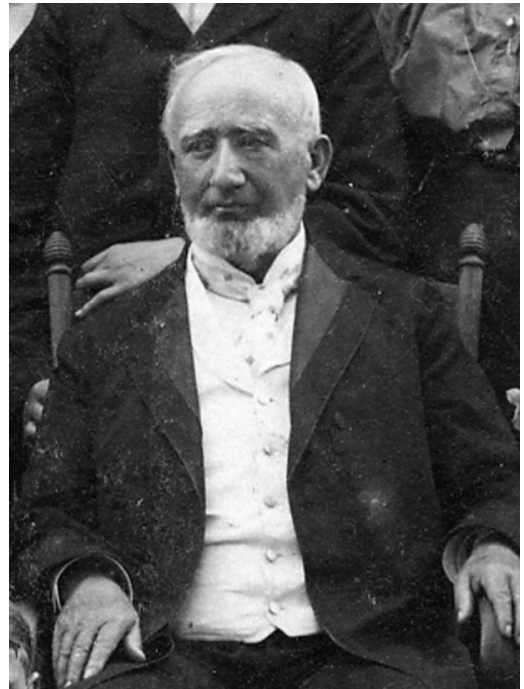


# Chapter 15

## George Q. Cannon in Hawai‘i, 1850–54: Relationship Challenges of a Young Missionary

*Davis Bitton*

When young George Q. Cannon disembarked in Honolulu in December 1850, as one of the ten original missionaries called to the Sandwich Islands, he was not quite twenty-four years old. In time, he became the most celebrated of these missionaries—both because of his great achievements in preaching the gospel and translating the Book of Mormon into the Hawaiian language and because he went on to become an Apostle and counselor in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1879 he published a book about his experiences in Hawai‘i, entitled *My First Mission*, that became a classic of Latter-day Saint literature. Near the end of his life, in December 1900, he traveled to Hawai‘i to participate in the jubilee celebration commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his and his companions’ arrival in the islands. It was a celebration of fifty years of faithful Latter-day Saint Hawaiians and of all the missionaries who had served there, but especially of Cannon himself, who had become an icon representing the spiritual power and faith of the early missionaries.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 1.** George Q. Cannon in 1900 at the fiftieth anniversary of his mission to Hawai‘i  
*Courtesy of Church Archives*

Cannon's mission to Hawai'i can be examined from different points of view. This chapter will review some of the challenges he faced, not those of physical health, financial support, or homesickness, but those of *relationships*. Relationship challenges have been common to the Latter-day Saint missionary experience from the beginning. It is instructive to consider how these challenges were part of the mission experience of Elder George Q. Cannon.

## Relationship with the Mission President

George Q. Cannon was just one of ten missionaries who landed in Hawai'i in 1850. The leader, or mission president, of the group was Hiram Clark. Breaking up into five pairs, the missionaries fanned out. George went to Maui.<sup>2</sup> Clark stayed in Honolulu, as was appropriate, and from there kept in contact with the others. Soon, however, a difference of opinion developed, and George faced a crisis. When conversions among the whites, or *haoles*, in the Sandwich Islands did not materialize, and prospects of learning the Hawaiian language seemed daunting, some of the missionaries decided they should go home. Even President Clark was having second thoughts about the mission. When Clark called Cannon to Honolulu to take the place of his companion who had decided to return home, Cannon expressed his Spirit-revealed conviction to those who were considering departure that success would attend their labors if they persevered. Though only one of the missionaries was persuaded to stay, President Clark was moved by Cannon's expressions and decided to send him back to Maui to continue his mission there.

Several weeks later, however, Clark unexpectedly arrived on Maui and bore testimony to Cannon and his companions that he had learned from the Lord that there was "nothing to be done" on O'ahu and that, in fact, he should go to the Marquesas Islands. Cannon recorded in his journal that Clark told the Maui missionaries that "if things

were the same here as they were up at O'ahu, he thought it would be best for us to go down with him."<sup>3</sup> However, Cannon noted, "We felt upon thinking the matter over as though we could not leave this place uncondemned." Indeed, his feelings were the same as he had expressed on O'ahu: "I considered that I would have been just as much justified in leaving the first day as I would now, that we had not given the people a trial whether they would receive it or reject it, and we had no such testimony as Bro. Clark. In fact every time I had prayed to the Lord that their [*sic*] might be a good work done here I had felt my bosom warm and felt the spirit continually whispering to me if I should persevere I should be blest."<sup>4</sup>

It is easy now to say that George was right, as his harvest of souls soon demonstrated, but at the time, his feelings clashed with the sentiments of his mission president. As Cannon later wrote, "Our position, just then, was a peculiar one. Here was our president, the man who had been appointed to counsel and guide us, proposing to us to leave the field to which we had been appointed, and to take a journey of several hundred miles to another land to labor. What were we to do? How far did the obedience which we owed to him require us to go? This was an important question. To disobey a man in the rightful exercise of authority, was an act from which we naturally recoiled. . . . But we felt that it would not be right for us to leave that island then."<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately, President Clark's purpose was to invite rather than insist that Cannon and his companions accompany him to the South Pacific. And George did not argue with his president or try to seize the reins of leadership. Fundamentally, George was a dutiful servant who would go to the ends of the earth if he was convinced that was what his leaders desired. Knowing Cannon's strong conviction of the need for loyalty to leaders, one can imagine his relief, and that of his three companions, at being allowed to remain on Maui.

Eventually the Maui missionaries would welcome reinforcements from the mainland and a

new mission president, Philip Lewis. There is every indication that George was fully loyal to Lewis. Still, one can imagine a certain temptation. Having arrived in the Hawaiian Islands before Lewis, George had a kind of seniority, and certainly his command of the language was superior. His converts were loyal to him. It is a tribute to Cannon that he continued to show initiative and leadership while at the same time deferring to his president. Later, as president of the British and European Missions, he expected the same combination of hard work and deference from those serving under him.

## Relationship with Other Missionaries

At times, there were jealousies and differences of opinions among the missionaries, but these were never so large or lasting that they threatened the work. Some felt mistreated or slighted. Francis Hammond, for instance, desired to go to Lahaina, Maui, to preach and wished Cannon to accompany him. George demurred, replying that the labor there required “wisdom and a good knowledge of the language.” Hammond took this remark as a put-down, implying that he was deficient in these areas. He said Cannon’s comments made him feel like he was “only a passenger on board the Ship.”<sup>6</sup> When Hammond’s hurt feelings emerged later at a missionary meeting, Cannon was caught off guard and became emotionally distraught. “I never, to my remembrance, in my life experienced such feelings,” he wrote. “They were exquisite and I felt cut down to think that Bro. H. & I had mingled together and I had unbosomed myself to him time and again and yet all this time he had these feelings against me and had hinted to me and I had been so dull that I did not understand—these thoughts oppressed me and it was in vain that I tried to express them for awhile.”

In the end, all interpersonal tension was resolved: “We had a good deal of talk and laid our feelings open one to the other and settled it all

satisfactorily to all parties.” But it was a painful learning experience for Cannon. He concluded the day’s diary entry, one of his longest, with these words: “I thought this [episode] worthy of note that I might be reminded to ascertain at all times the feelings of the brethren and to cultivate all times a spirit of candor that we might have no misunderstandings.”<sup>7</sup> Cannon was learning that to preserve unity of purpose, hard feelings must not be allowed to fester—a principle he would apply throughout the remainder of his life.

## Relationship with Christian Clergy

By the time the Latter-day Saint elders arrived, Christian missionaries had already been laboring in the Hawaiian Islands for several decades. The most influential group was the Congregationalist missionaries sent out by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Contact between the Latter-day Saint missionaries and the Congregationalist ministers was quite regular, though Cannon also mentions the occasional conversation with a Catholic priest. Both the Congregationalists and the Latter-day Saints felt the other was clearly in the wrong, and they had no compunction about saying so to each other. Not surprisingly, tension was inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

The Congregationalist missionary with whom Cannon had the most interaction was Daniel Toll Conde. Conde and his wife had been on Maui since the 1830s, and his Congregationalist converts reportedly numbered in the thousands. When Cannon met him in March 1851, Conde was living at the ABCFM mission station in Wailuku (there were also stations in Lahaina and Hana). A moderately friendly chat ensued and Cannon offered Conde a copy of Parley P. Pratt’s *Voice of Warning*. Conde, however, “condemned the principles before he had read or heard.”<sup>9</sup> In particular, he rejected out of hand the possibility of modern revelation. Conde’s approach frustrated Cannon: “I could not get him to show me my errors from the scriptures if I had

any but it was all I think, I think, I think, no proof." Conde had no hesitation in rejecting the Latter-day Saint claims: "He said he would rather belief [sic] Mahomet than Joseph Smith."<sup>10</sup>

On the final Sunday in March, young Cannon, who was beginning to grasp the Hawaiian language, entered the Congregationalist meetinghouse in Wailuku and heard Conde preach in Hawaiian to his congregation. A major part of his discourse was a diatribe against the Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith had pretended to see angels, Conde said, and claimed that an angel had taken away the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, which, if genuine, should have been left for all the world to see. Conde called Joseph Smith "a notoriously bad character," a thief, a lawbreaker, a dissolute rake with "many wives or concubines"—in short, "a very wicked man." If Joseph Smith had truly seen angels, Conde taunted, why did they not deliver him from death?

"My feelings while sitting listening to this tirade," wrote Cannon, "can be better imagined than described[.] I felt as though if I had owned the world I should have given it to have been able to have talked the Native. I thought of standing up after meeting and contradicting but I thought he had the pulpit & could out-talk me." After the meeting, Cannon went to Conde and asked if he could "inform him better in regard to the things he had told this people" so that Conde could "disabuse the people of the lies he had told them."<sup>11</sup>

"I do not think they are lies. It is my duty to warn the people," the reverend replied.

"I dare you to prove Mormonism wrong from the scriptures," said Cannon tactlessly, speaking rapidly, his heart pounding. "I can prove before this whole people that what you preach is not the gospel of Jesus Christ according to the scriptures."<sup>12</sup>

It was not a genial conversation. Some of the congregation had gathered around to listen, but they only understood English about as well as Cannon did Hawaiian. Upon returning to his lodgings, realizing that the people "had been so

much hurt listening to [Conde's] slanders," Cannon "wept like a whipped child."<sup>13</sup>

Another adversary to the Mormons on Maui was the Reverend Jonathan S. Green. In early April 1851, on his way to Peahi, Cannon stopped at Hamakua Loa. Hearing that Green was coming to preach the next day, Cannon stayed to meet him. Shaking Cannon's hand, Green invited him to a nearby house. After some polite small talk, the two men quickly engaged in an argument with each other. What, Green asked, was Cannon's purpose in coming? Hadn't the gospel already been preached here? Cannon did not mince words. He was there to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to tell all people that the Lord had again established His church as it was anciently. "I do not think the gospel is preached here or I would not have been sent here," he declared.

Huffily, Green declared that he would not believe Joseph Smith, who was of course an imposter.

"Have you read any of our publications?" Cannon inquired.

"Yes," said Green.

When Cannon insisted to know what they were and who had written them, it turned out that they were exposés written by ex-Mormons. But, Cannon continued, "Have you read any of ours?"

"No," replied Green, "nor would I read anything that Joe Smith or any of his followers would write."

"Then you are incompetent to judge whether we are right or wrong," declared Cannon. "A wise man hears both sides of the question and then judges."

Cannon next asked Green if his church had apostles.

"No," Green answered, "but the church is built upon their foundation."

"But they were meant to continue for the perfecting of the saints." Cannon was quoting the epistle to the Ephesians, chapter four. "You don't claim to be perfect, do you?"

"No, we do not," Green answered.

"Well, then," Cannon pressed his conclusion, "you are not the Church of Christ or you would have these offices."

Green paced back and forth. Grabbing his hat, he said, "God curse you," and strode out of the room.

Cannon followed. "You do not have the authority to curse me."

"I did not curse you but I prayed to God to curse you," Green said.

"Well, I do not think he will hear your prayers."

Poor Green was trying to get away. As he mounted his horse, he had to listen to one more sentence: "Mr. Green, you would do well to take Paul's advice 'prove all things and hold fast that which is good.'"

Spurring his horse, the Protestant missionary said, "I have proved Mormonism," and rode away. Just moments before, though, he turned to a group of Hawaiian onlookers and warned, "This man is *ae enemi keia*."

"No I am not," replied Cannon in Hawaiian, "and he cannot prove me one from the Bible."<sup>14</sup>

Cannon also had a few conversations with Catholics who, at the time, were a distinct minority in the Islands. Of one several-hour discussion with a Catholic priest, Cannon recorded, "his favorite & only positions were—the Savior's remark to Peter Mat. 16. 18 and last half of the 20 verse of the 28 chap. of Mat.—contending from these that if there had not been a pure organization from that time down to the present time—he (the Lord) had spoken falsely and was an unskilful workman." Cannon tried to show how the original Christian church had "fallen away," but the priest, probably wisely, would simply "dodge back to his original position. . . . It was very plain to be seen that he did not wish any comparisons made between his church and the scriptures."<sup>15</sup>

A final example of Cannon's exchanges with other Christian ministers is one that grew out of Cannon's request for the privilege of preaching in the hall of a Protestant minister (a common re-

quest of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint missionaries). The minister turned him down, declaring, "I intend to use my influence to stop your progress, and you may calculate on it."

"Hold on," Cannon said. "We are strangers to you. You don't know what we believe. You don't know who we are. You have not asked about our beliefs and don't know our tenets. We might have truths as pure as any that ever emanated from the Throne of Jehovah. You do not know. This is the work of the Almighty. It will gather out the honest in heart. All that you do against it will only accelerate its progress."

Three times during this "conversation," the minister called Cannon "bold."<sup>16</sup> This is a good word to summarize George's stance toward antagonistic Christian ministers and missionaries. He did not disrupt meetings and could be low-key in setting forth basic biblical teachings, but he did not hesitate to set forth the claims of the Restoration. If some of his comments seem a bit confrontational for modern tastes, it is important to remember that he was responding to the denunciations of churchmen who did not hesitate to poison the minds of their congregations against the Latter-day Saints. "I have found that nothing is ever lost by Elders standing up for their rights," Cannon later wrote. "People respect others who are spirited in claiming the privileges which belong to them; and no Elder should ever forget that he is the ambassador of the King of heaven, and that he should maintain his calling. If he is firm and respectful, he will be respected."<sup>17</sup>

## Relationship with *Haoles* (Settlers)

As a result of the Euro-American "discovery" of the Hawaiian Islands, the Islands were opened up to European and American merchants, explorers, seamen, and eventually settlers, or *haoles*. Latter-day Saint missionaries could have taken one of several approaches to these *haoles*. First, they could have limited their proselytizing entirely to them. The argument in

favor of this course would have been the ease of communication and the desirability of establishing the gospel firmly in wealthy, upper-class enclaves, from which it could later expand into other elements of the population. This was the point of view of President Hiram Clark, who, finding no such success, decided to transfer his efforts to the Marquesas. A second stance would be to ignore the haoles completely, whether European or American, and go directly to the Hawaiian Islanders. The third possible approach was a two-pronged effort, seeking converts among both haoles and Hawaiians, with emphasis shifting according to circumstances.

The third approach, of course, was the course of action pursued by George Q. Cannon. Only a few whites responded to the appeals of the Latter-day Saint message, but these haole converts—John Winchester, James B. Kipp, Albion Burnham, D. S. Rice, and Edward Dennis—were of great help both psychologically and financially. To his credit, Cannon avoided the trap of spending the majority of his time with this minority of the Islands' inhabitants.

## Relationship with the Native Hawaiians

When it came to proselytizing the indigenous population, the first Latter-day Saint missionaries had mixed feelings. As has been mentioned, some thought the islanders should be ignored, at least for the present, in favor of the haole settlers. But Cannon—under the Lord's inspiration, as he believed—eloquently defended the importance of reaching out to the Hawaiians. "The soul of a Sandwich Islander or a Lamanite is as precious in the sight of the Lord as the soul of a white man, whether born in America or Europe," he wrote later. "Jesus died for one as much as the other."<sup>18</sup>

That is not quite the end of the issue. From the beginning of Christian evangelism to non-Europeans, certain inevitable challenges had to be faced. First was learning the language. This

included the problem of translating European theological concepts into languages with no exact equivalents for the terms. Then there was the attitude of European superiority that was not always easy to avoid. Not only did the preaching imply a vertical relationship of full and empty, or teacher and taught, but educational, technological, and scientific advantages were on the side of the missionary. In the Latter-day Saint case, it is probably too much to claim that Cannon and his fellow missionaries always avoided any hint of disdainful attitudes. They did, however, show a remarkable willingness to participate in the local culture, learn the language, eat the food, and appreciate the spiritual qualities of the Hawaiian Islanders. This warm, open approach helped facilitate a spectacular number of conversions among the native inhabitants.

If the Hawaiians were not to be considered second-class Church members, they must have leaders from their own number. The genius of Church organization—lay leaders in each congregation with numerous opportunities for teaching and ministering—lent itself to the integration of locals into the public ministry whenever people of ability were found. From the beginning, Cannon and his companions were able to locate such individuals. Nāpela, Kaleohano, Ūaia, Kauwahi, Kalawaia—these and other converts became prominent local missionaries and leaders.<sup>19</sup>

One important indicator of how one relates to another culture can be found in the realm of language mastery. This is not to suggest that those with little language aptitude cannot sometimes be effective missionaries. Moreover, people of different countries remind one that very few missionaries achieve such a fluency that their accent disappears. Surely, though, mastery of a foreign language, which includes learning the idioms and coming to the point of thinking and even dreaming in that language, goes hand in hand with drawing closer to the people. In this aspect, as in other areas, George Q. Cannon set a high standard. Through a combination of heavenly gifts and hard work, he learned to speak like a native.<sup>20</sup>

This enabled Cannon to undertake the great project of translating the Book of Mormon into the Hawaiian language, which occupied whatever time he could spare from January 1852 to early 1854. Painstakingly, he went through the sacred text verse by verse, line by line. His command of the Hawaiian language increased in the process. Along the way, he recognized the need for help. On one occasion, he sailed to the island of Kauai, where he reviewed the entire manuscript with the assistance of Kauwahi, a Hawaiian Latter-day Saint of “acute intellect and talent and good education.”<sup>21</sup> Even more important was the assistance of Jonathan Nāpela, arguably the most prominent and influential Hawaiian convert of the nineteenth century, who effectively served as a collaborator. “I would then read the translation to him,” Cannon later explained, “going carefully over every word and sentence, and learning from him the impression the language

used conveyed to his mind. In this way I was able to correct any obscure expression which might be used, and secure the Hawaiian idiom.”<sup>22</sup>

If Cannon appreciated and respected Nāpela, Nāpela certainly reciprocated. In April 1852, he wrote this letter to President Brigham Young in Utah, summarizing the establishment of the Church in the Hawaiian Islands and Cannon’s role in it:

To the person justified, Brigham Young; Great love to thee.

The thought springeth up in me to tell thee concerning the things of the Kingdom of the Everlasting God.

In the year 1851, in the month of March, the 8th day, George Cannon came into my house at Wailuku, the Island of Maui, of the Hawaiian group. He was afterwards persecuted by our former teacher, D. T. Conde; therefore, George Cannon went to my house in Kula, upon this Island. He afterwards established a branch of the church of the Lord there; and when the last month of that year arrived, George Cannon and [bro.] Hammond established a Branch of the church of the Lord at Wailuku, and when the year 1852 arrived, it had increased, and it is constantly increasing at this time: and it is very plain to us that this is the church of God, and that it is the gospel which is preached by the white men from the Rocky Mountains; and there are many upon these islands who have obtained strong faith by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ the Lord, that we might receive the Holy Ghost: Amen.

May the true love of the Lord be with you, worlds without end: Amen.

My desire is great to see you, ye Fathers of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and my thoughts are buoyant to go to your place, when the proper time arrives.

Yours with admiration,

J. H. Nāpela

Wailuku, 8th April 1852<sup>23</sup>

It is obvious that even before their collaboration on the translation, Cannon had won Nāpela’s gratitude and respect. It is inconceivable



**Fig. 2.** Jonathan Nāpela in 1869  
*Courtesy of Church Archives*

that this attitude would have developed had not Cannon shown kindness and respect toward his Hawaiian friend and convert. Cannon clearly viewed Nāpela as a man of great faith from whom he had something to learn. Just days before Nāpela wrote his letter to Brigham Young, the first conference of the Sandwich Island Mission was held on April 1, 1852. Cannon recorded, "It looked much like rain. We had consented to pray last night to the Almighty to bless us with a fine day; but as it was likely to be wet and disagreeable outside; we concluded it best to hold meeting [indoors]. As we were about to enter Nāpela and a few more of the native brethren came up and asked if we were going in the house to meet after asking the Lord to bless us with fine weather; he said it did not manifest faith; he appeared much surprised—and we felt to be rebuked for our lack of faith."<sup>24</sup>

George approached the Hawaiians with warmth and generosity. He admired their qualities, called them to positions of leadership as quickly as possible, and rejoiced in their progress. A missionary's feeling of love for the people he labors among did not start or end with George Q. Cannon, but he was a very good example of it.

## Relationship with Government Officials

Church members encountered opposition not only from the previously established Christian missionaries but also from the government. On one occasion, when a local Hawaiian official forbade the Saints from meeting until they were formally authorized to do so by the king, Cannon resolved to go to Honolulu to settle the matter. Sailing seasick throughout the night, Cannon arrived at port by sunrise. After breakfasting with mission president Philip Lewis, the two began a tedious, frustrating tour of government offices. An interview with the minister of foreign affairs was followed the next day by a call upon the governor of O'ahu who promised to consider their request for official permission to preach. Then

they visited the American commissioner, Luther Severance, who talked with them for an hour and a half and "espoused our cause very warmly, and demanded of the government all the rights for us which were extended to any preachers."<sup>25</sup>

Two days later they made another call on the governor, who this time referred them to John Young, the part-Hawaiian minister of the interior. The missionaries complained to Young of the "molestation of certain persons" and asked for written permission to preach in the Islands. He seemed willing to grant the request but wanted to clear it with the Privy Council that was to meet later in the day. When Cannon and Lewis returned, they were told that the existing laws were sufficient to protect them, and that in the case of grievances they should apply to the law for relief.<sup>26</sup>

Cannon also decided to seek permission to construct a Latter-day Saint meetinghouse in Keanae, Maui, an area where the Saints had been forbidden to gather but where most of his converts were living. He looked up the agent of the king's lands, but he was not at home. The next day, hearing that the agent and the king had taken the royal yacht to Lahaina, Cannon took passage on another vessel. When he finally caught up with them five days later, the king was reported ill and unable to conduct business. The land agent recommended calling on the princes. Finally, Cannon met with Prince Liholiho, heir apparent to the throne. Liholiho declared that the Mormons should not be interfered with and agreed to check into the legality of the construction of a chapel at Keanae.<sup>27</sup> In Cannon's view the Hawaiian royalty and nobility tended to be responsive but were often negatively influenced by antagonistic advisors and haole Christian missionaries.

## Relationship with General Authorities

The Church was comparatively small in the 1850s, but even so it was unusual for a missionary



to have a close relationship with the General Authorities. George Q. Cannon, however, was the nephew of John Taylor, a senior Apostle with whom he had lived previously. In important respects, Elder Taylor was George's surrogate father. There might have been a good deal of correspondence between the missionary and his Apostle uncle had it not been for the fact that Taylor was in Europe at the same time, preaching the gospel in France and the Channel Islands. A close relationship between George and President Brigham Young was also developing. President Young blessed George before he departed and corresponded with him at times during the mission. The potential was present for jealousy on the part of the other missionaries and even the mission president, but George showed little inclination to puff himself up or to boast of his "inside track." Instead, Cannon worked hard and remained humble, thus retaining the respect of his colleagues.

## Relationship with Family at Home

George's parents were both deceased, having died in 1842 and 1843, but his siblings were alive. As the oldest child in the family, George did not ignore his siblings but continued to show brotherly interest. When a letter from home expressed concern for Angus and David, who were not paying attention in meetings and were following bad examples, George wrote back that he was "grieved" and disappointed that they had not made sufficient progress "in knowledge and intelligence."<sup>28</sup> Even from far away, Cannon was a force for good among his family members. Love and reinforcement moved in both directions as letters made their slow progress back and forth across the Pacific.

## Relationship with His Fiancée

One of George's correspondents was the charming Elizabeth Hoagland, a young woman whom he had met before his mission. The two corresponded throughout his mission, exchanged

daguerreotypes, and came to an understanding that they would eventually marry. Though their correspondence has not survived, one of George's diary entries suggests its tone: "She [Elizabeth] is anxious to hear of my return, and says that some tell her that I am not coming home, if she could think so, she says, she would feel like shouldering her pack and come to meet me. Bless her, O Lord, for her constancy and may she be strengthened continually and kept unto the end."<sup>29</sup> Less than two weeks after his return to Utah from Hawai'i, George and Elizabeth were married. They would share more than a quarter century and a dozen births together before Elizabeth died in 1882 while still in her midforties.

## Relationship with God

The final relationship under examination is between George Q. Cannon and his God. If he was to succeed, the young missionary had to live on a high spiritual plane. If ever a missionary lived close to the Lord, it was George Q. Cannon. How did he do this? There were three essential ingredients to his spirituality.

His foundation was a keen feeling of dependence on Deity. Without resources from home, he had to trust in the Lord to guide him for food, shelter, and clothing. Without formal language instruction, he appealed to the Lord for the gift of mastering the language. Periodic fasting renewed his feeling of reliance on the Lord. "To day was fast day and I attended and enjoyed it very much," Cannon wrote in his journal for March 2, 1854. "O Father I pray unto thee to deliver me continually from a feeling of carelessness and security but may I continually have my thoughts upon thee and seek to find favor in thy sight, that, I may always take heed lest I come under the influence of any other spirit but thine but may I be filled with the revelations and cheering influences of thy Holy Spirit every minute of my life for the sake of thy son Jesus. Amen."<sup>30</sup>

Strengthening his reliance on the Lord was his intimacy with the holy scriptures, particularly

the Book of Mormon. When he first arrived in Hawai'i, an initial lack of success among the haoles and his inability to understand the Hawaiian language afforded him extra time with the scriptures. He later recalled:

It was then that I found the value of the Book of Mormon. It was a book which I always loved. But I learned there to appreciate it as I had never done before. If I felt inclined to be lonely, to be low spirited, or homesick, I had only to turn to its sacred pages to receive consolation, new strength and a rich outpouring of the Spirit. Scarcely a page that did not contain encouragement for such as I was. The salvation of man was the great theme upon which its writers dwelt, and for this they were willing to undergo every privation and make every sacrifice. . . .

Let me recommend this book, therefore, to young and old, if they need comfort and encouragement. Especially can I recommend it to those who are away from home on missions. No man can read it, partake of its spirit and obey its teachings, without being filled with a deep love for the souls of men and a burning zeal to do all in his power to save them. . . .

What were my petty difficulties compared with those afflictions which they had to endure? If I expected to share the glory for which they contended, I could see that I must labor in the same Spirit. If the sons of Mosiah could relinquish their high estate, and go forth among the degraded Lamanites to labor as they did, should not I labor with patience and devoted zeal for the salvation of these poor red men, heirs of the same promise?<sup>31</sup>

Two years into his mission, after his mastery of the Hawaiian language and after his love of the Book of Mormon had led him to commence the book's translation, George wrote in his journal,

I never could enter into the feelings experienced by the holy men who wrote the Book of Mormon as I can at present. My soul shrinks from the thought of sin and my heart is pained to behold the sins of the world, I can weep over the weakness, folly and shortsightedness of man; I know that I myself have sinned often, sinned against light and knowledge and that I have not lived as I ought; my soul is startled at

times at reviewing my past life and seeing my many acts of folly, and neglectfulness; and when I behold the kindness, and long suffering of the Lord, I feel that words are too feeble to express the gratitude that I ought to have.<sup>32</sup>

The scriptures exerted a profound impact on Cannon. They were his companion, his emotional sustenance, his gallery of inspiring examples, his theological textbook, and his manual of devotion.

Third, George turned to prayer. Here is a sample of his numerous prayers for success in missionary work:

Grant O Lord that the labors of thy servants may be exceedingly profitable that we may rejoice with many of this people in the enjoyment of a celestial Kingdom. I desire to see them saved for I know the labors, faith and prayers of their forefathers, of their wrestlings before thee in behalf of these, that they might be permitted to hear and enjoy the blessings of thy gospel pure and unadulterated as it proceeds from thy mouth. Oh that my feeble faith and prayers might also be heard in their behalf; though [sic] knowest O Father the desires of my heart in this thing and that it has been stimulating to me to think of thy covenants recorded by thy servants in their favor, that thou would have mercy on them in the last days. May priestcraft be destroyed in their midst and may no power in earth or hell have power to keep the honest in heart from embracing thy gospel and believing the testimony of thy servants. . . . May thy truth go forth as the morning until all the honest in heart be gathered out, and thy servants have cause to rejoice in beholding them returning to the knowledge of their fathers; I ask these things in the name of thy only begotten even so. Amen.<sup>33</sup>

What Cannon especially sought in prayer was "the Spirit," meaning the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit, he could succeed; without it, he was sure to fail. When his preaching was successful, the phrase he often used in his journal to explain it was "the flow of the Spirit."<sup>34</sup> He learned by experience that he must avoid pride. Not long after his first "fluent" sermon in 1851, he preached on the gathering of Israel. "It was a weak attempt," he wrote.

"I had to pull every thing out that I said. It did not come easy. The only way that I could account for it was I had made up in my own mind yesterday what subject I would speak upon—and the Lord had left me to my own strength to show me my weakness. It is a fact I have proved it to my satisfaction that I cannot preach this gospel unless assisted by the Almighty."<sup>35</sup>

Clearly George Q. Cannon lived with a feeling of closeness to his God.

## Conclusion

Like all people, missionaries face relationship challenges. George Q. Cannon certainly did, and he seems to have passed them with flying colors. Though he began his mission to Hawai'i as a young, inexperienced man in his early twenties, the experiences of the three and a half years he spent there enabled him to forge and develop the spirituality, maturity, and strength of character that he would come to epitomize through his subsequent roles as mission president, Apostle, territorial delegate, and First Counselor in the First Presidency.

*Davis Bitton, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Utah, has written extensively on Mormon history, and continues to research and write.*

## Notes

1. The most detailed study of Cannon's life is contained in Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999). Much of the information that follows about his years in Hawai'i is presented in a less analytical, chronological narrative in chapter 1 of that work. Plans to publish all of Cannon's journals have been announced. To date, only the first, pre-Hawaiian mission journal has appeared. See *The Journals of George Q. Cannon: To California in '49* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000). For another look at Cannon's Hawaiian mission, see the relevant material in Lawrence R. Flake, *George Q. Cannon: His Missionary Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999).

2. In the same affectionate spirit that led generations of Latter-day Saints to refer to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Parley Pratt by their first names, I shall often refer to George Q. Cannon as George.

3. George Q. Cannon Journal, February 20, 1851. I have utilized a typed version of the journal prepared by the late Adrian W. Cannon and checked against the transcript of the scholarly edition. Shortly after his visit to Cannon and companions on Maui, Hiram Clark sailed for Tahiti, hoping to proceed from thence to the Marquesas. He never made it. Instead, he spent a brief while on Tubuai with Addison Pratt and other missionaries, went to other areas of French Polynesia, and then returned to California (see Donald R. Shaffer, "Hiram Clark and the First LDS Hawaiian Mission: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 [1991]: 94–109).

4. Cannon Journal, February 20, 1851.

5. George Q. Cannon, *My First Mission* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1879), 22. When Brigham Young heard about Cannon's resolve, he wrote him a commendatory letter: "We were well pleased with the course you had taken and the conclusions which the brethren and yourself had come to, in reference to remaining in the Islands until you had laid a foundation agreeable to your instructions from Elder C. C. Rich. It has been our constant prayer to our Heavenly Father that you might be blest and prospered" (Brigham Young to George Q. Cannon, April 2, 1851, George Q. Cannon papers, Church Archives).

6. Cannon Journal, September 6, 1852.

7. Cannon Journal, September 6, 1852.

8. See M. Guy Bishop, "Waging Holy War: Mormon-Congregationalist Conflict in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Hawaii," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 110–19.

9. Cannon Journal, March 8, 1851; see also Cannon, *My First Mission*, 27.

10. Cannon Journal, March 10, 1851.

11. Cannon Journal, March 30, 1851.

12. Cannon Journal, March 30, 1851; indirect discourse changed to direct and emphasis added.

13. Cannon Journal, March 30, 1851.

14. Cannon Journal, April 6, 1851; indirect discourse changed to direct.

15. Cannon Journal, October 10, 1852.

16. Cannon Journal, June 25, 1852; indirect discourse changed to direct.

17. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 41–42.

18. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 57.

19. See Joseph H. Spurrier, *Sandwich Island Saints: Early Mormon Converts in the Hawaiian Islands* (n.p.: privately published, 1989).

20. Of his experience with the language, Cannon later wrote: "My desire to learn to speak was very strong; it was present with me night and day, and I never permitted an opportunity of talking with the natives to pass without improving it. I also tried to exercise faith before the Lord to obtain the gift of talking and understanding the language. One evening, while sitting on the mats conversing with some neighbors who had dropped in, I felt an uncommonly great desire to understand what they said. All at once I felt a peculiar sensation in my ears, I jumped to my feet, with my hands at the sides of my head, and exclaimed to Elders Bigler and Keeler who sat at the table, that I believed I had received the gift of interpretation! And it was so. From that time forward I had but little, if any, difficulty in understanding what the people said. I might not be able at once to separate every word which they spoke from every other word in the sentence; but I could tell the general meaning of the whole. This was a great aid to me in learning to speak the language, and I felt very thankful for this gift from the Lord" (Cannon, *My First Mission*, 15).

21. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 61.

22. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 60.

23. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 6, 1852, Church Archives. The Journal History is a multivolume compilation of primary sources maintained by the Historical

Department of the Church in Salt Lake City. In this particular case, even though the letter is dated April 8, 1852, it appears in the April 6, 1852, entry. This is so because it was part of a larger newspaper clipping that started with events of the sixth, with the following note at the end: "In Deseret News of Nov. 27, 1852, Orig minutes on file." The day after Nāpela wrote his letter Cannon translated it for President Young. "It was a very good letter," Cannon noted in his journal, "but I felt somewhat delicate about translating it as he used my name several times and I was a little afraid lest a wrong impression might go out, as though I was blowing my own horn & anxious to have it known what I had done. I wrote a page to Bro. B. myself with a few explanatory lines" (Cannon Journal, April 9, 1852). Nāpela eventually traveled to Utah in the 1860s.

24. Cannon Journal, April 1, 1852.

25. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 41.

26. Cannon Journal, October 6, 1851.

27. Cannon Journal, October 21, 1851.

28. Cannon Journal, November 11, 1852.

29. Cannon Journal, October 31, 1852.

30. Cannon Journal, March 2, 1854.

31. Cannon, *My First Mission*, 58–59; order of text rearranged.

32. Cannon Journal, December 8, 1852.

33. Cannon Journal, November 23, 1852.

34. See, for example, Cannon Journal, August 10, 1851; January 25, 1852; and February 13, 1853.

35. Cannon Journal, August 17, 1851.