"THE LIBERAL, THE CONSERVATIVE, AND THE POPE"

Baltimore, Md.

Dear Sir: I hope you will permit me some observations on Mr. Michael Novak's review of my book (*worldview*, November, 1964):

1. The title of the book is *Politics and Catholic Freedom*, not *Catholics and Political Freedom*.

2. The reviewer chides me for approaching the encyclicals by way of the conventional "degrees of faith." But, after describing these degrees as historical background for arguments I must deal with, I make it clear that I do *not* accept them myself as meaningful norms. I can only gather that, for those who live by a code of intellectual tabu, even to *mention* the offensive terms is irrevocably to stain one's tongue or page.

3. Under the heading of "rationalization" by which Catholic conservatives circumvented the popes' social teaching, Mr. Novak lists the simple ignorance and indifference of those who never bothered to read the encyclical letters. As he remarks, I take occasion to deplore this ignorance in my book. But simple ignorance is not a "rationalization." It is, simply, ignorance. Mr. Novak seems to practice what he preaches against in his comments on argumentative "overkill."

4. In a review that loftily castigates what he takes to be abusiveness, Mr. Novak manages to call me (and others) quite a number of names. Then, in an *ad hominem* aside, he writes, "his book is a disservice to the classical tradition he purports to represent." Since there is nothing in the book itself about a "classical tradition," he is presumably referring to my academic occupation. Like some quaint officer in Kipling, he brings the charge: "conduct unbecoming a teacher of Greek." I do not know whether, after the hasty proceedings in this unofficial court martial, he would ceremonially strip me of my Liddell-and-Scott; but I am sure that Bentley and Housman would have had some peppery things to say about any attempt to connect this prim ceremony with the classical tradition.

5. I shall not enter, here, into my differences with the reviewer over the subject matter of the book. He has made such discussion needlessly difficult by oscillating, throughout his review, between contradictory positions—first, that I have nothing to say, and second, that what I say has an "inherent justice" vitiated, alas, by conduct that is un-Liddell and un-Scott. To use again a term he recalled for his own purposes in the review, this is a strategy of "overkill."

GARRY WILLS

The Author Replies:

Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Sir: I apologize to Mr. Wills for the mental slip which through three drafts and a final check allowed me to state his title incorrectly.

I expected that Mr. Wills would write a letter to the editor concerning my review, since he has done the same in every other journal in which I have seen his book reviewed. So let me state here what I saved for the occasion: no other book has ever been so difficult for me to review. Many of the key words in Mr. Wills analysis (and many of the recurring words in the *National Review*)—authority, knowledge, faith, prudence, liberty, moral law—seem to me to be used in ways which were once common to Jesuits and secular philosophers alike some generations ago; a more recent intellectual tradition, particularly in the United States, uses these same words with different connotations and different meanings. I have a great sympathy for the values and the way of looking at things which Mr. Wills often defends. I would be willing to enter his universe of discourse, though it is not my own. But his book, much as his present letter, makes conversation very difficult. I admire Mr. Wills' accomplishments and his concerns, and I hope we will be better friends in the future.

MICHAEL NOVAK