

# Father Damien, hero of the Hawaiian people !

## Open letter to Mrs. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, US Representative

Tremelo, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020

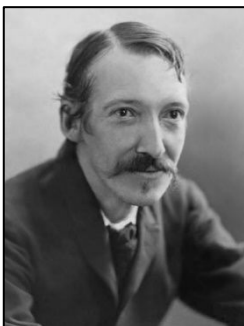
Dear Mrs. Ocasio-Cortez,

For many members of our Father Damien family association, Hawaii is a bit like a second home: by participating in our group tours 'In the footsteps of Damien' or through individual visits to Hawaii and to Molokai, and by the local contacts that are maintained there. We are also very much interested in Hawaiian history, for an understanding of the world in which Damien – Kamiano for native Hawaiians – successfully integrated himself.

Like many Belgians – fellow countrymen of Damien, who in 2005 elected him as 'Greatest Belgian' for his achievements at the other side of the world – we got a shock when reading in the newspaper that you chose, amongst the 102 statues in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection in Washington, the one of our relative Father Damien as a 'typical example of white colonialism, patriarchy and white supremacist culture'; with the suggestion why in his place doesn't stand the only and last queen of Hawaii, Lili'uokalani.

At the same time, we had a 'déjà vu' feeling: in the years after Damien's death (1889), several attempts were made to criticize his work, deny his achievement and destroy his legacy; mostly by envious colleagues and local superiors with whom Damien had collided by his stubbornness.

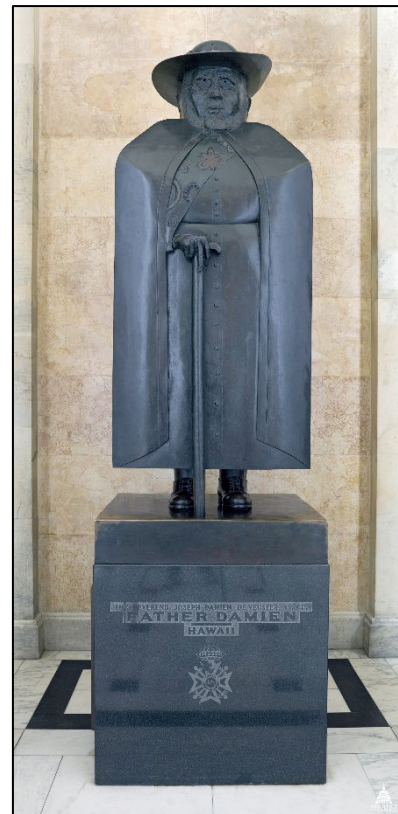
The very last attack dates back to 130 years ago : it was a letter by a certain Reverend Doctor Hyde addressed to the Bishop of Honolulu, in which he depicted Damien as 'coarse, dirty, headstrong and bigoted, who had no hand in the reforms and improvements' and decried the 'extravagant newspaper laudations as if he was a most saintly philanthropist'. Just like today, the letter made it to the international press because Damien was already world famous.



One of the greatest English-language writers of that time, Robert Louis Stevenson, replied in a worldwide published pamphlet of 6000 words entitled 'Father Damien'. Sentence by sentence, Stevenson fillets Hyde's letter, in such vitriolic wording that no-one in the 130 years since has yet dared to criticize again the person of Damien and his role in Molokai. Until now...

A recurring reproach in Stevenson's pamphlet is the lack of concrete field knowledge of Dr. Hyde, who himself had never been to Molokai while being resident of Hawaii – unlike Stevenson who lived in Australia. *In our family association, we have the same feeling about you, Mrs. Ocasio-Cortez... !*

As a family association actively engaged in history, we believe that, for the benefit of the young generation to which you belong, it is worthwhile to provide a basic explanation about the main characters in this new field of tension: about the first Hawaiian king Kamehamea I (the other representative of Hawaii in the statuary hall), the last queen Lili'uokalani (apparently your idol), and



about the 'white male Damien' in the context of the then Hawaii; and beginning with something about his decried statue, which also has a remarkable history !

Those interested in the history of Hawaii and the native Hawaiians will easily find all this information on the Internet, but for you we want to summarize it explicitly in an article.

Nobody other than the Hawaiians themselves have the privilege to judge whether Damien still deserves to be their first representative in the Statuary Hall of the US Capitol in Washington, or to prefer a native Hawaiian queen : not our family association, but also not a U.S. Representative from New York !

We know one thing: when members of our family association come to Hawaii and make themselves known as descendants of Damien's brothers, they are immediately hung with flower wreaths ...

After reading the pages below, you will find that the final Hawaiian choice for Damien in 1965 was very thorough, with the widest possible popular support, with opposing consideration of all counter-arguments and without any exclusion of female native Hawaiian personalities. Damien had no competition from anyone: in terms of legacy for the Hawaiian people, he was simply 'out of category' and the Hawaiian people felt that perfectly!

For his statue, the sculpture of a female artist was chosen; however NOT because she was a woman and living in New York ! But because her design best reflected Damien with his character traits as he had been.

What were again your recriminations, Mrs. Ocasio-Cortez: *'example of white colonialism, patriarchy and white supremacist culture'*... ? Really?

We find it ironic – but especially tragic for you – that, as a victim of your own ignorance, you choose to demonstrate your statement with the statue of Damien: not one of the 101 other personalities in the Statuary Hall has as many statues in the world outside as Damien; not one caused at his or her funeral procession such a broad mobilization of people, politicians, princes and kings as Damien in 1936, in all places of his voyage from Molokai over Honolulu, San Francisco, Antwerp and Leuven; not one was finally canonized.

With your cheap swipe at the 'white male Damien', Mrs. Ocasio-Cortez, you have added yourself to the list of figures next to Reverend Doctor Hyde, who, regardless of their other achievements in history, are remembered mainly as failed critics of Damien.

Finally, Mrs. Ocasio-Cortez, we want to sincerely thank you on behalf of our Father Damien family association for reviving the worldwide attention for our famous relative. Your perfect sense of timing in this Covid-19 era allows us to explain his achievement like never before. Now the US Capitol in Washington will receive visitors who come exclusively to salute the statue of Father Damien!

As for those statues of Damien in Washington and Honolulu, we are extremely confident about their fate : they will forever remain where they stand.

(In Damien's hometown of Tremelo here in Belgium, citizens would nevertheless be interested in giving one or even both a nice place... !)

Rob van den broeck

Chairman Father Damien family association  
Descendant of Louise, daughter of Gerard DV

Herman Van Roost

Representative Father Damien family association  
Descendant of Marie, daughter of Gerard DV



### **The history of Father Damien's statue**

In August 1959, Hawaii officially became the 50<sup>th</sup> state of the United States. Each state may place two statues of historical national personalities in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall in Washington, and a lively discussion almost immediately arose as to which notable Hawaiian figures should be chosen. By December 1960, the 4 counties of Hawaii (Maui, Kauai, Honolulu, and Hawaii) had each approved a motion that 'Father Damien' would be one of these figures – independently of who would become the second !

In the national Hawaiian Parliament, the debate on a possible choice of Damien lasted for another 4 years, with thorough consideration of counterarguments: that he was neither native Hawaiian nor Hawaiian national, and that he was a Catholic priest.

Finally, in May 1965, the law was voted on, selecting Damien as Hawaii's first representative in the U.S. Capitol. The law text mentions *'the efforts of Father Damien among the sufferers of Hansen's disease have made him a humanitarian of international renown and inspired the world toward tremendous strides in the suppression of this disease.* At the bill signing Gov. John Burns said *"Father Damien truly symbolizes the Hawaiian spirit of Aloha, which infuses all who come to these islands.. "*

The committee charged with choosing Damien's statue received 66 candidacies from interested artists. 7 from this group were allowed to submit a scale model, and in the end two finalists remained: Nathan Cabot Hale with a classic representation of the young Damien with a leper child on the arm, and Marisol Escobar (usually called Marisol) with a more contemporary design, based on a photograph taken towards the end of Damien's life, with mutilation of his face and right hand, and with his homemade walking stick.



The seven committee members voted 5 – 2 in favour of the contemporary image of Marisol. The five proponents said that it was contemporary and *strong, minimalist and solid, and that it exuded boldness and stubbornness – as Damien was.*

However, the two opposing voters did not accept this decision and made their own report calling the image of Marisol 'shocking'. Then came a real battle in the full parliament: the House of Representatives followed the opposition and annulled the committee's decision; however, the Senate chose the statue of Marisol and voted the budget - but only for the statue of Marisol ! With the statement : *"her version will not only impress the viewer about the temperament, character and greatness of Damien, but will also offer him an unforgettable visual experience"*.

It came to a widely spread social debate with passionate participants far beyond Hawaii ! The weekly Time Magazine even published on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1967 an article entitled *'How to Portray a Martyr?'*. Shortly thereafter, the House of Representatives turned and supported the committee's choice, so that production of the two bronze statues could finally begin.

There were some production problems, but on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1969, the 80th anniversary of Damien's death, his statue was inaugurated in the Statuary Hall of the Capitol in Washington. A few weeks later, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Kamehamea I, the second statue of Damien was unveiled by a leper patient from Damien's leper colony in Molokai, in the square right in front of the entrance to the Hawaiian Parliament in Honolulu where it still stands.

The group photo below was taken during our Hawaii trip in 2014.





The angular figure of Damien is reminiscent of his stubborn character and of the thousands of coffins he has made single-handedly for his deceased lepers.

Marisol Escobar said of her artwork "I made a man, not a monument".

Perhaps the best description of the statue comes from Jean Charlot, one of the 7 finalists: "it partakes of the immutability of a tree trunk ... a sturdiness and a feeling of inner growth. The holy man planted by his own will on his chosen ground is obviously there to stay."

## The second statue of the state of Hawaii : Kamehamea I

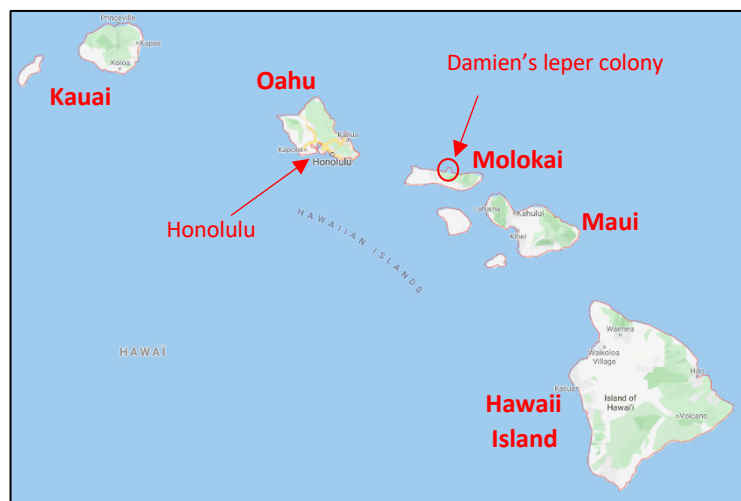


Shortly after Damien was selected as the first representative in the Washington gallery in 1965, Hawaiian King Kamehamea I was chosen as second representative, from a shortlist with three other native Hawaiian candidates, including a prince and a princess. All of these candidates had contributed politically, linguistically or through charity to Hawaiian autonomy, identity and cultural survival. To our knowledge, Lili'uokalani did not make the shortlist.

The statue of Kamehamea I in Washington is a copy of the statue that stands in front of the courthouse in Honolulu.



Kamehamea I was the first king of Hawaii, this one that united the kingdom of Hawaii. For hundreds of years, the islands had each been under their local tribal control, with regular skirmishes and raids among themselves but without the enduring predominance of one tribe. In 1795, 16 years after the discovery of Hawaii by James Cook, Kamehamea (then tribal chief of the southern Big Island called Hawaii) did what his ancestors could not ... now with the help of the English and their modern weapons; until then, the Hawaiians were evolutionary in the Stone Age, with weapons of wood and stone.



The English helped Kamehamea violently conquer all other islands, with some very heavy battles being fought on Maui and Oahu. After Kamehamea's victory, he became the first king to lead the entire archipelago, now in its entirety called Hawaii. Of course, he was loyal to the English: both he and his successors pursued a policy of hospitality for foreigners to trade and for local people to farm. In the following decades, this gave rise to successive waves of immigrations of English, Americans, Portuguese, Chinese and Japanese.

However, an unintentional consequence of this immigration was that his Hawaiian people became exposed to catastrophic epidemics (cholera, flu, measles, smallpox, ...) that rapidly reduced the indigenous population: from about 300,000 on arrival of James Cook to 50,000 in 1860, only 80 years later !

Once king, Kamehamea I, like many other Hawaiian royals and nobles after him, has made efforts to stop the decline of his people and preserve their autonomy, culture, and identity as much as possible. His successors usually named themselves after him : 'Kamehamea II, III, IV, V': just as the name 'Caesar' became a species name for his successors meaning "emperor." The national holiday 11 June is called 'Kamehamea Day', as much as 'King's Day' but directly referring to the name of their first king.

Anyway, Kamehamea I's most important legacy is undoubtedly the unification of the archipelago itself, which avoided that it would be divided between the imperialist powers of the time (England, France, Spain, the USA) with probably worse consequences for native Hawaiians in the long run. He is therefore an understandable choice as a symbol of Hawaiian popular identity.

### The history of Queen Lili'uokalani



Next to the parliament in Honolulu, at the opposite side of Damien's statue, stands the statue of the only and last Hawaiian queen Lili'uokalani, to which the Congressman Ocasio-Cortez also refers as a desirable alternative to Damien. The statue was unveiled in 1962, during the parliament discussion about the choice of the two statues for Washington.

At the time of Damien she was still princess, sister of the then King Kalakaua. She visited Father Damien on Molokai in 1881, to hand him the title 'Knight Commander of the Royal Order of Kalakaua' for his efforts in the leper colony.

Damien, who had been in the leper colony for 8 years, had organised a choir of the lepers for her visit. Lili'uokalani was moved to tears, so much that her speech had to be given by the minister who accompanied her. She was personally guided around the leper colony by Damien during the whole day. On her return, she actively contributed to the international public

knowledge about Damien's work outside the Hawaiian region, resulting in many donations to Damien from Anglo-Saxon (Protestant) countries.

Being a woman of strong will, her brief reign as queen from 1891 to 1895 was marked by a power struggle with the government, her failed attempt to change the constitution in favor of native Hawaiians, and a coup by the sugar planters with her impeachment as a result. When a delegation from the US Congress declared the coup illegal and proposed to re-install her in the position of queen on the condition that she grant amnesty to the coup plotters, she made the tactical mistake of refusing that amnesty (under the current constitution she was not authorized to do so). That was the immediate reason for the establishment of a republic, followed shortly thereafter by the annexation of Hawaii by the USA... A political miscalculation with tragic consequences.

For her efforts to support native Hawaiians, Lili'uokalani remained a beloved personality in Hawaii. She is also known for her artistry and for her charitable works for Hawaiian orphans; and for her book on the history of Hawaii, which she wrote after her impeachment.

## Kamiano, hero of the Hawaiian people

With his achievement in the leper colony on Molokai, Damien has gained great international fame, which certainly played a part in his selection as the first representative of the state of Hawaii in the US Capitol's Statuary Hall in Washington. But does he also have a close relationship with the Hawaiian people like the other indigenous candidates for the gallery of honour, and is that bond still present today?

The history of Damien is of course linked to the problem of leprosy in Hawaii. The current Covid-19 crisis makes it easier for us to understand what happened when leprosy began to strike in Hawaii from 1850 (only 60 years after Kamehamea I unification of Hawaii).

The disease was known in Asia and Europe including its incurability and fatality, but it was known little about how it spread. Where Covid-19 has an incubation time of 2 weeks, the one of leprosy is several years! To make matters worse, it was again mainly the native Hawaiians who were affected, making it seem that it was an inherited disease. Some even linked it to venereal diseases – in short, there was total confusion and dismay.

Leprosy was clearly an imported disease, but because it mainly affected the indigenous population, they were founded with all kinds of conspiracy theories, including that the vaccinations against smallpox by white doctors were in fact intended to cause leprosy; the specially established Health Council was called the 'Death Council' by the Hawaiians...

15 years after the first case of leprosy infection, the problem had escalated and became hopeless : after the slaughter caused by cholera, measles and smallpox, the Hawaiian population was finally dying out of leprosy. The Hawaiian Government had no choice but to take drastic measures: in 1865, a

mandatory definitive quarantine – effective banishment – of the infected individuals was introduced. For that purpose the northern peninsula of the island of Molokai was chosen. This peninsula is surrounded by rough seas and by high steep cliffs, making it a 'natural prison'. That sounds extremely negative but the intention was instead positive: this peninsula was a



fertile agricultural area before, and there was a conviction that the lepers would spontaneously build a new life here and take over the activities of the evacuated farmers.

However, that turned out to be a total miscalculation.

First, the concept of quarantine for native Hawaiians was possibly even worse than leprosy itself. Their culture was imbued with intense friendship and family ties, and the idea that they would be broken off caused a great deal of resistance : the indigenous communities refused to isolate their leper members, or hid them and resisted their deportation. To enforce the quarantine law, raids had to be carried out, each resulting in a few hundred cases for deportation to Molokai. Often healthy family members went along with their leper loved ones!

Once on site in the leper settlement on Molokai, the inhabitants of course did not have the ambition to do agriculture : perhaps they did not even live until the next harvest. As a result, the community depended on weekly food deliveries by ship; that resulted in robbery of the sick and the dying. Attempts at medical assistance by white doctors were done with 'social distancing', at the expense of their credibility so that abandoned medicines were openly drained; there was no law enforcement, no

administration, corpses were not buried ... : one spoke of *'hell on earth, populated by living dead'*. The news about this, of course, reinforced the resistance of infected Hawaiians to the quarantine... a vicious circle that threatened to fail the entire quarantine project.

Like Covid-19 today, leprosy was the main topic in the Hawaiian press in 1873, which openly questioned whether the 800 Hawaiian outcasts on Molokai were not entitled to religious services by the Christian organizations present on the archipelago.



It is in this context that Damien volunteered to go to Molokai that same year, initially as part of a turn role with three other colleagues. He was 33 years old at the time and a missionary since 9 years in Kohala-Hamakua, a rough area on the 'Big Island' (Hawaii Island). He was well acquainted with Hawaiian culture and spoke fluent in the Hawaiian language. With his perseverance and empathy he had built a strong reputation among the native Hawaiian inhabitants of his region who called him 'Kamiano'. Unlike many of his fellow missionaries, he was physically extraordinarily strong, and from his youth he mastered farming and carpentry – which would be of great help to him in Molokai.

As soon as the news broke that Damien was leaving for the leper settlement on Molokai, his name was on the front page of all Hawaiian newspapers as 'The Christian hero of Molokai'. At the same time, the basis of much later envy and controversy was laid.

The sequel can be read in detail in the many life descriptions that have been made of him: how he had to overcome his horror for the disease, how he understood that 'social distancing' was getting in the way of helping the people in their own culture, how he was the only one who provided the necessary medical care for the many wounds; how he felt that carrying out real burials with wooden coffin and ceremony met a deep need of the inhabitants; how he decisively organized the settlement with moral authority, and how he gradually transformed it into a 'Flemish village' – perhaps according to Tremelo's model – with marriages, marching bands, choirs, horse races and a dynamic association life, in which leprosy patients engaged according to their individual abilities and could feel fully human in society again.

How, against the rules of the mission, he opened up his cemetery to non-Catholics, and blessed second marriages on the grounds that those involved had already been declared dead to the outside world; how he circumvented the confiscation of his financial gifts by his mission superiors by asking his benefactors to send only relief supplies directly to Molokai; how he professionally tested possible leprosy drugs using the placebo method; how he became a leper himself, made this public with the words "We, lepers" and got a ban on leaving the peninsula; how he ignored this ban and went to Honolulu to plead with the convent sisters there to come and care for the girls of his orphanage; how, from his hostile superiors, he had to endure the humiliation of being tested for syphilis; and how he remained unstopably active until his death, after 16 years of full deployment in the child colony.

What legacy has the white man Damien left to the Hawaiian people?

For the overall 8,000 Hawaiian men, women and children exiled to Molokai, mostly natives, Damien's efforts have made the Hawaiian community on Molokai their new and only family that many did not want to leave any more. Despite their terrible illness, there were plenty of moments of happiness, joy, and human dignity.

The historical significance of this for Hawaii is that Damien has caused the desperate resistance of the Hawaiians to the forced quarantine to moderate, which eventually contributed to the success of that policy, reducing the disease and removing for the Hawaiian people the threat of outright extinction at the moment they had given up all hope.

For both the lepers and the Hawaiian people, Damien arrived in their darkest hour; he acted without hesitation, and paid for it with his life, knowing from the beginning that that would be unavoidable. For that reason, Damien is a true Hawaiian among Hawaiians, their existential national hero!





The transfer of Damien's remains to Belgium in 1936 for reburial in Leuven was a very painful matter for the Hawaiians. That has however not stopped them from selecting their hero for a statue in Washington 30 years later. Another thirty years later they obtained that Damien's right hand was transferred again from Leuven to Molokai for burial in his original grave there (see photo); of which a phalange is kept separately in Honolulu cathedral.

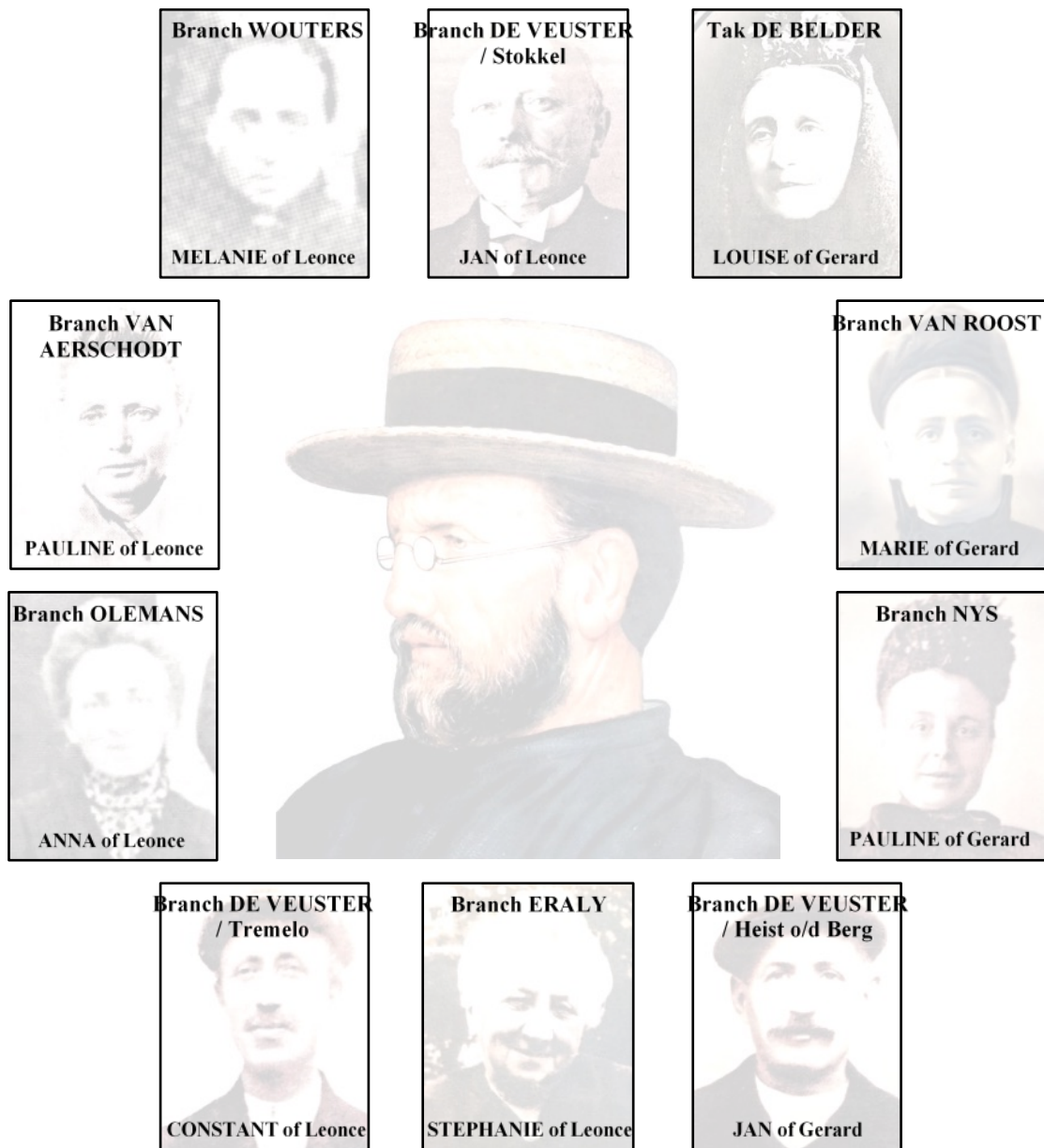
And since the canonization in 2009, they speak explicitly and proudly of 'Saint Damien'.

Every year on April 15<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of his death in 1889, Hawaii celebrates 'Father Damien Day' and then his statue is overhang with the traditional leis (flower wreaths).

Anyone who thinks Damien's memory in Hawaii has been tarnished by time is grossly mistaken !



Age	Year	Data	Event
0 y	1840	January 3d	Birth of Jozef De Veuster in <i>Ninde (Tremelo)</i>
	<b>1846 - 1854</b>		Jozef De Veuster goes to school in <i>Werchter</i>
10 y	1850	March 24th	First communion on Palm Sunday
	<b>1854 - 1859</b>		Jozef De Veuster works 5 years at the fram of his parents
	1854	April 5th	Death of Jozef's oldest sister Eugenie (Mère Alexis at the Ursuline nuns) in Uden, NL
	1857	March	Oldest brother August begins noviciate, with monastery name Pamfiel
	1858	May 15th	Jozef De Veuster enters at boarding school in <i>s'Gravenbrakel</i>
19 y	1859	January 3d	Jozef De Veuster enters at the Order of the Holy Hearts ('Picpus fathers') in <i>Leuven</i> ; monastery name Brother Damien
	<b>1860-61</b>		Damien studies in <i>Paris</i> , takes eternal vow on 7.10.'60
	<b>1861-63</b>		Damien studies theology in <i>Leuven</i> at the Catholic University
23 y	1863	March 23d	Damien's oldest brother, Pamfiel, is ordained a priest
		October 10th	Damien asks permission to take his brother Pamfiel's place to become missionary in Hawaii
		October 15th	Damien obtains permission to become missionary in Hawaii
		October 16th	Damien says goodbye to his mother in Scherpenheuvel
		November 1st	Damien embarks in Bremerhaven on sailing ship 'R.W.WOOD' ; departure on 9th November with five brothers and ten nuns, to the "Sandwich Islands".
24 y	1864	<b>March 19th</b>	Arrival in <i>Honolulu</i> (eiland OAHU)
		May 21st	In the cathedral of <i>Honolulu</i> , Brother Damien is ordained a priest; now called 'Father Damien'
		June	Damien leaves to his first mission post : district <i>Puna</i> (south part of the 'big island' HAWAII)
25	1865	March 19th	Second mission post : Damiaen exchanges with his colleague and goes to district <i>Kohala-Hamakua</i> (north side of big island HAWAII);
			from 1808 : only alleen <i>Kohala</i>
	1866		Start of the quarantine law : exiles of lepers to <i>Kalawao</i> (island MOLOKAI)
	1868	January	Death of Damien's sister zus Constance (40 y)
33 y	1873	May 4th	Gathering of mission in Wailuku (island MAUI). Damien volunteers to go to the lepers colony on MOLOKAI.
		May 10th	Damien goes ashore at the lepers colony at <i>Kalawao</i> (MOLOKAI) (currently : 10th of May = catholic holiday of Saint Damien)
		July 4th	Death of Damien's sister Pauline (mère Alphonse at the Ursuline nuns) in Uden, NL
		October	Damien speaks his confession standing in a rowing boat (prohibition to leave the lepers colony)
	1874	July 4th	Death of Damien's father Frans De Veuster
38 y	1878		First signs of leprosy
	1881	September	Visit by princess Lil'uokalani to the lepers colony of Kalawao ; Damiaen receives the title of honor "Knight Commander of the Royal Order of Kalakaua"
44 y	1884		Leprosy officially determined on Damien
			Visit of the writer/journalist Charles Warren Stoddard, who would later in 1892 write the first book about Damien 'The lepers of Hawaii' and later in 1901 'Father Damien, the Martyr of Molokai'
	1886	August 6th	Death of Damien's mother Catharina Wouters
	1888	November 14th	Arrivel of the Fransiscan Sisters after long insistence by Damien
		December	Damien repairs himself hurricane damage at his church despite worsening health situation
49 y	1889	<b>April 15th</b>	Death of Father Damien in <i>Kalawao</i>
	1890	February 25th	International publication of letter 'Father Damien' by Robert Louis Stevenson defending Damien's legacy
	1936	January 27th	Excavation of remains of Father Damien ; solemn transfer to Honolulu, next to San Fransisco and via San Cristobal (Panama) to Antwerp Antwerpen.
		<b>May 3d</b>	Arrival of Father Damien's remains in <i>Antwerp</i> , and solemn transfer in procession to <i>Leuven</i> ; burial in the chapel of Saint Anthony
	1956		Opening of Father Damien's grave for identification, as preparation in the process for beatification
	1960	December	Motion by the 4 Hawaiian counties designating Father Damien for one of the two statues of Hawaii in the US Capitol in Washington
	1965	May 1965	Hawaiian parliament selects Damien as Hawaii's first representative for statue in the U.S. Capitol.
	1969	April 15th	Damien's statue (from artist Marisol Escobar) unveiled in the U.S. Capitol National Statuary Hall in Washington
		May 8th	Damien's statue unveiled at Hawaii parliament building in Honolulu
	1977	July 7th	Father Damien declared Pater Damiaan "venerable"
	1989	April 15th	Centennial : grand ceremony in Brussels stadion and in <i>Tremelo</i> with historical 'Damien Procession'; celebration in Molokai with presence of Belgian prince Philip, Belgian US ambassador, bishop of Honolulu, more than 100 'picpus fathers' from worldwide, and all leper patients of Kalauapapa.
	1994	April 15th	Opening of Damien's grave; removal of Damien's right hand for re-burial in Damien's initial grave in <i>Kalawao</i> (Molokai).
		<b>September</b>	<b>Launch of the 'Father Damien family' association</b>
	1995	June 4th	Solemn beatification of Damien in basilic of <i>Koekelberg</i> (Brussels), on Pentecost
		July 22nd	Re-burial of Father Damien's right hand in his initial grave in <i>Kalawao</i> (Molokai)
	2005	December 1st	Damien elected 'Greatest Belgian'
	2009	11 oktober	Canonisation of Damien by pope Benedictus XVI



The Father Damien family includes the descendants of Damien's parents, i.e. of the 10 children of his brothers Leonce and Gerard De Veuster, creating the 10 branches of the family association.

These 10 people all talked about 'Uncle Jef' when they meant Damien. For the many living people of generation 5, these are grandmother or grandfather, respectively.