

Correction

In my review of two books by Bernard Frank (*JJRS*, Spring 2001, p. 157) I regrettably transmitted an inaccurate report touching on matters of painful memory to the Frank family. Madame Junko Frank and Louis Frank (Bernard Frank's son) have set the record straight in the letter below. Joined by the Editor, I offer them an apology for my carelessness—caused by a wish to pay tribute to the man, with no thought of criticizing his religious convictions—and I thank them for their loyal gesture in sharing this illuminating account.

Joseph S. O'Leary

Letter from Junko Frank and Louis Frank

We should like to express our warm gratitude for your *JJRS* review of *Dieux et Bouddhas au Japon* and *Amour, Colère, Couleur*. But we would ask you to correct, by publishing the following text, the rumors you have echoed, according to which Bernard Frank, menaced by the Nazis, is supposed to have sought refuge in conversion to Catholicism and to have received baptism at Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.

Bernard Frank, born 28 February 1927, was the second son of Jacques Frank and Suzanne Planchenault. He was baptized in the faith of his mother in the church of Saint-Augustin, Paris, on 15 May 1927, aged less than three months. His father, Jacques Frank, attorney-at-law, was arrested on 21 August 1941 by the French police acting on the orders of the Occupation authorities, along with some forty Jewish colleagues. Interned for several months in the Drancy camp, he was released at the end of the year because of the state of his health. Choosing not to flee, and fearing that his life might constitute a threat for his children, he threw himself from a window on the morning of 18 January 1942.

On his religious education and his parents, Bernard Frank has left the following testimony:

Né d'une mère catholique et d'un père qui ne l'était pas, tout en ayant – je l'ai entendu dire plus tard – une certaine propension à le devenir, mais que les circonstances précipitèrent dans la mort sans le laisser aller au terme de son choix, j'avais eu une enfance religieusement ambiguë. Catholique, je l'étais moi-même, mais ma mère était d'une profonde pudeur dans l'expression de sa croyance: elle rappelait des vérités, enseignait des gestes; son bon sens était un exemple; depuis plus de dix ans qu'elle est morte, elle n'a pas cessé d'être la référence de tous mes actes. Mais la religion était une chose et la vie, du moins pour mes yeux, en était une autre. Dans le quartier central de Paris où nous habitons, l'atmosphère de l'église paroissiale était impressionnante; les mères qui surveillaient les enfants au catéchisme avaient l'air de garder, avant tout, je ne sais quel monument menacé d'offense. Face à ce monde étrangement hiératique et en dépit de la présence d'un ou deux prêtres dont j'aime à me rappeler le bienveillant sourire, je n'arrivais pas à «accrocher». Et puis, je voyais bien que mon père, au regard d'un tel monde, était voué à rester dehors. Pour-

tant, quel homme merveilleux, mon père: si noble, juste, attentif; y penser me donne encore des ailes!

Lorsqu'il fut mort, je me retirai du présent. La sorte de religion que j'avais connue avait, par contre-coup, laissé le champ libre chez moi à des rêves d'autres formes d'effusion du divin dans ma vie. Là-dessus, il se trouva que je découvris le Moyen Age à travers son éblouissante littérature religieuse et les tours et verrières de ses cathédrales. Les gens qui avaient élaboré ces oeuvres, leurs gestes me paraissaient avoir tous un sens. Pourquoi n'étions-nous plus semblables à eux? Ils me semblaient irrémédiablement perdus au fond du temps.

Les années passant, j'effectuai d'autres explorations. Le Siècle des lumières m'apprit l'ironie et m'aïda à comprendre pourquoi j'avais détesté certaines choses. Mais une nostalgie ne m'avait pas quitté: elle trouva son emploi quand je fis à travers des lectures la soudaine découverte du Japon. J'y trouvais, fondus dans un même creuset, le sens très intense d'un divin diffus dans la nature et celui que met en oeuvre un bouddhisme axé sur la compassion qui n'était pas sans me rappeler le mouvement inspirateur de mon cher esprit médiéval. Comme un Maurice de Guérin qui aurait trouvé sa terre dans la réalité de ce monde, je fus aspiré d'un seul coup.

English translation

“As the son of a Catholic mother and a father who though not Catholic was moving in that direction (as I later heard) but was prevented from following his choice to the end by the circumstances which drove him to his death, my childhood was marked by a religious ambivalence. I was Catholic myself but my mother was profoundly discreet in the expression of her belief. She brought basic truths to my attention, taught the gestures of faith, gave the example of her good sense; in the more than ten years since her death she has not ceased to be the point of reference of all my actions. But religion was one thing and life, at least in my eyes, another. In our central Paris neighborhood, the parish church was an impressive presence. The mothers watching over their children during the catechism class looked as if their chief care was to preserve some monument from threatened injury. Faced with this strangely hieratic world, and despite the presence of one or two priests whose kind smiles I like to recall, I didn't manage to “latch on.” Moreover, I was able to see that my father, as far as this milieu was concerned, was destined to remain an outsider. Yet what a marvelous man my father was, a man of dignity, upright and painstaking; even now the thought of him lends me wings!

“When he died, I withdrew from the present. The kind of religion I knew left a gap, allowing me freely to dream of other forms of effusion of the divine in my life. On this piety supervened my discovery of the medieval world in its dazzling religious literature and the towers and stained glass of its cathedrals. Every gesture of those who had created these works seemed charged with significance, and I asked why we today were not more like them. They seemed lost beyond recall in

the depth of time.

“Years passed, and I embarked on other explorations. The Age of Reason taught me irony and helped me understand why I had detested certain things. Yet an old nostalgia remained with me. It found its outlet when my reading brought me the sudden discovery of Japan. Here I encountered, smelted in one crucible, the intense sense of the divine diffused in nature along with that which Buddhism cultivates and which has compassion as its axis. In the latter I recognized a dynamic inspiration that recalled the spirit of the Middle Ages, so dear to me. Like Maurice de Guérin, who is said to have found his homeground in the reality of this world, I was entirely won over at one stroke.”

[Bernard Frank, “Histoire d'une rencontre,” in *Père Lelong, en hommage au Père Maurice H. Lelong, O. P. (1900–1981)*, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Les Amis du Père Lelong, 1987.]