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The Pure Land of Assisi: Anesaki Masaharu in Italy

Susanna Fessler

Spring, 1908: Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873-1949), a Japanese professor of Comparative Religions, arrives in Italy as a tourist and student. He is traveling alone, but visiting European friends. He will tour selected cities, including Florence, Assisi, and Rome, over the course of three months. At a time when most of his peers were focusing on England, Germany, France, Russia and the United States, largely with a view to competing in global political and philosophical debates and the international marketplace, Anesaki unusually chooses to visit Italy, a country rarely mentioned as a cultural influence on late 19th-century and early 20th-century Japan beyond the tenuous parallel of Meiji modernization to that of Count Camillo Benso di Cavour's Italy. But his choice is not random, and as one reads through the material he produced before, during, and after his travel, the unifying and pertinent themes become apparent. Anesaki's journey to Italy was part of a larger tour of Europe and the United States. He was an up-and-coming scholar of religion and on leave from the Imperial University of Tokyo, where he was the first professor in comparative religions. The trip to Italy was funded by the Albert Kahn Foundation as a part of its international exchange program, *La bourse pour le tour autour du monde*. This program funded scholars to tour outside the borders of their home countries for the purpose of disseminating information about the world upon their return. Anesaki chose to visit Italy with several specific goals in mind: the first was to visit Florence to view the paintings of Fra Angelico (1387-1455). Next he went to Assisi, to trace the steps of St. Francis (c. 1181-1226). Finally, he headed for Rome, where he contemplated the role and structure of the Roman Catholic Church in the spiritual lives of its adherents. As discrete as these goals seem, they were united by Anesaki's world view: that mankind held, at its core, a common spirit; that that spirit found its expression most genuinely through art; that, more than organized religion, the catalysts for bringing that spirit to the common man were charismatic individuals.

The record of his trip took the form of a travelogue, titled *Hanatsumi nikki* 花つみ日記, published in the following year.¹ *Hanatsumi Nikki* is structured as a day-by-day account of Anesaki's travels, much like many traditional *kikōbun*. It does not present a structured academic argument but rather gives us Anesaki's impressions and thoughts in scattered, albeit chronological, order. Yet there are discernible themes: expressions of the religious experience, specifically those of Italy in comparison to Japan, and the place of spirituality in the modern world. The comparison takes the form of the parallels, as he saw them, between St. Francis and the Japanese Pure Land Buddhist saint Hōnen 法然上人 (1133-1212). The second theme centered on Christianity, specifically Catholicism, and the different manifestations of it that Anesaki experienced in Italy. This second theme in particular is presented as a pastiche of information; Anesaki's informants on religion in medieval Italy were not only St. Francis but also the myriad artists—mostly painters—of the 14th century. His informants on modern Italy included the novelists Émile Zola and Antonio Fogazzaro. Nonetheless a uniting thread brings these disparate sources together: the idea that a pure, almost naïve faith was core to the human

¹Anesaki Chōfū 姉崎嘲風. *Hanatsumi nikki* 花つみ日記. (Tokyo: Hakubunkan 博文館, 1909). "Chōfū" was the pen name under which Anesaki published non-expository works.

experience and that although such a faith may suffer vicissitudes it finds expression and lives on even in the modern day.

Anesaki's Context

Anesaki Masaharu is perhaps best known in the west for his seminal work *History of Japanese Religion*, but his academic career spanned much more. He was an active researcher throughout his life, and was also a man of letters, publishing under the *nom de plume* of Chōfū 嘲風. He published in Japanese, English, German, and French. His academic affiliation in Japan was with Tokyo University, and he also taught as a visiting scholar at Harvard. He traveled the world, delivering papers and attending conferences, in his efforts to bring a mutual understanding of human spirituality to followers of all world traditions.

Anesaki was born and raised in an *edokoro* 絵所 household, which meant that his family produced Buddhist artwork, specifically for the Bukkōji School 仏光寺派. Thus from a young age he was exposed to the connection between art and religion and saw the two as inseparable. Later, in *Hanatsumi nikki*, he conjectured that even secular art needed a religious theme, or else it would be absurd and empty.² Indeed, his interest in art focuses on the expression of the artist's faith much more than technique or style. However, as far as religion was concerned, Anesaki confesses in his autobiography to not having had much of a concrete appreciation for doctrine as a child. He did not receive any formal doctrinal education; his religious training, as it were, began by watching his devout grandmother perform her daily devotions, and being told by her that Amida Buddha was pure compassion.³ But by the time he was a young man his interest in philosophy was well developed, and he pursued the study of philosophy and religion at Tokyo Imperial University. His personal religious beliefs migrated over time, and it is difficult to categorically place him in one school or another. At the time that he wrote *Hanatsumi nikki* he was particularly interested in Hōnen, but later his focus moved to Nichiren largely due to the influence of his friend Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871-1902). What emerges clearly is that his shifting focus was due to a deeper feeling of universality in religions. That is to say, he found a connection between sects, and even between very different world traditions, such as Buddhism and Christianity. His efforts as a scholar were largely directed toward bringing disparate traditions together to demonstrate their fundamental nexus as he saw them.

Before arriving in Italy, Anesaki had had considerable experience abroad. As a graduate student of Tokyo University and funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education, he studied in Germany 1900-1902, where he spent time in Kiel, Berlin, Munich, and Leipzig. In a long, meandering journey home from Germany he also visited the Netherlands, London, Paris, and Italy, as well as stopping on the Indian sub-continent before arriving in Japan in June of 1903. In the five years that followed before his next trip to Italy, Anesaki taught at Tokyo University and began his prolific publishing career, producing scholarly articles and books in both English and Japanese. He was well established in intellectual circles, and had published thirteen books and numerous articles in prominent journals such as *Taiyō* 太陽, *Tetsugaku zasshi* 哲学雑誌, *Kokumin no tomo* 国民之友, and *Jidai shichō* 時代思潮. His closest friend had been Takayama Chogyū, the editor of *Taiyō* and one of the most influential cultural critics of the day—indeed,

² See entry for May 22nd in *Hanatsumi nikki*.

³ See Anesaki's autobiography, *Waga shōgai: Anesaki Masaharu sensei no gyōseki* 我が生涯・姉崎正治先生の業績 (Tokyo: Ōzorasha 大空社, 1993), p. 3.

Hanatsumi Nikki is dedicated to the memory of Chogyū, who was never able to travel abroad himself because he contracted tuberculosis on the eve of his scheduled departure for Europe.

Unlike that of his contemporary Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922), who studied in Germany 1884-1888, Anesaki's opinion of Germany and her culture, as well as his opinion of the utility of studying abroad in the West for a Japanese, was not entirely laudatory. In a series of three open letters to Takayama Chogyū which were published in the magazine *Taiyō* in early 1902,⁴ Anesaki equates his experience studying abroad to a “Pandora's box” or a “talisman that mechanizes [his] humanity.” The letter, a stream-of-consciousness invective, is critical of scholars who traveled to Europe and were entirely positive about the experience. For Anesaki, the experience brought a mixture of emotional reactions, not all of which were positive. He is critical of philosophical trends that infected youths in European university classrooms, leaving them under the spell of mad geniuses like Nietzsche. This sparked a reply from Ōgai, who delivered a lecture on March 24 1902 titled “On the Rise and Decline of Western Studies” 洋学の盛衰を論ず, in which he argued for the utility of Western studies. Ōgai accused Anesaki of writing a treatise on the “futility of going to the West” 洋行無用論, and then said that, by extension, Anesaki was arguing for the futility of Western Studies as a whole.⁵

But it would be unfair, and incorrect, to label Anesaki as entirely opposed to Western studies. He continued his comparative studies—and traveled abroad often—throughout his life. On the one hand, as Hirakawa Sukehiro conjectures, Anesaki's somewhat critical and reticent response to his experience in Germany may have been in part the result of cultural fatigue, as is experienced by most students abroad.⁶ On the other hand, some scholars have identified the kernel of Anesaki's dissatisfaction as the particular political events, specifically speeches made by Kaiser Wilhelm II, in the summer of 1900.⁷ Wilhelm was reacting not to the Japanese, but rather the Chinese, and the Boxer Rebellion; the murders in June of over 200 foreigners in Beijing, including the German minister, outraged the Western world. Wilhelm's response in his infamous *Hunnenrede* was to exhort the German troops to “fight against a cunning, courageous, well-armed, and cruel foe. When you are upon him, know this: Spare nobody, make no prisoners. Use your weapons in a manner to make every Chinaman for a thousand years to come forego the wish to as much as look askance at a German.”⁸ Anesaki wrote that he was “indignant”⁹ upon hearing this. He adds that his antagonistic feelings toward Germany stemmed in part from this event. He reports that Chinese, and all other East Asians, were despised and that children threw

⁴ “A Reply to Takayama Chogyū” 高山樗牛に答ふるの書 appeared in Volume 8, Nos. 2 & 3 (February 5 and March 5, 1902 respectively); “To Mr. Takayama” 高山君に贈る appeared in Volume 8, Nos. 3 & 4 (March 5 and April 1, 1902 respectively); “Another Letter for Chogyū” 再び樗牛に與ふる書 appeared in Volume 8, No. 10 (August 5, 1902). All three letters have been reprinted in *Meiji Bungaku Zenshū*, Vol. 40 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1970), pp. 210-241.

⁵ 是れ洋行無用論たるに近く、又一步を進めて言へば、洋学無用論たるに近し。This speech has been reprinted in *Mori Ōgai shū* in *Meiji bungaku zenshū*, Vol. 27 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1965), pp. 382-386. This particular quotation is on page 383.

⁶ Hirakawa Sukehiro 平川祐弘, *Wakon yōsai no keifu: uchi to soto kara no Meiji Nihon* 和魂洋才の系譜・内と外からの明治日本 (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1971), pp. 99-101.

⁷ Hirakawa Sukehiro, *Wakon yōsai no keifu: uchi to soto kara no Meiji Nihon*, pp. 96-107; Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一 & Hidetaka Fukasawa 英隆深澤. *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki* 近代日本における知識人と宗教・姉崎正治の軌跡. (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō shuppan, 2002), pp. 207-9.

⁸ Translated by Wolf von Schierbrand in *The Kaiser's Speeches: Forming a Character Portrait of Emperor William II*. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1903), p. 260.

⁹ 憤慨。See *Waga shōgai: Anesaki Masaharu sensei no gyōseki*, p. 85.

stones at them in the street.¹⁰ Finally, the general disillusionment brought about by the Triple Intervention by Germany, France, and Russia in China in 1895 over the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki brought the “East-West” problem to the forefront of Anesaki’s generation’s mind. Repeated in textbooks so often as to become hackneyed, it is nonetheless important to note that this disappointment, brought on the heels of victory in the Sino-Japanese war, profoundly affected how the Japanese saw their role in the world vis-à-vis Western powers. Anesaki was no exception, and the Kaiser’s response to the Boxer Rebellion only served to reinforce those ideas.

The political tensions between Germany and East Asia made it easy for Anesaki to turn his gaze elsewhere, and for him as a scholar of comparative religions the natural direction was toward religious trends. He was particularly interested in similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, and felt that the parallels between the two religions offered followers in both traditions spiritual considerations that transcended borders. In 1905 he produced “How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist” for the *Hibbert Journal*, in which he writes, “If Christianity is an absolute religion, not in its actual visible condition, but owing to the universality of its Gospel, Buddhism may claim the same as possessing a similarly universal ideal.”¹¹ Although he recognized that both world traditions were so vast as to defy a *comprehensive* comparative study, he felt that individual case studies, such as the comparison of St. Francis and Hōnen, could provide universal ties between peoples. This too may have been his reaction to Wilhelm II, in that, in Anesaki’s view, the German Kaiser saw his role as one of promoting Christianity as the one true, righteous faith, and justified German aggression in part by seeing it as part of the promulgation of Christianity. Anesaki, on the other hand, did not hold that any one tradition was superior to any other—rather, he felt that the human condition was united by a common experience, one that found expression around the world in different forms.

Although Comparative Religions was a new discipline in Japan (and Anesaki was the pioneer of the field), in a global context Anesaki was not alone in his pursuit. While he was studying St. Francis, a number of European philosophers, such as Enrico Bignami, the editor of the philosophical journal *Coenobium*, were likewise studying Buddhism (often with the help of Anesaki, who published in *Coenobium*, but also published in other Western journals, such as *Ost-Asien*, *Le Muséon*, and the *Hibbert Journal*).¹² Titles of his Western-language work at this time include “Der Sagātha Vagga des Samyutta Nikāya und seine chinesischen Versionen” (*Congrès international des Orientalistes*, 1902), “Buddhist & Christian Gospels. Being Gospel Parallels from Pāli Texts” (*Yūhōkwan*, 1905), “Traces of Pāli Texts in a Mahāyana Treatise” (*Le Muséon*, 1906), “The Four Buddhist Āgamas in Chinese” (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 1907), “Some Problems of the Textual History of the Buddhist Scriptures” (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 1907), and “Buddhist Influences upon the Japanese” (*Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religion*, Vol. 1, 1908).

Simultaneously, for his Japanese peers, Anesaki was writing much more prolifically on topics such as “Russians’ Faith and the Future of Russia’s Destiny” ロシヤ人の信仰とロシヤ国運の将来 (*Taiyō* 太陽, 1905), “Buddhism and Nature” 仏教と天然 (*Teiyū rinrikai kōenshū* 丁酉倫理会講演集, 1906), “Buddhism and Dante” 仏教とダンテ (*TōA no hikari* 東亜の光, 1906), “Religion and Character” 宗教と人格 (*Teiyū rinrikai kōenshū* 丁酉倫理会講演集, 1907),

¹⁰ As quoted in *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki*, p. 207.

¹¹ “How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist” in *The Hibbert Journal*, Vol. IV (1905-6).

¹² For a bibliography of Anesaki’s works in Western languages, see *Waga shōgai: Anesaki Masaharu sensei no gyōseki*, pp. 135-146.

and “Man, God, and Persona” 人と神とペルソナ (*Teiyū rinrikai kōenshū*, 1907). Although this is a selective list of his publications, it shows us the many directions of Anesaki’s research at the time, many of which involved the comparison of Japanese and Western traditions on a number of levels and through a number of disciplines, including literature, religion, and political science. There is not one particular “theme” running through his studies. Rather, the content of much of his publications brought general commentary and history to a broad Japanese readership. For example, in “Russians’ Faith and the Future of Russia’s Destiny,” Anesaki gives a brief history of political events in Russia that led up to the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-5. It is a descriptive piece, not a prescriptive piece. Anesaki makes a few conjectures, such as the supposition that the world will turn from practical competition towards gaining spiritual knowledge in the 20th century, but these are general observations that he makes, not calls to action.

One of Anesaki’s main interests at the time was trans-national; in other words, he wanted to bring the human experiences from different traditions together inside the same frame in an effort to argue that there was a common thread, hence articles such as “Buddhist & Christian Gospels. Being Gospel Parallels from Pāli Texts” and “How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist.” This interest heavily informed *Hanatsumi nikki* also, as it is a record of his journey across borders to share knowledge of Japan and to argue that there was a strong similarity between Hōnen and St. Francis.

The opportunity to travel abroad again, effected by the Kahn Foundation funding, presented Anesaki with the means to interact in person further with his Western colleagues. When Anesaki received his fellowship from the Kahn Foundation, he was given free choice of itinerary. The parameters of the fellowship were quite broad:

These young people [chosen to be *boursiers*] will have to spend approximately fifteen months going on a journey around the world. The essential object of their studies will be to obtain information directly, apart from any preconceived notions, about the social living conditions in the various countries, the way in which each government intends to form the public spirit, the means implemented for developing the genius of each nation, and finally the causes which ensure such or such a people, in such or such a particular field, the superiority which they may have.¹³

In other words, *boursiers* were simply obligated to travel and ruminate on cultural and social differences. Although Italy is our main focus here, Anesaki did dutifully visit numerous countries on his *bourse* to fulfill the expectations of the Kahn Foundation. He left Japan in September 1907 and followed an itinerary that took him through New York, France (Paris), Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, and London, returning to Japan in October of 1908.¹⁴

Why did Anesaki choose Italy as a primary destination? Certainly the late 19th century saw many political paradigm shifts across the globe, any one of which would have sufficed as a

¹³As quoted in *Albert Kahn 1860-1940: réalités d’une utopie* (Boulogne: Musée Albert Kahn, 1995), p. 139. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French and Japanese are mine.

¹⁴Anesaki was the first of many prominent Japanese to receive the Kahn fellowship, including Tachi Sakutarō 立作太郎 (1874-1943), Taki Seiichi 瀧精一 (1873-1945), Kano Naoki 狩野直喜 (1868-1974), Takebe Tongo 建部遯吾 (1871-1945), Shidehara Taira 幣原坦 (1873-1953), Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助 (1877-1955), Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美 (1874-1946) and Sugiyama Naojirō 杉山直治郎 (1878-1966). See *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki*, pp. 55-6.

focus topic for Anesaki as a *boursier*. But, as we have seen, Wilhelm II's antagonism toward East Asia made Germany less palatable for Anesaki. Italy, on the other hand, presented Anesaki with a chance to follow, literally and figuratively, in St. Francis' footsteps; in effect, to conduct a religious pilgrimage much like those modern pilgrims continue to undertake today. Add to this the rich collections of 15th-century religious art in the museums and cathedrals of Italy, and we have an enticing destination for Anesaki.

In sum, Anesaki found himself, in the autumn of 1907, with the financial means to travel to the West and further his studies of St. Francis and the Catholic Church, and he was given leave from Tokyo University to do so. His only responsibilities were the vague objectives of the Kahn Foundation as stated above, about which he was asked to write a report at the end of his journey. He was academically primed for the trip by being well read and published in comparative religions, and he had a number of friends spread across the world who were established in their respective national intelligentsia. And, perhaps most importantly, he wanted to pursue the idea that Italy and Japan shared a religious parallel in their pasts, one that might be used to illuminate other similarities between western and Japanese traditions.

Let us now examine the details and developments of Anesaki's foci on this journey.

Hōnen and St. Francis

The beginnings of Anesaki's ideas on Hōnen and St. Francis appeared in his 1908 essay, "Hōnen, the Pietist Saint of Japanese Buddhism." This essay is a short biography of Hōnen with a focus on his compassion and the compassion of Amida. It opens with Anesaki's comparison of Japan and Italy:

The development of religious faith in the thirteenth century exhibits some remarkable parallelisms in Japan and Italy. Just as St. Francis of Assisi marked an epoch-making phase of Christian religion in Europe, so our sage Hōnen is the man representative of the change worked out in Japanese Buddhism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The spread of the teachings of Buddhism during the preceding centuries had inspired the people with aspirations for religious ideals and a demand for a deeper and everlasting faith. But the hierarchic institutions, however glorious and dignified they appeared, gave the people either an elaborate dogmatic system or a superficial and rather materialistic satisfaction of their yearnings. Real faith failed which could give profound repose to their hearts or which could bring them into vivid contact with the transcendental ideals taught. In addition to this, the social disintegrations were just ripe to stir the people's mind to an ardent aspiration for a final consolation and to an eager search for its giver. Japanese Buddhism during the three hundred years from the tenth to the twelfth century was pre-eminently a religion of rituals and mysteries, taught by the hierarchic authorities and professed and practised by the court nobles. The Buddhist institutions which had contributed so much to the centralization of the government, corrupted the nobles and were in turn corrupted by them.¹⁵

¹⁵ "Hōnen, the Pietist Saint of Japanese Buddhism," in *Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religion*, Vol. 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp. 122-23.

When the Fujiwara fell in Japan, he says, “Buddhist orthodoxy lost its sway. The time was now ripe for the development of the aspirations of the people.”¹⁶ Although Anesaki does not explicitly detail the similar changes in the religious landscape of 13th- and 14th-century Italy, he clearly equates them with the changes in Japan. To paraphrase, both Italy and Japan experienced a period in which the established religion (Christianity and Buddhism respectively) became so hierarchical as to push the faithful away from formal church structures. Those faithful were primed to find a new source of “final consolation” and found it in Francis and Hōnen, respectively. Anesaki pursues this idea with another parallel: “The majority of the 237 chapters of [Hōnen’s] principal biography tell single stories... without any chronological order. So these chapters may be brought parallel to the *Fioretti* of St. Francis.”¹⁷

In his Preface to *Buddhist Art In Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*, Anesaki notes that his trips to Italy, particularly the second one, brought back childhood memories of growing up in Kyoto where Buddhist art surrounded him. He says that “thus a high admiration for Buddhist painting has become inseparably connected with a similar feeling for that of the Italian Quattrocentists, just as my devotion to Hōnen...has been linked with my reverent attachment to [St. Francis of Assisi].”¹⁸

How did Anesaki first learn of St. Francis? He does not tell us in *Hanatsumi nikki*, and he certainly began studying Francis before choosing his itinerary in Italy. It is possible that he became interested in studying Francis’ life after reading Émile Zola’s novel *Rome* (about which much more will be said below) in which Francis is described as an “ingenuous lover of poverty” and Zola asks rhetorically, “how such an apostle, so gentle towards both animate and inanimate creation, and so full of ardent charity for the wretched, could have arisen in a country of egotism and enjoyment like Italy, where the love of beauty alone has remained queen.”¹⁹ While in Italy, Anesaki met often with the French historian Paul Sabatier (1858-1928) who was the pre-eminent biographer of St. Francis. Sabatier’s *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (1893) was widely read and translated, and although Anesaki does not tell us in which language he read the work, it seems clear that he did read some version of it before meeting Sabatier. He also had read *I Fioretti*, probably in its English translation (Anesaki was fluent in English, German, French and, of course, Japanese). Sabatier himself guided Anesaki in 1908 through the town of Assisi and its environs, detailing the historical importance of each locale. In retrospect, we know that Anesaki could not have had a more well-informed host, as Sabatier’s biography of Francis is still held in

¹⁶ “Hōnen, the Pietist Saint of Japanese Buddhism,” p. 123.

¹⁷ It would seem that this focus on St. Francis originated with Anesaki. A footnote in the 1923 collection of essays *The Religious and Social Problems of the Orient* states: “The author [Anesaki] called attention to St. Francis, in his *Diaries in Italy* [*Hanatsumi nikki*] (in Japanese, 1908), perhaps for the first time in Japan. Since then, very remarkable has been the number of publications on St. Francis... ‘The Little Flowers,’ [has] been translated more than once. Besides the translations of Sabatier and Jorgensen, several biographies of St. Francis, and St. Clara have appeared. (See *The Religious and Social Problems of the Orient: Four Lectures Given at the University of California under the Auspices of the Earl Foundation, Pacific School of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 63, n. 4. More follows about Sabatier; Johannes Jørgensen (1866-1956) first published his biography of St. Francis in Danish in 1907. Translations in many languages soon followed. The first Japanese translation appeared in 1917 (聖フランシス・ヨハンネス・ヨエルゲンセン[著]; 久保正夫訳. 東京: 新潮社, 1917).

¹⁸ *Buddhist Art In Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals* (New York: Houghlin-Mifflin, 1915), p. viii. Anesaki also dedicated this volume to “the Pious and Beautiful Soul of Saint Francis of Assisi”.

¹⁹ *Rome*, translated by Ernest A. Vizetelly. Reprint by Kessinger Publishing (Whitefish, Montana: 2006), p. 362. This text is also available through Project Gutenberg at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/rome610.txt>.

high esteem today, having been republished with annotations. Anesaki was inspired by Sabatier. After his tour of Assisi, he wrote:

We talked much of Francis as we looked at each place. Hearing all this from Mr. Sabatier, who had dedicated his life to the study of Francis and had practically become a resident of Assisi, I felt as if I had gone back seven hundred years into the past. We really need more people like this who can study Dengyō Daishi or Hōnen, Eshin or Jichin.²⁰ The Buddhist faith in Japan comes from those men. Truly Mr. Sabatier, in following Francis' footsteps and initiating all sorts of philanthropic work in the area, has become an unsurpassable power on this Franciscan hill. (April 25)

Thus we see that Anesaki was relatively well read and informed about the life and deeds of St. Francis, and perhaps he saw a calling for himself in the work of Sabatier—that is, a call to study the Buddhist saints in the same way that Sabatier had studied Francis. Most importantly, he saw Francis as a religious leader who turned his gaze upon the poor in a form of authentic faith, returning Christianity to the common man. This was in contrast, largely, to the Dominicans, but there were other orders too who, in Anesaki's view, had become insular and failed to convey the compassion of Christ in the way that Francis did.

Of course, being a Buddhist and having studied Buddhism, particularly Pure Land Buddhism, Anesaki was very familiar with Hōnen and his history. Not only had he been raised in an *edokoro* household, in the years preceding his second trip to Italy he oversaw the editing and publication of Takayama Chogyū's collected works, a project that deepened his interest in Pure Land Buddhism and Nichirenism. The source that seems to have inspired or influenced him the most, however, was the illustrated scroll of Hōnen's life, *Hōnen shōnin eden* 法然上人絵伝, (also referred to by the edition title of *Chokushū goden* 勅修御伝) a 48-scroll collection still in print today.²¹ Originally imperially commissioned in 1307, over the centuries it has transcended biography to become a religiously inspirational and hagiographic text. Anesaki carried a copy of it with him in Italy, showing it to some of the people he met and occasionally quoting it in his diary. While in Assisi he writes:

After dinner I spoke again with the British guests about painting. Among them I was introduced to a Miss Stoddart²² who had written a biography of Francis, and I spoke a little to her about Hōnen. She had thought that there must have been someone in Japanese history who was like Francis, but she had not been able to discern much from the books she had, and so was very happy to speak with me. I showed her the painting of Hōnen's life (*Hōnen eden*), then we talked again about Western painting and the cause of its corruption after Raphael, about how

²⁰ Jichin is another name for Jien 慈円 (1155-1225), a Tendai priest and poet. Eshin is another name for Genshin 源信 (942-1017).

²¹ It is impossible to know for certain which edition of this work Anesaki carried with him to Italy, and the editions have undoubtedly changed over the centuries. It is interesting to note, however, that as Anesaki was sharing the text with his European friends, it was being translated into English by Harper Havelock Coates and Ryugaku Ishizuka. (See *Honen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching*, trans. H. H. Coates and R. Ishizuka (Kyoto: Chion-in, 1925). In the translators' preface, the authors note that the project began in 1908, and was nominally finished in 1915.)

²² Anna M. Stoddart (1840-1911) published her book *Francis of Assisi* in 1903 (London: Methuen).

Giotto's painting of Francis was not necessarily a true likeness but rather a reflection of people's spirits at that time—it was an interesting and beneficial conversation, after which we parted and went to our respective rooms. (April 26)

I shall address the latter half of this quotation in the next section, but here let us consider the first half: the fact that he carried the biography of Hōnen with him and shared it on multiple occasions with his hosts and acquaintances indicates that Anesaki was enthusiastic about spreading knowledge of Pure Land Buddhism and Hōnen. The shadow of Hōnen followed Anesaki everywhere in Assisi. He mentions Hōnen whenever the opportunity arises; when asked by the wife of Italian philosopher Giuseppe Rensi (1871-1941) for a calligraphic sample, Anesaki quotes a poem by Hōnen;²³ he is reminded of a poem by Hōnen when he thinks of Francis' *Cantico del sole*.²⁴ He brings up Hōnen again later in a dinner conversation with two acquaintances:

After dinner, I spoke with [Ms.] Stoddard and [Mr.] Goad²⁵ about various things, such as the paintings I had seen in the day, the school, and then the conversation turned to Hōnen. I showed them a picture of the *Chokushū goden* and told them of the priest's life and faith, which the two were very happy to hear, and they agreed that there were many similarities between the Buddhist priest and Francis. (April 28th)

The climax, as it were, comes when Anesaki visits Francis' retreat, the Carceri, outside of Assisi. The journey is arduous, but finally he arrives at Francis' cell:

We passed through a doorway that was like a small foxhole and descended. In a cave no bigger than three *tatami* mats, there was a stone bed, on which a wooden pillow lay in a slight depression. This is where it is said that Francis came to sleep. In Japan's *yamabushi* ascetic tradition there is the expression, "sleep in the mountains with a stone for a pillow," but Francis took these austerities for granted and did not consider them a hardship. Francis, who fervently prayed day and night with nothing more than bread and water for nourishment in that rocky cell, has many similarities with Hōnen, who withdrew from society to the Yoshimizu meditation cell and with undivided attention invoked the name of Amida. Seclusion in the mountains by people in the early-modern period is usually directly ridiculed, or dismissed as Hinayana practice, or something that a

²³ Anesaki quotes the first three lines. The complete stanza is 露の身はこゝかしこにてきえぬともこゝろはおなし花のうてなそ "Although my dew-like body will vanish, my heart will remain on a lotus dais." The poem appears in Volume 34 of the *Chokushū goden*.

²⁴ The Hōnen poem is in Volume 30 of *Chokushū goden*. Curiously, it seems that Anesaki mis-remembers it. He quotes it as: 月影のてらさぬくまはなけれどもながむる人の心にぞすむ "Although there is not/ a cranny where it does not shine/ the moon/ resides in the spirit/ of one's gaze"; the poem appears in the *Chokushū goden* as 月かげのいたらぬさとほなけれどもながむる人のところにぞすむ "Although there is not/ a village where it does not shine/ the moon/ resides in the spirit/ of one's gaze". It is also in the *Shoku senzaishū* 続千載集, poem 981.

²⁵ Harold Goad (1878-1956) founded the Laboratorio San Francesco on Via Metastasio for the poor children of Assisi. He later became a published scholar on the Franciscans.

weakling would do, but those who say such things do not know the character of the secluded saint.

Hōnen did not seek the Pure Land because he was weak in Hinayana austerities²⁶ or the difficult practices of enlightenment,²⁷ but rather he knew the difficulty of taking vows based on the strength of others while in the midst of austerities focused on the noble path of one's own power. Hōnen was able to gain the power to ferry sentient beings across the sea of reincarnation to the shore of nirvāna from within a type of Zen reclusive *nenbutsu samadhi* akin to Hinayana practices. Likewise, Francis retreated to this rocky valley cave, prayed to God, and then stored up the intrepid spirit that he gained from this state of meditation and went out into the world to engage in the salvation of the masses. He had a pure heart that had been cleansed in the waters of this valley, and he went into the world to heal the wounds of the injured. He spread the teachings of Christ, rooted in the signs that he had received from God while in this cave, to the people. The strength that came from a life of fortitude and hard struggle was truly nurtured on this stone bed, sleeping upon this wooden pillow. (April 27)

Both men opposed the established versions of their respective religions and offered in its place a fundamental version, one stripped of the pageantry, glory, and exclusivity of the authoritative church. This appealed to Anesaki, especially when he arrived in Rome. Anesaki's main argument is this: that Hōnen and Francis, who were contemporaries, albeit on opposite sides of the globe, brought about similar changes in their religious traditions. Both men achieved a method to save souls, or lead them to paradise. In Hōnen's case, he led the popularization of Pure Land Buddhism in such a charismatic way as to be exiled for his efforts. Hōnen's detractors found his focus on compassion and the lower classes strange and, consequently, suspicious. Francis, too, after a youth of profligacy, forsook his family's wealth and prestige to live in a state of poverty so that he could awaken in his followers a fervent sense of faith and gratitude that would lead to a communitarian sense of oneness with others. Furthermore, both men gained a sort of folk-following, exemplified in the pocket-sized copies of Hōnen's biography (such as Anesaki carried) and the popular, equally hagiographic and widely distributed *I Fioretti* on the life of Francis. To follow Hōnen and Francis is to be anti-establishmentarian, but it is also to be religiously essential.

The final similarity between Pure Land Buddhism and Francis' interpretation of Christianity was their expression of compassion. The diary entry for April 25th describes similarities between Chapter 16 of *I Fioretti* in which Francis preaches to the birds and the Buddhist concept of "Rejoicing in Divine Protection" (*Myōga o yorokobu* 冥加を喜ぶ). Anesaki writes:

The story of Francis preaching to the birds is in chapter sixteen of his biography, the *Fioretti*. One day Francis, along with two disciples, was walking along in the fields and saw many birds, to whom he began to preach. The birds gathered around and listened quietly to his words. That sermon is interesting:

²⁶ *Shōjō no shugyō* 小乗の修行

²⁷ *Shōdō no nangyō* 聖道の難行

My little sisters the birds, ye owe much to God, your Creator, and ye ought to sing his praise at all times and in all places, because he has given you liberty to fly about into all places; and though ye neither spin nor sew, he has given you a twofold and a threefold clothing for yourselves and for your offspring...he feeds you, though ye neither sow nor reap. He has given you fountains and rivers to quench your thirst, mountains and valleys in which to take refuge and trees in which to build your nests; so that your Creator loves you much, having thus favoured you with such bounties. Beware, my little sisters, of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to give praise to God.²⁸

This sermon should be reverently listened to not only by the birds but also by mankind. In Buddhism, the concept of “Rejoicing in Divine Protection” is essentially the same teaching; praising God is like reciting the *nenbutsu* or sitting in Zen meditation. In today’s educational system, the concept of “Divine Protection” is nowhere to be found, and there are many broken or troubled homes that ravish human emotions and know of no “Divine Protection.” One should give proper consideration to this in children’s education, too. Praising God’s virtue or Repaying the Kindness of the Four Virtues are all one and the same with “Knowing Divine Protection.” In order to know Divine Protection, one must first love Nature, feel sorry for one trampled flower, or look at a puppy and think that it, too, could someday become a Buddha. To view a single grain of rice as a bodhisattva would view it, with the awareness that that grain was tied to one’s life, and being thankful for it would also encompass this emotion. If, in this way, one knows Divine Protection in all things, one will see the beauty in human emotions and nature, and one will be able to see the light all around. Francis not only conveyed this teaching well in his sermon to the birds, he also showed this same compassion to all animals, birds and wolves alike.

This sort of universal compassion, one that was extended to all sentient beings, was the antithesis of what Anesaki saw in the corrupt hierarchies of Catholicism and Japanese Buddhism in the medieval period(s). Hōnen and Francis, in their insistence on conveying compassion to the masses, or, as Anesaki terms it, conveying “popular propaganda,” countered this trend.

Art and Religion

Another area of scholarly inquiry that occupied Anesaki on his journey was the nexus between art and religion. Anesaki had been born the son of an *edokoro* 絵所 in the Bukkō Temple in Kyoto, which gave him early exposure to the relationship of art and spirituality. He took this concept across international borders, studying Western religious art, particularly that

²⁸ This is from part 1, chapter 16 of the *Fioretti de San Francesco*. The English translation here is from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Roger Hudleston (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library; Boulder, Colo.: NetLibrary, 1990). The passage that Anesaki omits makes reference to the story of Noah’s Ark, and reads as follows: “Two of all your species he sent into the Ark with Noah that you might not be lost to the world; besides which...” A number of English translations of the *Fioretti* were published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, so it is difficult to determine which one Anesaki had read.

produced immediately after the time of St. Francis. On his first journey to Italy in 1902, in Florence, he writes:

Rafael's "Marriage of the Virgin" did not strike a chord in my heart. Mantegna's "The Lamentation over the Dead Christ" shows, through the wounds and blood of Christ, the remnants of the faith nurtured in the fifteenth century, but the wounds of the flesh and the blood are somehow unrealistically depicted, seemingly in a search for a faith based in a bloodless blood. The only painting that moved me was the scene of Leonardo's Last Supper. (November 2)²⁹

Here we see the beginnings of what would develop into a thesis, or at least an academic focus, on Anesaki's second trip to Italy. In the years leading up to that trip, he read and was influenced by the work of Emil P. Berg, author of *God the Beautiful: An Artist's Creed*, which Anesaki translated into Japanese and published in 1906 as *Bi no Shūkyō 美の宗教*.³⁰ Anesaki felt that beauty aside, art must also express faith in order to be considered of high quality. In "How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist" he writes:

We find painting, especially that of the Quattrocento, remarkable in its depth and vitality. In this respect, the works of the Quattrocentisti appeal to our inner heart incomparably more than the later European art, excellent though this be in execution. There is in them nothing comparable to the gracefulness of a Raphaelian³¹ Madonna, but these earlier artists knew how to paint the deep store of faith or emotion, to attract the beholders and to assimilate their hearts to the inner hearts of the figures depicted. One expects in vain to see the skilful shadings and colourings of modern French painters in Lippi³² or Bellini³³, but their naïve sincerity and sometimes childlike freshness are truly products of piety. I find no necessity of saying more on this subject to the English public, whose taste is now much influenced by Ruskin³⁴ and who are true lovers of Italian art. What I wish to enforce is the wonderful similarity existing between the art of the Quattrocento and our old Buddhist painting. My impressions when I first saw Angelico's³⁵ Madonna in the National Gallery of London, and then in Florence, were simply the feelings I had when I looked at the old paintings of the Tak'ma school. Not only in intention and depth, but in treatment and colouring, they show a striking similarity. They depicted their piety in figures and colours, and have appealed to the heart of the same emotion. Their paintings were not for the sake of amusement or of dilettantism, but for worship. For them art was not a merry thing, but serious as life.³⁶

²⁹ *Ware ya izuko no ki 我れやいづこの記* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1909).

³⁰ *God the Beautiful* was initially published under the initials E.P.B. (London: Philip Wellby, 1901). *Bi no Shūkyō* included supplemental essays by Anesaki in addition to the translations of Berg's essays (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1906).

³¹ Raphael's years are 1483-1520.

³² Filippino Lippi (ca. 1459-1504).

³³ Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1426-1516).

³⁴ John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a British critic of the arts, and also an artist himself.

³⁵ Fra Angelico (c. 1395-1455)

³⁶ "How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist" in *The Hibbert Journal*, Vol. IV (1905-6).

Here Anesaki equates the painters of the Quattrocento with those of the Takuma school 詫間派, ostensibly because of their “treatment and coloring.” And, when he describes paintings in Italy, he similarly focuses on the use of color. However, upon close reading one finds that it is not the color or figures of the paintings which impress Anesaki the most—it is the artists’ ability to express faith. The Takuma school (late 12th to late 14th century) specialized in Buddhist icons, and its painters were also Buddhist priests. It is associated with Pure Land Buddhism, particularly the expression of Amida’s compassion. Here Anesaki may be thinking not only of the Takuma school, but also of the monk Genshin 源信 (942-1017, aka Eshin Sōzu 恵心僧都), whose depiction of Amida’s paradise appears in his *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (“Essentials of Rebirth”). In his 1915 book *Buddhist Art In Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*, Anesaki comments that the “two most precious specimens” that express Amida’s compassion are the door panels by Takuma Tamenari located in the Phoenix Hall of the Byōdō-in and two triptychs attributed to Eshin. Of the latter, he says:

In the verbal delineation of those visionary scenes [of Amida] his talent may be compared with that of Dante; but he was, in addition, a great master of painting, so rich in colors, quiet in tone, free in composition and soaring in conception, that *he may be called the Fra Angelico of Japan* [emphasis mine].³⁷

Thus it would seem that, perhaps more than color, faith was central to Anesaki’s aesthetic vision. He associated Fra Angelico with Eshin and the Takuma school because all were concerned with the artistic representation of spirituality, most specifically the compassion expressed by Angelico in his depictions of the Virgin and by the Takuma painters in their depictions of Amida.

When Anesaki first arrived in Italy in 1908, he visited a number of churches and galleries, viewing the art of Francesco Francia (1450-1517), Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535), Filippino Lippi, Guido Reni (1574-1642), Pietro Perugino (1446-1524), and Giotto di Bondone (1276-1337). The variety of paintings seems to have overwhelmed him, and upon his arrival in Florence he made a resolution:

After dinner I read a book about Giotto, and also a chapter in the life of St. Francis, plus, in preparation for tomorrow, I took a look at a book about San Marco. Lost in thought about these subjects, my heart could not but be taken over by the beautiful art of the Renaissance in this city of flowers, the hometown of poetry, and the center of the Renaissance. I resolved then and there that, as I went through Assisi and to Rome, I had to devote myself to St. Francis, Giotto, and Fra Angelico. I would not turn my eye toward Raphael or any other such painter, but rather would concentrate on the two saints of painting. Coming to Florence and not seeing Raphael was like refusing to eat at a feast, but resolutely I would refuse to eat. The Renaissance feast was a delicacy of the nether world. No matter how much Raphael painted the Virgin Mary, those paintings were still objects of this world. And, to taste the Buddha’s excellent teachings, I had to fast in the nether world. Giotto’s faith and the rapture in Fra Angelico’s paintings give us a taste of heavenly immortality. Those and those alone were the means of religious

³⁷ *Buddhist Art In Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals*, pp. 27-28.

austerities. Thus I was resolved. No matter what I saw, and no matter what I myself suffered, I would not look at Renaissance art with the exception of the works of Lippi and Masaccio³⁸ (who produced works like Angelico), and also the Brancacci Chapel. With this revelation I decided that from tomorrow on I would not sightsee but rather be a pilgrim. The two hours I spent at dusk today provided a lesson for which I was truly grateful.

Through these passages, we see Anesaki developing a distinct objective in his gaze and taking on the role of a pilgrim, not a lover or critic of art. Renaissance art to him was beautiful but earthly. Pre-Renaissance art, although it had its crude elements, provided the sort of spiritual expression and solace that he sought. Moreover, the contemporary artistic developments in Japan weighed in the back of his mind. Later, in his book *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan*, he would note that the art of the 13th and 14th centuries in Japan is dominated by scrolls of the Buddhist saints' lives, and that those scrolls, in contrast with the opulence produced during the Heian period, "are interesting as showing the historical transition from a time of luxury and dilettantism to an age of stirring movement and of intense religious feeling."³⁹

In his descriptions of painting after the Florentine revolution, he praises the expression of faith to the exclusion of all other artistic characteristics. What he wants from art is the visual concretization of the sort of dedication and faith that St. Francis had. Even his choice of subjects—that is, the subjects of the paintings he chooses to mention—centers on either Francis, or scenes from the life of Christ, to the exclusion of events in Christian history during the thousand years between Christ and Francis. What they have in common is an elemental, authentic faith, much like what Anesaki was searching for in Rome.

The Roman Catholic Church, Fogazzaro, and Zola

After his idyll in Assisi Anesaki moved on to Rome. In *Hanatsumi nikki* he becomes melancholy and disappointed even before he enters the city. His difficulties upon arrival foreshadow the negative turn his opinion takes in the next days' entries. He writes, "I left Assisi and came to Rome. It gave me an unpleasant feeling to leave a quiet old-fashioned town in the mountains and come to a raucous and chaotic city." The bad portents are many: he has difficulty finding lodging; the trams are so crowded he is forced to walk to St. Peter's, where he says, "I had been disappointed in the façade of this church before, and this time, having just seen the ancient interior of the church in Assisi, I found it absolutely uninteresting"; it is "vulgar" and, he scoffs, "the country bumpkin pilgrims may be surprised by it, but anyone with eyes can see that it is awful." At his inn, he has no one to talk to and he feels lonely. Rome is depicted as hostile and aesthetically displeasing, and that image is later applied to the Vatican. It is a sudden shift of voice.

As mentioned earlier, among Anesaki's informants on spirituality in modern Italy were French novelist Émile Zola (1840-1902) and the Italian novelist Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911)—specifically Zola's novel *Rome* (1896) and Fogazzaro's novel *The Saint* (1905). Anesaki mentions both of them by name in *Hanatsumi nikki*. Their novels both criticize the Roman Catholic Church, and argue for a return to a compassion-based and follower-focused form of

³⁸ Masaccio's years are 1401-ca. 1427.

³⁹ *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1973; first published by Marshall Jones Company, Boston: 1932) p. 81.

religion as opposed to a church with a strong hierarchy and rigid structures that alienate the common man. Of course, in Assisi Anesaki had meditated long on the compassion of Francis and how it echoed that of Hōnen; now that idea followed him from Assisi to Rome, where he considered the nature of the “Prisoner of the Vatican” (as Pius IX called himself, and then Leo XIII and St. Pius X followed suit). As he saw it, Christianity (Catholicism) suffered from a baroque bureaucracy and had pushed the pope out of reach:

The sun shone so strongly on the world, but the Pope was shut up in the Vatican on the hill, never setting foot outside of this little walled fortress. It really is incredible that he is heir to Christ, who walked across the hot fields of Judea to save mankind. That the Pope has come to strictly protect this walled city is the product of a very narrow world-view, one that derived from the fact that in the Middle Ages Rome was, more than a political entity, a territory of the Vatican. After the unification of Italy the royal family made Rome a municipality, and chased the Pope from the palace on the Quirinal hill to the Vatican. Consequently, all territory outside the Vatican was occupied by the Pope’s enemies, and he was not allowed to set foot in his enemies’ territory. It really is incredible that this stubbornness born of a narrow point of view persists, despite the fact that the territory of the heir of Christ should not be some tiny territory in Rome but rather the territory of spirits throughout the wide world. Fogazzaro, in his novel, recommended that the Pope should be kind and be in contact with the people, but the current government did not accept this and banned his book. When I saw that the sun shone on St. Peter’s and the Vatican in the same way as it shone on all other places, this thought became all the more dominant.

Although he claims he will save the world, shut up in the Vatican

He cannot take one step outside

世を救ふあとにはつげどもヴチカノにこもる召うど足ふみも出ず

yo o sukuu / ato wa tsugedomo / vichikano ni

komoru meshūdo / ashi fumi mo izu

The saying that the Pope is the “prisoner of the Vatican” was not some severe criticism but rather the words of the previous Pope, Pius IX. In recent times many pilgrims from various countries have gathered here, and every day the Pope holds audience for them, but, although he can hold audience with them, at the same time he himself cannot leave. One cannot but feel pity when one looks at the Vatican. (May 4)

Anesaki’s criticism of the Pope was not political in nature, but rather spiritual. He sees the Pope’s refusal to cede to the Italian monarchy as simple “stubbornness” that loses sight of the faithful in the church. Elsewhere, Anesaki comments that when the pope holds audience, he cannot possibly minister to individuals, and thus he is a failure as a religious leader. The comment about Fogazzaro is telling: Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911) was an Italian novelist and poet who published his novel *Il Santo* (The Saint) in 1905. The book was banned shortly thereafter by the Roman Catholic church. The novel is about a young man who preaches to the common man in Rome, challenges both the Catholic church and the Italian government, and

charges the former with four faults: falsehood, clerical domination, greed, and immobility. As Fogazzaro's biographer, Robert A. Hall Jr., notes, "[The hero], as Fogazzaro portrays him, combines the asceticism and self-immolation of a mediaeval mystic with the love of his fellow-men manifested by, say, Saint Francis of Assisi, and the direct outspokenness of a Saint Catherine of Siena or a Savonarola."⁴⁰ The hero, Benedetto, is devout yet, because he is critical of the church, he is denied affiliation. Much of Benedetto's story mirrors Francis' life, including his devoted female follower, Jeanne, who is much like Saint Clare. Anesaki writes that "I cannot help but be sympathetic with Fogazzaro and others who went to great pains to bring peace between the Pope and the government." (May 7) Moreover, it is not difficult to see similarities between the fictional Benedetto and the real Hōnen; they were both men who were ostracized by the religious authorities of their time.

Zola's novel, *Rome*, from the *Three Cities Trilogy*, appeared in 1896, and Anesaki read it shortly thereafter.⁴¹ In *Rome*, the protagonist, Pierre Froment, travels to Rome in an effort to argue against the Papal condemnation of his book, *New Rome*. Froment is a young, naïve priest who advocates in his book a return to the "primitive church," by which Zola means a rejection of the politics and elite structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Pierre thinks to himself:

That the popes in a spirit of haughty protest should for five and twenty years have voluntarily shut themselves up in their palace was already regrettable; but this imprisonment of centuries within the past, within the grooves of tradition, was far more serious and dangerous. It was all Catholicism which was thus imprisoned, whose dogmas and sacerdotal organization were obstinately immobilized. Perhaps, in spite of its apparent flexibility, Catholicism was really unable to yield in anything, under peril of being swept away, and therein lay both its weakness and its strength.⁴²

Zola's words seem to have informed Anesaki's. The Catholic church had imprisoned itself over the centuries through stiff, "immobilized" dogma; the "hierarchic institutions [of Buddhism in Japan] ...gave the people...an elaborate dogmatic system." The similarities between Zola's and Anesaki's opinions here and elsewhere are unmistakable. Reading *Rome* and *Hanatsumi nikki* back to back reveals multiple passages that echo the same impressions. Here is Zola describing a beatification in *Rome*:

Noon had struck. There was a false alert, a burst of emotion, which swept in like a wave from the other halls. But it was merely the ushers opening a passage for the *cortège*. Then, all at once, acclamations arose in the first hall, gathered volume, and drew nearer. This time it was the *cortège* itself. First came a detachment of the Swiss Guard in undress, headed by a sergeant; then a party of chair-bearers in red; and next the domestic prelates, including the four *Camerieri segreti Partecipanti*. And finally, between two rows of Noble Guards, in semi-gala uniforms, walked the Holy Father, alone, smiling a pale smile, and slowly blessing the pilgrims on either hand. In his wake the clamour which had risen in

⁴⁰Robert A. Hall Jr., *Antonio Fogazzaro*, Boston, Mass: Twayne Publishers, 1978, p. 81.

⁴¹ He does not mention reading it explicitly in *Hanatsumi nikki*, but he does do so in his article "Zora no *Pari* to Fogazzaro no *Seija to*" *ゾラのパリとフォガツァロの聖者と* (*Taiyō*, Sept. 1907).

⁴² *Rome*, pp. 208-209.

the other apartments swept into the Hall of Beatifications with the violence of delirious love; and, under his slender, white, benedictive hand, all those distracted creatures fell upon both knees, nought remaining but the prostration of a devout multitude, overwhelmed, as it were, by the apparition of its god.⁴³

And here is Anesaki attending a beatification ceremony on May 17th, 1908:

Presently five o'clock drew near. Groups of ambassadors to the Vatican from every country appeared and took their seats. The cardinals appeared by ones and twos, wearing fire-red robes and hats, and they kneeled in prayer before solemnly taking their red seats. The electric lights were turned on one by one and illuminated the whole hall and the altar. Even the painting of the Beata (*is it feminine plural?*), deep in its alcove and hard to see, was brightly lit. Each time a light came on, the sound of voices resounded through the hall. Then the people near the entrance began to lean to one side. I realized that to their left they could just get a glimpse of the Pope above the crowd. The graceful procession slowly advanced deeper into the hall. The Pope was seated on a chair on a high palanquin, and he lightly raised his right hand, giving the crowd of people his benediction (giving his blessing), as he drew close to them. As the group came closer, I could see the Pope's old visage, the red robes of the palanquin bearers, the gold uniforms of the guards on either side of them, the monks dressed in black habits to the front and rear, and finally a line of *protonotarii* (secretaries) dressed in crimson. The people in the crowd bowed their heads and kneeled, all of them making the sign of the cross on their breasts as they paid homage to the Pope.

Certainly Anesaki is reporting truthfully from his own observations and not fabricating his description based on Zola's words (if nothing else, in Zola's case Leo XIII is walking, whereas in Anesaki's case Pius X is carried on a palanquin), but Zola's focus influences Anesaki. The attention to sound, color, the procession, and the Pope's benediction informs both passages. Anesaki had read Zola's *Rome* before entering the city, and it provided him with a starting point to interpret what he saw. He did not always agree with Zola, as was the case after the beatification ceremony. Zola writes about the large sums of money reaped by the Vatican through such ceremony, and criticizes the church for it. Anesaki writes:

Zola wrote that this ceremony was actually a horrid ceremony and that it was just a lot of superstition, but on the other hand one cannot but sympathize with the feelings of happiness that the solemn faithful have in the joy at this ceremony. Today's scholars view the ceremonies at the main hall of Honganji as taboo. Similarly, collecting charity and decoration are also taboo. But it is not simply taboo; one cannot but sympathize with the feelings of respect that the faithful in Kaga had for the Buddha when he attained enlightenment.⁴⁴ Although Zola wrote that ceremonies such as the one that was held today were pernicious

⁴³ *Rome*, p. 220.

⁴⁴ It appears that Anesaki is contrasting the deep faith of the Shinshū believers in Kaga who "took refuge" in the leader of their religion (just like Catholics took refuge in and expressed adoration for the Pope), with the way that scholars view such things as a rather embarrassing aspect of religion.

political maneuvering to get money out of pure avarice, there is an element of untruth in what he wrote. Moreover, even if the ceremony *is* done to collect money, at the same time it also plays an important role in educating and expressing compassion to those who have dedicated themselves to the religion. It is a way of praising those who set the example of doing deeds through faith. It is a commendable act in the world of man that gives a ceremonial form to the idea that god blesses those below from on high. This ceremony, in which the spirit of a nun is praised through the reverence of the Pope is the same as the Japanese emperor making an imperial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. (May 17th)

In other words, Anesaki says that the organized church had become distant from its true goal or calling, but it retained legitimacy in its ministering and symbolism. Zola, on the other hand, dismissed the church as so corrupt as to be ineffectual and meaningless in modern society.

In numerous other passages of *Hanatsumi nikki* we see Zola's influence, such as when Anesaki climbs the dome of the Vatican and looks down on the aisles and transepts beneath, or when he looks out over the Vatican city, and sees the residences of the workmen and the Swiss Guards, or when he wanders through the grounds of the Vatican and comes upon the miniature Grotto of Notre Dame of Lourdes. Certainly Anesaki depends on Zola for much of his aesthetic response to the landscape of Rome.

Finally, Anesaki borrows from Zola the theme of eternal change and evanescence. As he walks through Rome, vicariously experiencing the repetition of human folly, his words echo Zola's. When he sees the ruins, he recounts how divers ruling powers had come and gone on Roman soil, and that, ultimately, the vanity of human existence is folly. This is a rather stock Buddhist observation, one we find in many works of classical Japanese literature, such as *Heike monogatari*. But Anesaki is doing more than applying Japanese Buddhist concepts to the Italian landscape; he is also alluding to Zola. Let us look at one example. Here is Zola's description of the Roman ruins:

Then another surprise for Pierre was the Forum, starting from the Capitol and stretching out below the Palatine: a narrow square, close pressed by the neighbouring hills, a hollow where Rome in growing had been compelled to rear edifice close to edifice till all stifled for lack of breathing space. It was necessary to dig very deep – some fifty feet – to find the venerable republican soil, and now all you see is a long, clean, livid trench, cleared of ivy and bramble, where the fragments of paving, the bases of columns, and the piles of foundations appear like bits of bone. Level with the ground the Basilica Julia, entirely mapped out, looks like an architect's ground plan. On that side the arch of Septimius Severus alone rears itself aloft, virtually intact, whilst of the temple of Vespasian only a few isolated columns remain still standing, as if by miracle, amidst the general downfall, soaring with a proud elegance, with sovereign audacity of equilibrium, so slender and so gilded, into the blue heavens.⁴⁵

And here is Anesaki touring the Roman ruins on May 5th:

⁴⁵ *Rome*, p. 154.

I went down the stairs to the ruins of the Foro Romano and stood among the stone columns. This was the place where, in the glory days of Rome, the emperor had had the seat of his government. The pillars of the palaces of the gods were lined up, their tiles vying against one another, and amongst it all were meeting-places and forums of all sorts. This, over the course of two thousand years, up until the fifteen or sixteen hundreds, eventually deteriorated, was burnt, and the remaining pillars and stone stairs were buried for eternity. What was dug out is these ruins. Emperor Severus' triumphal arch is still standing, and next to it the temple of the god of war [sic], Saturn, remains as six or seven pillars. Otherwise, there are just pillars, walls, a random stone here and there, and splendid statuary, broken into pieces, is common.

The skies were clear, but the wind kicked up the dust in this weather, and the stones took on the color of the dust to make it a solidly dead landscape. Nonetheless, here and there flowers the color of violets blossomed on the stone walls and on the pillars. There were also some charming light purple flowers on a creeping plant, the name of which I do not know, that bloomed in between the rocks, as well as many other kinds of plants that blossomed in the cracks between the stones. This was the place where, in Rome's heyday, the senators, politicians, and priests would gather and the soldiers would come decked out in different types of armor and line up between the great halls. The spring of the Roman Empire may never come again, but the small wild flowers bloom every spring, as they have since time immemorial.

It has lost its charm; thousands of flowers bloom as if to ridicule
the acts of man, amongst the palace ruins
色あせし宮居の跡に人のわざあざけらんとてや千々の花さく
iro aseshi / miyai no ato ni / hito no waza /
azakerantoteya / chiji no hana saku

Both men are struck by the literal and figurative layers of history before them. The imagery here runs in parallels: Zola draws a picture of buildings tightly packed together, Anesaki gives us pillars that vie with each other; Zola notes that all that remains are trenches cleared of ivy and bramble, Anesaki happens upon the scene after the ground cover has grown back, but both men recognize that the remains of a great civilization lie buried deep below; the arch of Septimius Severus is noted by both as a lone remaining testament to the greatness of the Empire. Neither man admired Rome in the end, but it seems that Anesaki, like Fogazzaro, felt that redemption was possible if only there could be a revival of true, meek, penitent faith. This faith is represented by the flowers that clamor amidst the ruins, whereas in Zola's vision what strikes him about the scene are the isolated columns which represent not a promise of new life but rather simply the grandeur of the past.

All of this brings us back to the central theme of *Hanatsumi nikki*, which is the spiritual transition Anesaki sees in Italy (and, by extension, Christendom) and its parallel in Japan. As Japan passed from an age of "luxury and dilettantism" into an age of spiritual revival and focus in the 12th and 13th centuries, Italy experienced a similar revival in St. Francis' time. Furthermore, the Italy that Anesaki experienced in the early 20th century seemed in terms of

religious trends to be mirroring the events of Francis' time. To wit, the Catholic church exerted a religious dominance that Anesaki admired, but one that he also feared lacked the sort of individual appeal that a charismatic leader, such as Francis, could have. As Zola and Fogazzaro point out in their novels, and as Anesaki sees in the life story of St. Francis and the paintings of Fra Angelico, true faith is not necessarily the domain of the church—rather, it comes from the masses, in a groundswell that respects the authority of the church but holds individual faith above Papal bulls. Anesaki's implicit vision of an Italy united by sincere faith never came to pass, but his journey to Italy was nonetheless momentous. Twenty years later he recollected, "Painfully, I met head on the problems of fate and the nature of modern civilization when I was traveling the world as a Kahn researcher... those problems concerned not only the changes of human civilization but also how mankind could motivate religious faith and ideals, how we could devote ourselves to the interrelationship between religion and culture..."⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ As quoted in *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki*, p. 57.