

**LETTERS TO CAPTAINS**  
by  
**ANDRÉ CHARLIER**

Maslacq, September, 27th 1942

Now that return to school approaches, remember that it won't be any less difficult than last year, because you will have a lot of new friends. Our present building unites us all, only too numerous, in one house ; whereas, we are large enough now to have two houses. However, it is necessary that we have a good beginning, otherwise the whole year will be compromised. I want to give you my instructions in writing so that there is no possibility of uncertainty. It will first put you on guard against dangers of your function. There is, first of all, small dangers in the privileges that one concedes you, and that you interpret gladly as an excuse for greater freedoms to which you believe you have the right. But nothing is more false. Your function, rather, is a service. You must be more demanding on yourselves what is refused to others. Today's children are not accustomed to ever forcing themselves ; above all they unconsciously look for what is pleasing to them. So, at *Les Roches*, if we do not succeed in correcting this tendency, we will have missed our mission and we are lost. I want Captains that are the most exact, the most hard-working, the most disciplined, and the most anxious for order from all points of view. I warn you that it will often fall to me to refuse you what you will ask. But you will accept this if you remember that I must always have in view the general interest of the community, something that often escapes you. As a result, I don't want any recrimination from you, but your joyful obedience.

The other danger, and one that is the fundamental, is that you often pretend to think you can form your younger friends. You see what this supposes : you believe that your own character is perfectly shaped and that you are capable of directing yourselves. Be modest. Be humble... What I ask above all from you, is to be rigorously strict about everything that pertains to the material order of the house ... We must create conditions of life so that the soul can bloom. Order is one of the primordial conditions that should be working within you. Then you will always be ready to help your friends in their difficulties and their pains, small or big... Goodness must be one of your qualities of predilection... But don't try to act as if you are chaplains... If you are living examples, two words will be sufficient to straighten out any problem. Especially, don't try to be shrewd, that is, to appear what you are not : you must be essentially creatures of a certain order. This order is necessary for every living soul in the house. Everything that you will do, even in the smallest of details, will do as much as anything to win the creation of this order. Don't believe this is unworthy of you, it is all important : the cleanliness of the house, the strict accurateness of boys in all acts of their life, their belongings, their language. It belongs to you to make sure that all is clean in gestures and in words. Perceive slackness, vulgarity, and cheating, as if these were a curse. I want boys that are upright, that look you in the eye, and who speak firmly. I tell you again : be humble. I repeat don't count too much on yourselves. Look for strength where it is : only the spiritual view can give it to you. And it will give to you the radiance that illuminates your souls and the desire to pass it to others.

February, 18th 1943

There is a particular point to which I wish to draw attention today : this is that you have been entrusted with the care of souls. This is the sense which is given to your responsibility. The first thing you need to realize, and too often you are so far from even thinking of this, is that you must give a great attention to those souls which have been entrusted to your care, whoever they may be, and only then might you come to know them. For have you ever noticed how difficult it can be to get to know someone ? Even in your own experience you can find situations where even after having been a long time living aside other souls, you would not even be able to guess what went on within them.

So then, do you really know the boys who live in your dorm ? Do you even have a desire to know them ? Examine yourself carefully on this point : for it is of great importance. Your whole way of behaving will depend on this point. It does not consist in only becoming interested in those you like best and then not caring about the others, for anyone can do that. You also have the responsibility for those you don't like as well, and if you happen to give but even a slight sign of your negative feelings, you will most likely have lost the very chance you had to get somewhere with them. You will then come to be feared rather than loved. And to be loved is a whole different thing than to be popular. For popularity is hateful. The true exercise of popularity demands that one both be liked and respected. For that will it serve if for an instant you might show yourself all demanding on a certain point of discipline ? They will want to know if you are as demanding for yourself and you will only then be respected in as much as you live up to your own demands. Your respect will be earned in as much as you will have shown true friendship with others, for friendship is an authentic sentiment which cannot be commanded.

I have already told you that one cannot expect to “form” or ”reform” others. For the growth of a soul is truly something mysterious, something in which God is happily far more successful than we might ever be by our own attempts. However, you may and you should help your comrades by such things as counsels, or simple marks of affection. But do beware of sentimentality. For this is not a manly thing. It is not unmanly, however, to show to others a devotion which is full of tenderness. Or it is in such that is founded true authority, and it is in following this that you will come to find yourself well obeyed and without much need of any sanctions. In a word, the first condition for true authority is an utmost respect for the soul. I would like for you to learn this respect, for it still seems to be unfamiliar to you. This respect will not only teach you to seek out the needs of others — and some of these maybe are awaiting that which only you can bring them — but also, it will teach you to preserve your own personal dignity.

March, 11th 1943

It is written in the captain's handbook : « His duties make him realize his weaknesses and show him that in order to serve and be useful he must know himself in all humility, accept legitimate advice, and put himself in God's hands. » This indicates to you the importance you should attach to your spiritual lives. The principle natural qualities of a leader are without doubt : vigour, authority, dynamism, etc ; but in the end, these remain insufficient if a certain fervor of the interior life is lacking. By the interior life, I mean the intimate relation of your soul to God.

But I, who watch you live, who observe you often without your knowing it, see that you are barely able to enter into yourselves, for your minds are turned toward worldly things. When you do think of

yourselves, you are preoccupied with the impression you make on others. Indeed, at your age this is a natural fault.

You are creatures of God, who created each one of you with a particular purpose in His mind. It is time that you learn to recognize this divine pattern for you because without it life will catch you up and crowd out all knowledge of your unique relationship with the Eternal. Everything could become so clear to you from now if you want ; you will find your life forever transformed. Only, each day you must give yourselves a few moments of silence (do you make the others respect, do you yourselves respect, these daily meditations ?) and I am not speaking simply of physical silence. You must also silence the agitation of thoughts, and so all the restlessness of the day's work will come to die on the ground of this peaceful contemplation. Then, hold your soul one moment under the gaze of God and with one very simple gesture make an offering of yourselves to this God who expects from you some exact thing. If you remain faithful to this habit, you who are so tormented because you do not yet know who you are, you will soon see the light make itself clear in you, many of the doubts and objections will fall from you without you even feeling the pain of the battle. You will feel how much the soul enlightened by God towers over any that has only intellect.

Then, something will radiate from you. The others will not know what it is, but they will be struck, they will sense you are lit by an inner light and you are animated by a hidden mastery that certainly far surpasses those who are bound by their own power. You will then be able to become men of action for there is no one of real action except the one who is rooted in the genuine spiritual life.

May, 15th 1943

I am always happy, during the vacations, to read the reflections of such and such among you about life at home. I am judging naturally according to occupations in which you take interest, even during the vacations. I have received certain letters which testify about their authors of a real enthusiasm for their work, in which I rejoice. For some of you, this term will be the last of your school life. I would like that it be full, although it must be brief, and that you take with you from your activities here, the impression of having been enriched and also of having been useful.

I have told you that the captains form one team, and it is obvious that this team no longer exists, or in any case the links are excessively loose. Besides you feel it well, and those who are really concerned about the house know that it is on this point that a great progress remains to be made. So carry out that which I have given you about your relationships with the other captains and all grown-ups in general. All of you without exceptions have imagined things about one another, very often false or too simple, and that you never seek to reform. Therefore you form small groups of three or four boys, and you surround yourselves with deep ditches. In reality, you don't know each other. You succumb with an incredible easiness to the mania of "gossip", which is a common fault of the French ; you believe you are being witty in exercising your critical acumen about everything. How can you expect to have one common action after that ? So try to judge a little less quickly and a little less severely, and you will gain by being more severe with yourself. You don't realize that you have decided in advance "that there is nothing to be done" with such and such among you, and naturally nothing positive can come out of such a position. It happened several times that I had to work to make these barriers fall, which separate you. Or I have observed this : when you make some efforts of sincerity and of generosity, these barriers always fall. You yourselves perceive then that this comrade which

you have considered up till then as “the impossible type”, someone with whom we can't agree on anything, is very different from that which you have realized. However we must go to others with true generosity, that is to say with the best of yourselves; and of course not to believe that you will be understood at the first attempt ; expect to be disheartened. Never discourage yourselves. Do you believe in what you do ? If yes, you will give up an attitude of criticism and of systematic gossip. I know well that this is not voluntary, but without you yourselves realizing it, that is what is paralyzing you. If you truly believe that you have some form of apostolate to fulfill, you will be able to pass over everything which shocks you in others so you can collaborate from the bottom of your heart with them.

But I ask you to believe this. You unconsciously let yourselves be overcome by a certain scepticism. You become suddenly timid, passive, and neutral. So walk straight, do it generously. We do nothing without faith.

December, 12th, 1944

It is a great comfort for me to sense the fidelity of those who have left us, particularly those who are in the army. This must be a lesson for you, that you take notice through them of the meaning of the School. That which she is trying to teach you is fidelity to the essential thing, to the Faith as far as the spirit and the soul are concerned. Nothing seems to me more important in our world, where all sense of values are abolished : it is the only way to remake a Christian civilization. In his last letter written at the front, Jean-Marie had a word which particularly touched me, one of these grave words which go a long way : « I believe that upon leaving Maslacq, we are forever beings who are set apart in society : I don't mean that we cannot live with others, but rather, that the need within you for an absolute ideal renders more difficult the company and intimacy of others. We don't felle ourselves to be better than others, but we would like to be able to find some others better. »

I see enough to express exactly the form of heroism demanded from Christians today. There are no longer any Christian societies ; as a result, life will offer you no established surroundings where you could find a place. You must expect to be alone if you want to be entirely faithful to your Christian vocations. You must accept it. Jesus, before entering into the Passion, prayed for his disciples, saying : « I gave them the Word and the world hates them, because they are not of this world, as I am not of this world. I pray not that You remove them from the earth, but that you protect them from evil.» That is to say, that we have fallen back into a state similar to the pagan society that the disciples of Christ knew, and we have in addition against us all the advances — or so-called — of progress. It is therefore asked to us to live in the world as if we didn't exist, that is to say, to live while staying faithful to our essential nature and to the divine grace, even if the world ignores both. Behold the simple reality, and no specious arguments will prevent it from being so. It is my job to make you realize this. You understand that if you want to be faithful to your vocation, you will have to put to work your heroic virtues. It will be easier to be a simple middle-class man with no caliber, having a comfortable life. But that which I propose is not easy, it is difficult. The nature of man is demanding. It wants all because it needs everything. We must be demanding of ourselves. What I like in the words of Jean-Marie which I have quoted to you is that the demand is accompanied by humility.

I also have to put you face to face with your reality. You are sensible enough to good ideas. It is no trouble to raise you above yourselves during a few instances. But you are actually incapable of

making any of this happen in daily life. You don't have the least notion of what it is to be demanding of yourself. You ignore all personal discipline. You constantly over-step the most elementary rules. You are full of ideas for everything that is not strictly your duty, and you unconsciously take the first chance to drop your duty. Thus, you force me to make absurd petty, occupations for you, because I am obliged to set right a crowd of little things which should be your responsibility only. And what do you think of your work, which should be the principle mark of your merit ? For most of you, your characters are mediocre. You don't even obtain the results that a student of mediocre talent normally obtains. You are incapable of applying your mind seriously to any normal intellectual work. Won't we find this unruliness which is the dominant trait of your characters in the mapp of your souls ? I have repeated often enough that it is vain to pretend to act if you do not begin by learning to think. But I ask myself if the words have any meaning for you. It does not seem to me that it is an extraordinary thing to expect that my captains be normal students.

You must admit that after what I have just told you, the beginning of my letter may seem to you ridiculous. I propose to you a high expectation and you are not even capable of little things. Nevertheless, I have nothing to change from what I told you. I have a certain concept of man that I am working to realize. It corresponds to the deep reality of your race and at the same time to the aspirations which France has of the best among the youth. It is to you to show me if I can count on you : ut till now I have only been able to see in you representatives of a middle-class man a his decline, but no means those who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

April, 14th 1947

The second term that has come to an end once again saw you a little hesitant in the beginning, at times even troubled. It would seem that I was setting you an extraordinary course and that I was asking more than is expected from boys in your age and in your time. You said that I was correct and yet suggested you break with such habits, prejudices and your conventions. It is that is its not very hard to express scorn for the mediocre in expressing one's views but when it comes to pulling oneself out of the same mediocrity, one is suddenly struck with the fear that causes all men to think that they might not be like everyone else. Then, after your first hesitations you became more sure of yourselves, it would seem that you reflected on the fact that the simplest was to just do what you were told, and the result was that the term ended with an harmony and serenity which the house had never hitherto known.

I know that I said things that were rather severe ; I know that you found me quite demanding. But by repeating these words, you risk distorting things and believing that what I propose is more difficult than what it really is. At your age, it is not hard to believe in what is the most beautiful and pure in one's self. And so, believe it with all your strength. Don't try and fool others by having them believe that you are as silly and vulgar as ordinary people. There is a human respect which consists in putting oneself at the lowest grade : you will see one day how this can end up, in a barracks. Don't have this sort of false modesty. I your act and in your speech, dare to show the best of yourselves. Do this simply, without exaggeration, that it may be as natural as breathing. You'll see how it's easy, so easy and simple too be like everyone else, for there only remains to be oneself — and it's the only way to have everyone want to imitate you, that is to say, where everyone lives according to his true nature

and to communicate this in all his being.

The only great revolutions, the ones which had the greatest impact, are those from within. Yours has just begun. Have the courage to see it through. I write these words from my desk at Maslacq. The castle is completely quiet. From my open window a concert of frogs comes to me which fills the night, as the same which enchanted Aristophane when he had the idea to write his famous comedy [ *The frogs* ]. The world is just as beautiful as it was in the fifth century before Christ, but men are infinitely regressed. The ancient Greeks as pagan as they were, and deprived of the light of Revelation, nevertheless were able to come up with an order and put man in his proper place. I have been reading these past few days the *Phædo*. A pagan like Plato could have such a profound notion on the nature of thought that he was able to assign man his proper task, which is contemplation. And we moderns, what are we by comparison ? How we seem rather uncouth and barbaric. How we are indeed just like that. Men of today are completely detached from the great laws of Being, their life is subservient to entirely artificial rules. The hour is no longer that divine hour by which the sun glistens on our faces, but it is simply the hour told to us by the radio. Writing has lost the sacred character which it had for our ancestors, it is nothing but that infamous scrawl, so dirty and repugnant, as we might find in the papers.

I do not say that you must despise your times, since you live in it. I tell you that you must despise which is despicable. Don't leave yourselves open. Be yourselves without worrying yourselves silly with what the world thinks. "Imbeciles", cries out Bernanos to his contemporaries in a book which I have just finished reading. "You don't care less about the interior life, but it is in and through the interior life that are transmitted the indispensable values without which liberty would be a mere word." And so I say to you : complete peacefully your interior revolution, this self-conquest in total truth, without which you would advance through life like blind men. You learn how to analyze Latin texts : it is an exercise in profound teaching. I was going to say, of a profound morality. You learn how to understand the meaning, to remain loyal to the text and to embrace his form. Put yourself in the same attitude with regard to the world. By this I mean the real world : one of Heaven and Earth and real men, not one of bars and clubs. Tell yourself that there is a treasure of inexhaustible truth from which you will never have your fill. And read the Sacred Text of the Gospel with the same seriousness that today's man read the newspaper. You will discover much better than in the papers the news of the day which directly concerns you and without which your life will have no meaning ; you will read the very words which you need to hear at that moment. Finally, take the life to the letter, like a great adventure which depends on us to make the small events full of meaning, for this time it is you who are writing the text, and don't forget that it is also a Sacred Text. Does all this seem, far away from life in the house ? But no, we are right in the middle of things. And soon many of you will leave for good. I hope that they continue on this same path where they learned to trace their steps. Outside of the School, it will at times seem to be the path of solitude, but at that moment they need only to tell themselves that one is never alone when one remains in the truth.

April 1949

I don't know if you have looked back during this vacation and tried to weigh up accurately the last semester. For my part, I have never had so little contact with the School seniors, the captains have

never kept so far from me. There were some of you with whom I did not even have a two-minute conversation outside the usual meetings. Is it because I have so vehemently expressed several times my displeasure ? Or is it your sense of responsibility which made you withdraw into yourself ? It is not a good reaction : it looks like wounded pride, this evil sadness which closes up the heart instead of opening it up. I use so often to hear you judging each other : when will you decide at last, each of you, to judge your own self for your own good ? As you might have seen it, I was so often tired to say words, that seem so blatantly useless to me, as long as you don't try to implement them somehow. The reason being that you always think unconsciously, that it applies only to others : the first reform — and the deepest one — is to realize that it does apply to you. If you don't learn right now to look inward into yourself with a not so lenient scrutiny, it will be much more difficult for you to learn it when you grow into men. Each of you has already started to consider himself as someone important and as a focus of attention, how would it be then in a couple of years ? I heard so often this so-called maxim that people made of the opinion that a man should believe in himself : this is a silly thing, only good for those ridiculous puppets who take on the role of leaders in our days. Man is constantly playing the smart one, and you start already to play that ridiculous game : so, you are feeling embarrassed because you know well that I don't be taken in. You have accumulated a number of errors and silly things, what does it matter ? At least, they come from you and belong to you : there is no mistake about it. Don't let bitterness overcome you. On the contrary, you could transform them into a source of joy. For you will find out, if you look carefully, that the good you do is not from you : you'll know it distinctively by the quality of the joy you would be feeling. Consequently, there is no way we get sad because of our shortcomings and our mistakes, or rather, if we get sad about them, it's because they displease God (which is the only productive sadness), we can always turn that sadness into joy, because we should always excel in knowing that we are nothing by ourselves, that we are completely poor and destitute so long that we do not make fully room for God to abide in us. Once we have anything more to offer to Him than what He has already given us. Once we have tackled our nothingness, we start to become aware of what is outside of us in a bright light, that is to say this daily duty, simple and familiar, through which the will of God manifests itself on us. Once we are aware of all this, how pleasant and beautiful it becomes !

In short, this means that you are terribly loaded with yourselves and full of your own persons, and that there is nothing more urgent for you to do than to learn daily how to be humble. Don't try to be smart, neither with the others nor with God. At your age, they start to hold on strongly to themselves. They do not want to give away anything of themselves, and they fear God as someone demanding and cumbersome who would prevent them from finding themselves and assuming themselves. Get rid of this stiffness and this resistance. Do not wait until the twilight of life, when the necessary stripping will be done anyways in spite of yourself, in order to understand that we are truly ourselves only when we give way to God's Grace. Look at yourself then in your weakness, without fear nor bitterness, and make room in yourself. Humility will give you a glimpse of the effect of Grace in you, this effect which, alas, most of men do not grasp, and through which alone goodness can be implemented, the potentiality of which is contained in us. Do not dread to give up something in you life. On the contrary, it is life itself that you are giving yourself.

You might think that these considerations do not pertain to the job of captains. If you think it over more carefully, you will see that it is not so. Nothing else is directly relevant to daily duty in the house. Deeds are only worth the quality of the soul which is involved. To be captain is to learn how to be a man and how to be a christian. We are now right after Easter : it is quite time to renew that interior life of yours because the Resurrection of Christ invites you to do so.

Clères,  
September, 10th 1956

You have in your possession a number of Letters to Captains of these past years. I could simply refer you to the recommendations in these Letters since I wouldn't have anything else to add. To perform well your job, you need only to follow a few principles and a couple of rules. I just want to draw your attention to the following : the rules are usually specific, often material, and therefore easy to understand and implement. The principles, however, are broader : they address the steady *intention* which has to be put into your life, the life to which they give a certain direction. They might seem vague, remote, and unnecessary to you even though they are very precise and quite pressing. Enforce the schedule concerning the time to get up and to go to bed, keep silence during study, these are *rules* which are very clear and can be implemented easily. But when I talk about captains being in charge of souls, having to work toward the spiritual advancement of those who are entrusted to them, having to put the care of others before their own pleasure, I am stating *principles*, which are so critical that if you do not apply them into your life, it means that you do not understand your role at all. And it is there where I feel that most of you are far from following me. It won't be difficult at all to make a list of captains of last year who did consent to rules but did not want to go deeper into principles. Principles are binding on life, they are cumbersome. If as of the beginning of this school year you do not face them directly by asking yourselves what they require of you, you might as well give up your responsibility right away instead of accepting it reluctantly.

I was very happy to notice that during the year just passed the youths who were not captain had very well understood how the house could undergo such a thorough change by the simple fact that some of you put together their most generous intentions. It is a common remark that within a human community, the great majority, if left to itself, tends to put itself to the lowest common denominator, and the School is not exception to that law : from there you can derive how stunningly prestigious people seem to be who are in fact mediocre individuals, simply because they know how to flatter the meanest feelings or turn into ridicule the most noble things. How could you not feel the sadness of heart by remembering here our lovely Thierry de Pelet who revealed himself this year as a courageous and faithful soul, resolved to fight mediocrity : what could we not expect from him ? Let his memory inspire you in your behavior and your fellow's one. It is not the matter of nobody championing the cause of moral and virtue : nothing could be more silly and inefficient. But it is not contrary to humility to think that noble desires are made to be realized.

Never doubt your soul any great thought or exalted desire which can sprout from it : this is your true self, this is what man finds so difficult to experience and this is what you should not let die at any cost. It is through this also that you will enter into a spiritual life and that you will discover the infinite treasures for your soul : and these are so overwhelming that it won't be hard for you to recognize WHOM they come from. For that you will have up against you all the mediocrity of daily life. So, in order to infuse into your life the best of yourself, you will need the brotherly help that you could give to each other ; you will strengthen yourselves mutually, and each of you will begin to take your own shape. This is how you could transform the School, because in spite of the attacks of sceptical irony and jealousy, souls are sensitive to spiritual radiance. Everyone who has written to me during this vacation about Thierry have noticed in him this radiance which was only at its dawn : at this sign you recognize the presence of a soul. It dwells among you showing you the way.

I was extremely touched this year by the fact that almost the whole School demanded the daily salute of the flag. I expressed some reticence : you have well grasped that it was only meant to let the unanimity be confirmed more strongly — since I hate acts which do not mean anything. If at this time

where so many of your elderly are stationed in Algeria, young people like you do not start to be aware of the uniqueness brought to the world by your own nation which at this very moment is being exposed to a threatening danger, it would be hopeless. Future is not written in advance, it will be what you will make it become. Peace is something very precious, even then it must be used for something which is worth ; and, in any case, peace is not something absolute to be worth that everything, such as honor and spiritual heritage, should be sacrificed to it. War is always a disaster, but there are cases where it is better to face it than to lose honor. The more I see France staggering under the blow from the enemies and from its own friends, the more I see it being essential to the world. I do not know which will be the fights you have to take up in order to save it ; I wish that they will be peaceful fights. The first one you have to take up right now is the one aimed toward restoring the sense of honor. As for the upcoming ones, whatever they will be, they will demand from you manly virtues and the liking for sacrifice. You have to infuse into the souls of your fellows these virtues and this liking — smoothly, slowly, and with that sense of discretion and subtlety which is part of the French spirit. It is not without good reason that we are descendants of Saint Louis and Jeanne of Arc.

April, 18th 1950

First of all I must remind you of something I thought necessary to say during the last term : namely that any student of the School is normally called to become a captain and that all the senior students should consider themselves as captains. Responsibilities of the house should likely be assumed by any of the graduating students. This must be absolutely understood by all of you. Therefore, what I am writing to the captains is not a special message only for them : I wish to be understood by all the seniors. Graduating students should make up a compact unit based of the same spirit.

We are going to begin the last term of the school year. From the previous term we will draw some practical lessons I like to ask you to meditate on :

1/ Much has been often said about unity which is lacking in the captains team. I wish you would have talked less about this. You used to reproach to such and such fellow among of you to discredit unity. Actually that's a waste of time. You expect unity to fall upon you as a gift of heaven ; do not spend time to be critical of everything, each one of you should be right away unity-minded in all your actions, for your own account and, and say to yourself that *it is not difficult at all*.

2/ During the last term events had occurred in the house, events that should have been foreseen by the captains. *You must be alert in your mind at any time*. You get tied down by routine, you don't like to see unpleasant things to handle them for you. You should never wait for someone else to do for you something you have to do. Get advice, if needed, but do it yourselves.

3/ If I haven't pointed out all your mistakes, it doesn't mean that I don't see them. I would like very much for you to have come to me by yourselves to let me know that you were the authors of the mistakes and were aware of them afterwards, but it never occurred to you, so to say.

4/ You are still wasting a lot of time chatting around, and you are not too demanding towards yourselves when it comes to keep your hours of study.

Having said this, now about your daily activity in School, I hope that you are not forgetting that we are preparing ourselves for Pentecost which is the Feast of the Holy Spirit. I am talking, here, of course, of the inner preparation, the only important one. I can assure you that this Feast has always

brought his Graces to us : it is on this day that Jean-Marie discerned what the School was and that he started to experience a transformation. Besides the outer success of the Feast, it always happens something in the inner of some souls. Let us therefore see to it that Pentecost become the summit of what Easter has begun, I mean the resurrection of the inner man within us. Have you read in the Gospel what happened immediately after the Resurrection of Jesus ? He appeared to the disciples in Emmaus, to Maria Magdalena, and to His Apostles gathered in a house where they had confined themselves for fear of the Jews, and on the Sea of Tiberias. I was very amazed to see that neither the Apostles nor the Holy Women who had followed Him everywhere on the road and had shared in His Life during months and some even during years, did not recognize Him. He was the same though, His hands and His feet had been still bearing the marks of nails. We do not look here for an explanation, but rather for the teaching which is directed to us. The teaching that Christ whom we know so well and whom we have been fed on, we are not able to recognize Him when He passes by in our life and not even when He speaks to us. We are not able to recognize the Grace, or we are afraid of it, as the Disciples were as if they were seeing a ghost. Because Grace is very disconcerting, it upsets our reason, it always come through the way the least we expected : in a word, it disturbs the world of mediocrity we have tailored to ourselves, forgetting that our measure is God's measure. Indeed, we are poor idiots, and our hearts are slow to believe. But Jesus has plenty of patience. If we behold a corner of sadness and restlessness in our hearts, trying very awkwardly to understand what is happening to us, like these two men on the way to Emmaus, Jesus will Himself "open up our senses" and explain to us the mystery of Redemption, and we will recognize Him one day in the breaking of the bread. Or our works might become so mysteriously fruitful that we will have to ask ourselves why and look for the cause of it in someone else than ourselves, and we will say like John : "It's Our Lord !" Or if we are able to shed tears like Maria Magdalena — but it is a great grace to shed such tears, and there are only very few souls who receive this favor — we would hear Jesus calling us by our name and we would not need anything else to know that He is speaking to us.

The inner man is the man who accepts to recognize Grace when it comes by, who is not afraid of the undoubted signs it uses to leave on its passage. I don't ask you to say nor to do anything extraordinary. But as Pentecost is drawing nearer, you must behold a certain inner attitude of expectation and of desire, which will shine forth in the house and will make it possible for it to receive the lights we are all so in need of these times of darkness. Man is today eaten up by activities, but he is stirring himself like a blind and does not strive towards anything higher. It is essential that we learn to love and to want light.

February, 13th 1957

You are not absent from my thoughts although I am staying right now in a clinic in Paris. A clinic is an excellent place for a retreat where meditation enjoys the necessary quietness and silence. I am thinking of you quite especially, and all the more since I detected in you this year a very real effort to realize the spiritual demands of your job. Now that you are well embarked, I don't want to see you keel over once you reach the open sea ; when in fact it could give cause to a shipwreck. Always remember that *you should handle problems from the top* : it's the only way to solve them. And it's the most dreadful problem of everything which is at stake here, the problem of your life and the direction

thereof. You can approach it either in its easy aspects, the mediocre way — pleasure, interest, comfort —, or its more noble aspects — various kind of activities, and especially trade — ; when you don't begin to say that we are instruments in the hands of God, and that the only important thing for us is to understand the intention of the hand which is holding us and to faithfully obey its lead, we can almost be sure to miss our lives. In fact, this job of being a captain leads you for the first time into the path of life, because for the mere first time you are required to be responsible for something, you initiate a process, a free and personal one, which sets the first steps of your path towards becoming a man. That's why it is so important not to wander aimlessly in a spirit of adventure.

There is an eternal human tragedy which is the source of every tragedy : the instrument wants to ignore the hand which is holding it and free itself from it in order to assert its autonomy. — Some of you are already willing to give way to that temptation : we hear them saying that spiritual demands are superfluous, that they can easily perform their captain's duty without conforming themselves to these ; they even pretend to decide already if they are going to admit God into their society or not. How could you even lose the awareness of being preposterous as so many did who are thinking that they are playing an important role in the life of the world but who in fact are simply ridiculous and pitiful individuals. I see lots of those kinds of people, and I don't want you to be like them. If you want to avoid to be like them, beware of making up with stories. When you come to tell us that you have lost your faith, or that you are going to lose it, we know what that means. You never conducted a genuine review of the mysteries proposed to you by faith nor have you considered how these mysteries could be inserted into your own life. You simply feared that God would become too cumbersome and you would like to beg Him not to interfere in your business. This was not deeper than that. — And you know very well that, if you make your job seriously, you have to sacrifice something of yourself and you say to yourself dreadfully : “When will this sacrifice end ?” So, you prefer to say “No” right away, alleging so many reasons which of course do not have any ground to be based on. When you come to tell me : “I want first to prepare for my exam, it's the most important thing”, I reply to you : “You are putting the scale of values up side down, you are not handling the problem from the top.”

You are now embarked, as Pascal used to say. — Even if you did not want it absolutely, do realize at least that it is a grace given to you and let yourself be guided by it. Try to be a docile instrument and to understand first of all what kind of instrument you are : this is the whole issue of vocation. But you will never discover it if you let yourself eaten up by external actions. It is not a matter of preaching ; it is quite the opposite what you are asked too. I advise you rather to make silence in your inner self and to be attentive to what could happen inside that inner silence. — It is during this process that you will learn that God is Someone, that He knows you, and that He only asks to lead you, if you would agree not to withstand Him. It is only then that you can tackle the issues of action with a fair sense of what a man can and must accomplish. All too often I see you trusting excessively in yourself and then falling into despondency and ready to give up everything. — True men that I have known did not hold that self-importance nor have that cowardice, because they were aware of being only instruments and thus they were tapping into that awareness the only self-confidence human beings are allowed to have.