

NOTES

A Reply to Mr. Franck's Review

When Mr. Franck's review* of Bankei's *The Unborn* and Deshimaru Rōshi's *Questions to a Zen Master* came to hand I read it a little unhappily, and with actual irritation at one or two points, and then put it aside on the grounds that it seemed to have a partisan bias which made it undeserving of serious consideration, that comparisons are not only odious but impossible, that people had preferences and must be allowed them, and that the matter was not so very important.

The publishers of *Questions to a Zen Master* felt otherwise, however, and I could see that they might well do so because Mr. Franck seemed to be trying to say that they had made an embarrassing, infantile boob in choosing to print what he called an "odd" book on Zen. They asked me to find someone to write a reply, and I said I would.

But who is "qualified" to reply to such a review? Mr. Franck is making, and not always implicitly, a comparison between Bankei and Deshimaru Rōshi, and the comparison is unfavourable to the latter. In view of their dates, I could think of no one who could have firsthand knowledge, as it were, of both men and be in a position to offer what might be more useful comments about them.

Mr. Franck knew that Deshimaru Rōshi was speaking a foreign language which he did not in any sense master and that what he said was further distorted by interpreters and scribes; but in his review he forgets that and makes a very slighting and uncalled-for remark about him "lacking the self-criticism to refrain from doing what he was obviously not gifted for" (i.e., writing). Of that, not having read Deshimaru in Japanese, he can be no judge.

It is true that Deshimaru used cumbersome terms from Western philosophy, such as noumenon; they drove us crazy too! But that's what he wanted to see written down. And my conviction—and Dutton's, I think—is that getting Deshimaru's teaching across is worth a few grimaces of esthetic distaste. Response from other reviewers and readers has borne it out.

*See *Eastern Buddhist* 18, 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 138-142.

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Something must have gone very wrong with Mr. Franck's reading, or with our presentation, of Deshimaru Rōshi, if he could imagine he might have been reminded, upon turning up to practice, that according to tradition a person must be rejected three times before being admitted! Deshimaru admitted the whole world, certainly and easily. On the other hand, he deflated pretentiousness and overfastidiousness just as certainly and just as easily—and, oh wonder, with no loss of face to the person deflated!

Or perhaps there is nothing wrong with Mr. Franck's reading, if what he really wants is what he said he would do upon arriving at Bankei's doorstep: "I would join the crowd and listen." Those of us who became Deshimaru Rōshi's disciples had to do a lot more than listen, and we wanted to. We waited to answer the questions Sensei was always asking, "How must we live our life here and now? How must we be, act, in this world?"

As for the long list of quotations which Mr. Franck strings together to show how distressing, absurd, awkward, inflated, comical, oversimplified, etc., Deshimaru's views were, I got the impression, rereading the review just now, that perhaps his irony backfires a little—because when you come right down to it, whether beneath the "wabi of sparse eloquence" to which Mr. Franck is so partial or beneath the messy, lopsided discourse of Deshimaru Rōshi, *what* Deshimaru is saying is all right—especially the "OPEC koan." In fact, I'm sure that all of the statements Mr. Franck singles out for ridicule could be decked out in raiment so subtle that he himself would agree with them wholeheartedly.

In the end it's just the same old story, no? The masters are alive and well and teaching away, each one different and each one fine. What about us?

NANCY AMPHOUX

NOTES

Nancy Amphoux's defense of her teacher is gallant indeed, but really somewhat superfluous, as I did not attack the late Taisen Deshimaru Sensei. A glance at my combined review of his *Questions to a Zen Master* which Ms. Amphoux translated, and Norman Waddell's Bankei translation (*E.B.* Spring 1985) will show that I did not presume to judge Deshimaru in relation to Bankei at all, but that I merely discussed the merits of two books published in English for an anglophone readership. Whether I did or did not read Deshimaru in the Japanese is therefore beside the point. I was quite careful not to misquote either book and if some quotations from the Deshimaru translation appear as they did, it is not because it was I who "singled them out for ridicule."

Ms. Amphoux admits being faced with the disadvantage that Deshimaru spoke "a foreign language he did not in any sense master" and that what he said was "further distorted by interpreters and scribes"; and that moreover he was given to "use cumbersome terms from Western philosophy" so as to "drive us crazy too," but that nevertheless he insisted "to see them written down." . . . Does this not justify an objective reader's impression that he may well have lacked in self-criticism in this respect?

It is entirely possible and—I trust after reading Ms. Amphoux's subsequently published moving and elegantly written *Diary of a Zen Nun*—even probable, that "these statements could be decked out in raiment so subtle that he (F.F.) himself would agree with them wholeheartedly."

This makes it even more regrettable that in this instance editorial presentation and/or elucidation failed in doing so.

FREDERICK FRANCK