

Letter of A Grothendieck to N Bourbaki⁽¹⁾

Paris October 9, 1960

To Mr. Nicolas Bourbaki

Dear Sir and my dear Master,

I thank You for your letter, marked by both wisdom and clemency. Indeed it seems pointless that a personal disagreement could be the occasion for the departure of a disciple. I recognize that it was pointless for me to wait for the Master to arbitrate a quarrel that did not concern him and that such arbitration would resolve nothing.

I have asked myself many times over the years of my collaboration with the Master whether my lack of social skill, my impassioned character, and my repugnance for overcoming the repugnance of others, did not render me unsuitable for a productive collaboration during the meetings. No longer wanting to search for the cause anywhere except in myself, I now think that it is better this way and that I reached earlier than the traditional age the moment when I would better serve the Master by my departure, rather than remaining as a result of His kind insistence.

I will endeavor to remain worthy of the teachings that You for so long lavished upon me and not to betray the spirit of the Master who, I hope, will remain visible in my work as it has been in the past.

Your very devoted pupil and servant,

A. Grothendieck

1. Translation by W Messing and transcription by M Carmona