamehameha's favorite wife (Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 22, 43). However, Mookini records that "In 1789 Kamehameha deserted Ka'ahumanu for awhile and lived entirely with Kaheihimālie, Ka'ahumanu's sister, who was already married to Kamehameha's brother and who matured into a beautiful woman after bearing a child, much to the grief of Ka'ahumanu, who had been his favorite wife. There was not woman of his household whom Kamehameha loved as much as he did Kaheihimālie" (Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 11).

<sup>49</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 13.

<sup>50</sup> Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 13; Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 46. Also see Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 10–11.

<sup>52</sup> Thus Mookini: "when *kūmākena* ended, the new ruling chief would place the land under a new *kapu* following old lines. It was believed that if the new ruling chief did not put a *kapu* on 'ai noa, he would not have a long rule" (Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 13).

<sup>53</sup> See Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 9.

<sup>54</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 9. Sinclair notes that "On the first day after Kamehameha's death ... Keopuolani took the first decisive step. She ate coconuts forbidden to women and dined with men [which was *kapu*]" (Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 10). However, it is unclear to me if this was during 'ai noa or not. As such, I am leaving that account out of the body of this paper.

<sup>55</sup> Sinclair, "The Sacred Wife," 10.

<sup>56</sup> W. D. Alexander, "Overthrow of the Ancient Tabu System in the Hawaiian Islands," Originally published in *Hawaiian Monthly*, repr. *Hawaiian Historical Society*, 25th report (1916/17): 40–41 (hereafter, "Overthrow"); cf. Mookini, "Keōpuōlani," 15; Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 45.

eating,”<sup>57</sup> “a sign for ‘*ai noa*.”<sup>58</sup> However, Liholiho still did not approve.<sup>59</sup> As such, Keopuolani took a further step—she summoned her “younger son,”<sup>60</sup> “Kauikeaouli ... and in the late afternoon she ate with him in defiance of the *kapu*.”<sup>61</sup> It does seem that Liholiho offered some sort of “assent” (even if not full blown), since he did not punish them, as Alexander writes, “on the same day she sent to Liholiho for his younger brother Kauikeaouli, then a mere child, to come and eat with her in defiance of the tabu. Liholiho, after some hesitation, granted his mother’s request, but still was careful to abstain from any violation of the law, although *he saw that no evil consequences had followed his mother’s sacrilegious act.*”<sup>62</sup> Yet, Liholiho did not “at this time break the *kapu*,” it was a momentous time that initiated the dereliction of the Old Hawaiian way(s).<sup>63</sup>

Historians surmise why Keopuolani interpolated herself into the situation. Accounts at least offer a suggestion of protecting Kaahumanu, among other probabilities.<sup>64</sup> Notable for our consideration, however, is *that* Keopuolani stepped in, and the objective result was that no harm came to Kaahumanu for desiring to derelict the *kapu*, which, for Kaahumanu, would normally be seen as an act that would “just have pronounced her own death sentence.”<sup>65</sup> While Liholiho (or the so-called “gods”) did not immediately respond with wrath, we could only guess that such was a *possibility* then or later on.<sup>66</sup> However, Keopuolani’s actions at minimum protected Kaahumanu, and therefore also protected and promoted the vision of ending *kapu*—what Kaahumanu pushed for here,<sup>67</sup> Keopuolani protected and promoted. According to Mookini’s account, “Keōpuōlani, the last of the *ali‘i kapu*, was particularly responsible, and it was through her action alone that the ‘*ai kapu* ended.”<sup>68</sup>

Kekuaokalani, another chief and cousin of Liholiho, whole-heartedly opposed the abandoning of the *kapu*.<sup>69</sup> He entreated Liholiho to keep the tradition. After six months of no outcome, Liholiho at last concluded what to do,<sup>70</sup> albeit in response to the initiation of Kaahumanu.<sup>71</sup> Then he ate and dined with women, thereby breaking *kapu*, and thus, the people rejoiced: “‘*Ai noa—the eating tabu is broken.*’ Then

<sup>57</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10; cf. Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15; Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15.

<sup>59</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15.

<sup>60</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10.

<sup>61</sup> Mookini, “Kauikeaouli,” 15; Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10; Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander, “Overthrow of the Ancient Tabu System in the Hawaiian Islands,” 41. Emphasis added.

<sup>63</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10.

<sup>64</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15; Alexander, “Overthrow of the Ancient Tabu System in the Hawaiian Islands,” 41; Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 46–48 (esp. 46).

<sup>65</sup> Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 45.

<sup>66</sup> Mookini puts forth Keopuolani as protecting Kaahumanu by her actions, so I think it is plausible to say that this is a real possibility (though perhaps from the so-called “gods” than from Liholiho [see Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15]). This, however, is guesswork. The objective reality that we know of is that Keopuolani acted, and Liholiho did not punish Kaahumanu.

<sup>67</sup> Mookini says that ‘*ai noa*’ was instigated by the female chiefs, specifically the widows, Keōpuōlani, Ka’ahumanu, her two sisters, Kaheiheimālie and Piia, and Kekāuluohi” (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 13).

<sup>68</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 13.

<sup>69</sup> See Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 10 (see also pp. 11–13); Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 15–16.

<sup>70</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 11; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 16–17.

<sup>71</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 11.

Liholiho directed that men and women throughout the kingdom were free to eat together and share equally of foods prohibited to women. Hewahewa ordered that all *heiau* be destroyed.”<sup>72</sup> Both Sinclair and Mookini record that he sent “messengers to all the islands to command the destruction of idols and the overthrow of the kapus.”<sup>73</sup>

Despite this formal decree, Kekauaokalani (Liholiho’s cousin) and his followers remained opposed to forsaking *kapu*. War was on the brink, and as such, Keopuolani stepped in to safeguard Liholiho’s right to the throne. Keopuolani, who met with Kekauaokalani,<sup>74</sup> realized “there would be no compromise,” and in response to Kekauaokalani’s refusal, “Keopuolani then spoke: ‘So you cut the navel cord, my brother, by this act.’”<sup>75</sup> Such words seem to indicate that war was inevitable.<sup>76</sup> “Keopuolani stepped ... into a political role designed to make certain that Liholiho would be undisputed king of the Hawaiian nation.”<sup>77</sup> Sinclair attests that according to Kamakau, Keopuolani “ordered Kalanimoku to prepare the kings’ army for war,”<sup>78</sup> while Kaahumanu “commanded” one of the battle ships.<sup>79</sup> Kekauaokalani lost and died in battle, Liholiho held his place on the throne, and the derelict *kapu* remained forsaken. As such, “The old religion, as an organized system, was abandoned. The old tabus were no longer enforced.”<sup>80</sup>

With the termination of the old way, Sinclair points out the peculiar historical progression of these events: “Thus was settled what in other circumstances ... might have been a prolonged struggle between reformers and traditionalists. A religious vacuum was in process of creation: and to the missionaries and others it seemed as if divine providence had acted.”<sup>81</sup> Alexander observes something unique here. He writes, “All public worship and sacrifice ceased, the priesthood as an organized body was dissolved, and as Jarves says, ‘Hawaii presented to the world the strange spectacle of a nation without a religion.’”<sup>82</sup> Approximately six months later, “the first company of American missionaries ... anchored at Kailua on

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<sup>72</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 16–17. Mookini seems to be quoting from R. S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1, 1778–1854 *Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1938), 68, who accordingly draws “from an account given by Kaahumanu to Rev. A Bishop in 1826. MH. XXIII (1827), 247” (Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, 68n22).

<sup>73</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 11; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 17.

<sup>74</sup> According to Mookini, it was “Naihe and Hoapili, uncles of Kekuaokalani,” who were sent “to try conciliatory measures first,” and “Keōpuōlani joined them. No one new of her intentions to go” (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 17).

<sup>75</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 12.

<sup>76</sup> In Mookini’s eyes, “In doing what she did, she became the cause for the battle of Kuamo’o” (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 17).

<sup>77</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 12.

<sup>78</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 12. Sinclair gives no citation reference location in Kamakau.

<sup>79</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 17.

<sup>80</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 17. Haley recounts, “from this day the old religion was ended. *Heiaus* were dismantled; those *ki’i* that were not burned were either neglected or given away as souvenirs to foreigners” (Haley, *Captive Paradise*, 48–49).

<sup>81</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 13; cf. Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 17. In agreement with Dr. Bartosik.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander, “Overthrow of the Ancient Tabu System in the Hawaiian Islands,” 45. There is no citation or reference to the Jarves quote in the manuscript. To be fair to Alexander, the essay was presented posthumously.



April 4, 1820.”<sup>83</sup> I believe Richards is right to say that “Providence seemed already to be preparing her [Keopuolani’s] mind for the Christian religion, with which she was shortly to be made acquainted.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Keopuolani and Christianity*

When the missionaries came to Hawaii, they appealed to Liholiho, however, Mookini notes that he “did not give them an immediate reply to their request to reside in the kingdom and carry on their work.”<sup>85</sup> He was not the only one to be hesitant to receive the missionaries. On the other hand, Keopuolani showed immediate favor; indeed, “She was the first *ali’i* who welcomed the missionaries and without hesitation approved their proposals.”<sup>86</sup>

### *Keopuolani and the Christian Missionaries*

Richards recounts this in his *Memoir*, writing, “Some of the chiefs seemed to doubt; but Keopuolani without hesitation approved their proposals. She ever after appeared friendly to the mission and favored the *Palapala* [‘The whole system of instruction’].”<sup>87</sup> It is important to note that she did not at that time become a Christian.<sup>88</sup> However, seeing that the missionaries were rather different than other “foreigners,” Keopuolani realized that they displayed, according to Richards, “selflessness, and eagerness to instruct, and a restraint which characterized most of the American missionaries.”<sup>89</sup> Keopuolani also wanted her daughter to be “trained up in the habit of Christian and civilized females, like the wives of the missionaries.”<sup>90</sup>

Later on in 1823,<sup>91</sup> “Keopuolani and her husband Hoapiri [Hoapili] expressed a desire to have an instructor connected with them. They selected Taua, a native teacher [a Tahitian<sup>92</sup>] sent by the church at Hauheine, in company with the Rev. Mr. Ellis, to instruct them and their people in the first principles of the Gospel, and to teach them to read and write.”<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that it was Keopuolani and Hoapili who expressed this wish—it was not pushed or forced by the missionaries themselves.

A few months later (April 1823), more missionaries arrived to Hawaii.<sup>94</sup> Keopuolani, as well as other Hawaiian royalty, likewise treated them with kind favor.<sup>95</sup> Richards recounts how the new missionaries

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<sup>83</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 13; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 18. This short-lived experience of a religion-free society and the close proximity of the missionaries arriving has been pointed out to me by Dr. Rick Bartosik in his presentations.

<sup>84</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 18.

<sup>86</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 18.

<sup>87</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 18. The brackets quote Richards’ footnote (\*). See also, Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 13.

<sup>88</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 18. See also, Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 13.

<sup>89</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 14.

<sup>90</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 14. Sinclair is quoting, Bingham, *Residence*, 183.

<sup>91</sup> According to various historical treatments, this was in 1823, particularly in February (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19; Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 18; Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 14).

<sup>92</sup> See Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 15; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19.

<sup>93</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 15; Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 21; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19.

<sup>95</sup> Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19: “Keōpuōlani and the rest of the chiefs welcomed the new missionaries.”

reacted to her, saying, “Those who had the pleasure of being introduced to her on that day, will never forget the mild and beautiful expression of her countenance, when she raised her head a little from her pillow to bid them a joyful welcome to the islands.”<sup>96</sup>

The next month (May 1823), Keopuolani decided to move to Lahaina on Maui.<sup>97</sup> However,

Before her departure, Keopuolani requested the Americans to assign teachers to go with her. She wanted a mission established in Lahaina, and for herself further instruction in reading and writing; she also wished to have a man of God to pray with her. The Honolulu mission elected Charles Stewart and William Richards to accompany the queen.<sup>98</sup>

And of course, “Tuaa” was with her “until the death of Keopuolani.”<sup>99</sup> The first morning after coming to Lahaina, Keopuolani requested to hold a worship service, and “Tuaa opened the service by reading from the Scriptures in Tahitian; the clergy then conducted the usual Sunday prayer service. Afterwards, Keopuolani requested the missionaries to come not only on Sunday but also each day at sunrise and at sunset to conduct prayers for herself and the princess.”<sup>100</sup>

#### *Keopuolani Confesses Christ and Transforms Her Life*

Liholiho had come to visit, and he fell into his habitual drinking. When the missionaries found many people drunk in the morning, Keopuolani had Tuaa to tell the missionaries to come worship elsewhere.<sup>101</sup> The missionaries came to Keopuolani and she broke out into “tears” and “She lifted her hand and pointed toward her home ... Then, in a voice strained with feeling, she muttered, ‘Shameful, oh shameful!’”<sup>102</sup> Keopuolani recognized the shameful nature of the sin of her son and others. According to Sinclair, “Stewart learned later that Keopuolani during the night had pleaded with her son and warned that the debauchery would lead him to ‘everlasting fire.’”<sup>103</sup>

We can see such a change and desire in Keopuolani’s heart in accounts of her conversations. According to Sinclair, drawing from Stewart, one conversation between Keopuolani and Liholiho went like this:

The king [Liholiho] accused his mother of studying too much. It was not good for her. “You are old and it is well for you to study only a little.” Keopuolani said that she was old and would die. “Therefore I must learn soon, or I shall die before I obtain the good thing I desire.” Liholiho was particularly exasperated by the missionaries. They did not allow his mother to drink rum with him or “to do anything we formerly did. Their teachings are false and evil, their prayers are not

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<sup>96</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 21; cf. Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 16.

<sup>97</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 16; Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 22; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19.

<sup>98</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 16.

<sup>99</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 18; cf. Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 15.

<sup>100</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 16; cf. Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 18.

<sup>102</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 18.

<sup>103</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 19, quoting Stewart, *Residence*, 150.

good. Let us return to our former custom; let us now, as we formerly did, drink a little rum together.” Keopuolani reminded her son he had once said the missionaries were good; he had instructed her to listen to them and give up the old religion. Now it was he who no longer listened. “Are not the missionaries the same, and their instruction the same?” Keopuolani asked. She added: “I will never forsake my teachers. I will never take my dark heart again.”<sup>104</sup>

Richards also tells of a conversation<sup>105</sup>:

a high chief, whom she tenderly loved, came to her and said, “let us two drink rum together again, as formerly. Enough of this new word. Let us cast it away, and attend to it no more.” Keopuolani replied, “I will never adopt that evil custom. I am afraid of the everlasting fire.” She then turned to Taua and said, “My heart is much afraid I shall never become a Christian.” He replied, “Why what is in the way?” She said, “I think I am likely to die soon.” He replied, “Do you not love God?” She answered, “O yes, I love—I love him very much” ... At the close of the conversation she said, “Your word, I know, is true. It is a good word; and now I have found, I have obtained a Saviour, and a good King, Jesus Christ.”<sup>106</sup>

It seems that Keopuolani, truly began to see the light of Christ. She initiated worship services and the establishment of mission on Maui and began to forsake her old *personal* lifestyle. In one instance, she did this quite drastically. She had multiple husbands—something that was quite “common.”<sup>107</sup> She sought Taua’s advice and instruction on the matter, and the event and conversation went like this according to Richards’ account:

He [Taua] answered, “It is very proper for a woman to have one husband, and a man one wife; but Christian females never have more than one husband.” She [Keopuolani] said, “I have followed the custom of my country; but we have been a people of dark hearts. I have had two husbands, but since I thought it wrong, I have not desired more than one. I wish now to obey Jesus Christ and to walk in the good way. Hoapiri [Hoapili] is my husband—my only husband. The other man I will now cast off.” [¶<sup>108</sup>] She then called him and said, “I have renounced our old religion, the religion of wooden gods; I have embraced a new religion, the religion of Jesus Christ. He is my King and Savior, and him I desire to obey.”<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 19. Sinclair cites Stewart, *Residence*, 150.

<sup>105</sup> The parallels are numerous and uncanny between this conversation and the preceding one. However, I am not positive they are the same occurrence because of the chronology and placement of the instance(s) in Sinclair and Richards’ respective accounts. In Sinclair’s essay, she puts the conversation after the second batch of missionaries arrived to Hawaii and after Keopuolani moved to Maui in May of 1823 (see Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 16, 19). On the other hand, Richards puts the conversation before his treatment of the coming of the second group of missionaries and before Keopuolani’s time in Maui (Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 19, 21–22). Richards does include another similar conversation more like the previous citation that includes mention of “study” and “obtain the good I seek” (see Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 24–25), which would incline me to say that these two are two different conversations that I have block quoted.

<sup>106</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Richards, “Appendix: Brief Remarks on the Sandwich Islands, and on the Christian Mission Which Has Been Established There,” in *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 48.

<sup>108</sup> Richards breaks into a new paragraph here, but I have put the paragraphs together.

<sup>109</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 20. See also, Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19.

Keopuolani confessed Jesus has her “King and Savior,” and she thus banned her other husband to no longer live with her nor eat with her or her people.<sup>110</sup> Her deeds corresponded to her confession of faith.

At one point, a “chief proposed that she should send away the missionaries, and give up the whole system of instruction.”<sup>111</sup> Keopuolani stood her ground and stood up for the missionaries and the Christian faith. According to Richards, she said, ““They are good men, and I love them. *Their religion is good. Our old religion is good for nothing.* Their ways are all good, and ours bad.”<sup>112</sup> Another time, some chiefs, who did not approve of all of the Christian faith and practice(s), came to Keopuolani and said to her, “Now our advice is this, that we attend strictly to reading and writing, but that we give up prayer, preaching and Sabbaths, for these will never increase our riches.”<sup>113</sup> Keopuolani “replied,” after consulting Taua, and said, ““If you wish to keep your dark hearts, and be heathens, and live like the people of Satan, then live so, and give up the Sabbath and prayer, and when you die go to Satan and the world of misery; but trouble me no longer.”<sup>114</sup> Despite her welcome character, this seems to open a window to see the sincerity and genuine zeal of her faith.

#### *Keopuolani's Baptism*

Unfortunately, later on in 1823,<sup>115</sup> “Keopuolani became seriously ill.”<sup>116</sup> This time, however, “in her view was a premonition of her approaching dissolution.”<sup>117</sup> According to the “custom,” chiefs in the islands came to her while she was sick.<sup>118</sup> Knowing that her death was near, Keopuolani confessed her faith and instructed those around her. Richards records this discussion

with Karaimoku [Kalaimoku], after he came to Lahaina, she said “Great is my love to the word of God, by which I hope my mind has been enlightened. The word of God is a true word, a good word. Jehovah is a good God. I love him, and love Jesus Christ. I have no desire for the former gods of Hawaii. They are all false. But I love Jesus Christ. I have given myself to him to be his. When I die, let none of the evil customs of this country be practised at my death ... but let my body be put in a coffin. Let the teachers attend and speak to the people at my interment. Let me be buried in the ground and let my burial be after the manner of Christ's people. I think very much of my grandfather Taraniopu, my father Kauikeaouli, my husband Tamehameha, and all my deceased relations. They lived not to see these good times, and to hear of Jesus Christ. They died depending on false gods. I exceedingly mourn and lament on account of them, for they saw not these good times.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 20–21. See also, Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 19.

<sup>111</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 25. Emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 26.

<sup>114</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> According to Sinclair, this was in “early September, 1823” (Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 19). According to Mookini and Richards, this began “the last week of August” (Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 21; Richards, *Memoir of Keiōpuolani*, 29).

<sup>116</sup> Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 19.

<sup>117</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 29; cf. Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 21.

<sup>118</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 29; cf. Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 21.

<sup>119</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 30. Mookini records this discussion as well in Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 21.

She did not die right then. As such, she lived longer and provided us with more encouraging and insightful words, some of which she spoke to her husband. Again, Richard records this and writes,

She called her husband, and said to him “see that you take care of Nahienaena ... See that she is instructed in reading and writing, that she may learn to love God and Jesus Christ ... it is a good thing for her to learn the good way ... After I am dead do not you cast away the word of God, or the Sabbath day. Neglect not prayer, neither cease to love Jehovah, that he may love you, and that we two may meet in heaven. I think a great deal of my sins and of the love of Jesus Christ. He is very kind to me. I hope he will take me to his right hand.”<sup>120</sup>

The day before she died,<sup>121</sup> Keopuolani

turned to the king and said, “I wish you after my death to be a friend to all the friends of your father, and to all my friends. Take care of these lands which you have received from your father. Exercise a tender care over the people. Protect the missionaries, and be kind to them. Walk in the straight path. Keep the Sabbath. Serve God. Love him, and love Jesus Christ. Attend also to the word of God, that you may be happy, and that we two may meet in heaven.”<sup>122</sup>

Afterwards,

She turned to the chiefs and said, “Watch over the king my son ... But particularly I wish you to watch over my two younger children. See that they are brought up in the right way, that they are instructed in reading, that they keep the Sabbath day, that they both love God and pray to him. Protect the teachers who have come to this land of dark hearts. Attend to their instructions. Cease not to keep the commandments of God, to love him, to obey his word, to regard the Sabbath and all the means of instruction, and do not neglect to prayer to God. He is a good God. Our former gods were false, but he is the God by whom we may all live forever in heaven. I love Jesus Christ. I hope he has loved me, and that he will receive me.”<sup>123</sup>

Earlier, she had expressed her desire to be baptized.<sup>124</sup> Now that death was at the door, the time for her to be baptized was running short.

While she wanted to be baptized, and others “thought she was a fit candidate for baptism ... they [‘Messrs. Stewart and Richards’] were unwilling to administer that ordinance, without an interpreter, or some means of communicating either with her or with the people, on such an occasion.”<sup>125</sup> Thankfully, Mr. Ellis came, and Keopuolani’s “wish to be baptized was immediately communicated by the chiefs.”<sup>126</sup> Yet she was not in good physical condition, and so they pondered not administering it, but at this thought, “the king, in a most expressive tone, replied, ‘Why, what is the harm?’ He afterwards said, ‘I

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<sup>120</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 31–32.

<sup>121</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 32–33.

<sup>122</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 32.

<sup>125</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.

<sup>126</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.

know that this is only an external sign, but my mother gave herself away to Jesus Christ before her sickness, and now, because she is about to die, do you refuse to sprinkle water upon her in the name of God?”<sup>127</sup> As such, they baptized her.

Keopuolani was the first Hawaiian convert to Christianity to be baptized on account of the missionaries’ work in Hawaii. As Richards records, “Although there were others who gave evidence of piety earlier than Keopuolani did, yet no one had ever yet been baptized; so that Keopuolani may be called the first fruits of the mission.”<sup>128</sup> When she was baptized, Richards recounts that the Hawaiians around the event “said, ‘Surely she is no longer ours, she formerly gave herself to Jesus Christ. We believe she is, and will go to dwell with him.’”<sup>129</sup> One hour later, Keopuolani died,<sup>130</sup> and the nation wept at the loss of one who ““was a mother to every body.””<sup>131</sup>

### ***Conclusion: Reflections on Keopuolani’s Life for the Church Today***

To conclude, I want to offer some reflections on Keopuolani’s life that will hopefully help the life of the church today here in Hawaii. We could focus on numerous aspects here, like her virtue of mercy, or the reality of divine providence, or her resoluteness to stay bold in the face of opposing views of Christianity. We could also mention her hospitality or her diligence to honor the Sabbath. We as church leaders in Hawaii also would do well to pay attention to her “commission,” as it were, to lead the people of Hawaii to love Jesus and follow his commandments. There is much to reflect on from Keopuolani’s story and faith. I, however, limit myself to two observations.

### *God, the Giver of Happy Life Eternal*

Before her death, Keopuolani said, “Our former gods were false, but he is the God by whom we may all live forever in heaven.”<sup>132</sup> Everything else in Keopuolani’s life—just like our own—cannot provide life eternal. Only God can do this. And this is not just any sort of eternal life. Notice what she said to her son, King Liholiho: “Serve God. Love him, and love Jesus Christ. Attend also to the word of God, that you may be happy, and that we two may meet in heaven.”<sup>133</sup> When we attend to the word of God, we attend to God himself and experience his love for us in Christ Jesus. And the result of knowing such love is life eternal in lasting happiness. Keopuolani saw that attending to God led to life and therefore it led to happiness. Our churches, our people, and our families long for life and happiness, and according to Keopuolani, life and happiness are found in God’s word, and God’s word leads us to God himself. Will we point our people to anything other than him? There is no greater joy for us church leaders to do

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<sup>127</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34–35.

<sup>128</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 35–36.

<sup>129</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 36; Mookini, “Keōpuōlani,” 21; cf. Sinclair, “The Sacred Wife,” 20.

<sup>131</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 36.

<sup>132</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 33.

what Keopuolani urged her son: attend to the word of God that in turn leads us to God who gives eternal life in Jesus Christ. That is happy and hopeful news.

### *Assurance for Believers*

While many things stand out in Keopuolani's last sayings, something pricked my heart in an unfortunate way. In many of her last recorded sayings in Richards' *Memoir*, Keopuolani often *appeared* to be questioning whether or not Jesus loved her and would receive her. "My heart is much afraid I shall never become a Christian,"<sup>134</sup> Keopuolani also said, "I think a great deal of my sins and of the love of Jesus Christ. He is very kind to me. I hope he will take me to his right hand."<sup>135</sup> Near the end of her life, she relayed, "I love Jesus Christ. I hope he has loved me, and that he will receive me."<sup>136</sup> Such quotes seem to suggest she experienced some doubt or at least had questions concerning her salvation. This is, I admit, subjective guesswork on her thought process. Nevertheless, my guesswork arises out of an analysis of her own words. That said, it is quite understandable to have questions and doubts about one's salvation, all the more when death was standing nearby. Further, I am not criticizing Keopuolani's faith nor am I calling her out on it. Rather, I am using her words—whether or not they reveal an objective lack of assurance—as an opportunity to remind pastors, church leaders, and Christians in general. That is, Keopuolani's words gives us an occasion to remember that we really can have assurance in the gospel of Christ.

We ought to recall the purpose of John's Gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31). John really means that if we have faith in Jesus, we also have life in him. This is something objective that rests not on our faith, but on Christ, who will never let us go. Earlier, in the same Gospel, John records Jesus saying, "this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (6:40). Again Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (10:27–30). Jesus' words here offer the grace of certainty his people can have: Jesus will never lose those who are his, and therefore, God will certainly receive those who trust in Christ, not because of the quantity of their faith or the quantity of their good works, but again, because of *whom* they put their faith in—Christ Jesus.<sup>137</sup> Paul's words can therefore assure us that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in

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<sup>134</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 19.

<sup>135</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 31–32.

<sup>136</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.

<sup>137</sup> This insight is owing, generally speaking, to my friend, Matt Crutchmer.

Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) and thus nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). This is good news not only for those who have doubts, but for everyone. We truly can trust Jesus’ words that we are his and forever belong to him. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* Question and Answer 1 puts it: “*What is your only comfort in life and in death?* That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”<sup>138</sup>

If we have heard someone in our church say some of the things Keopuolani said that were noted in the previous paragraph, and we have seen fruit in their life like the fruit seen in the accounts of Keopuolani, we *ought* to remind them of the gospel truths concerning the assurance of pardon. We who trust Jesus do not have to hope that he loves us or will accept us; we can know for certain that he does love us and that he will receive us. This is not to presume, but to be confident in Jesus’ own words and the words of his apostles.

Consider two texts from John in his First Epistle. First, John writes, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2). John of course does not want his readers to sin—such acts are those of the darkness and not of the light. Yet, he assures us that even when we do sin, those sins have been and are paid for by the blood of Jesus, who now advocates for us. Thus, as the author of Hebrews writes, “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Second, John tells his readers why he wrote the things that he did in his First Epistle: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Here, John is giving a rather bold statement: believers can actually know that they have eternal life.<sup>139</sup> If this divinely inspired text teaches us this thing, we ought build up people’s assurance—not in themselves, but in their Savior to do exactly what he said he would do: *save them*.

Concretely, this may look like urging people to not forsake the church gathering (cf. Heb 10:25), something Keopuolani herself did as well. It may also look like practicing and observing the Lord’s Supper weekly instead of monthly. It may look like including a time of confession and an assurance of pardon for our congregations to regularly be guided by God’s word in confessing our sins and hearing from God’s word that we truly have been pardoned by God’s grace in Christ. Or, it may be having the habitual disposition to constantly remind people of Jesus’ saving work.

By constantly assuring believers of their hope, I believe, people will not gain license to sin. Instead, by building up their hope, their morality will grow, because hope transforms our moral life, for

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<sup>138</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism* Q&A 1, in *Creeds, Confessions, & Catechisms: A Reader’s Edition*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 291.

<sup>139</sup> I believe Zack Melvin pointed me to this text to make this very point years ago. Gavin Ortland, I believe, hits this point as well in his ministry, *Truth Unites*, if my memory serves me well.



“Christian hope,” as John Webster says, “is a moral phenomenon.”<sup>140</sup> In other words, hope affects (for the good!) how we live, pushing us to do things contrary to our sinful nature. And this is our hope, in the words of Keopuolani, “he is the God by whom we may all live forever in heaven.”<sup>141</sup> That, according to Keopuolani, is happiness—a happiness that is had in Jesus.

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<sup>140</sup> John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 195.

<sup>141</sup> Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani*, 34.