Dear Doctor Sabin:

I have not had a chance heretofore to answer your letter of June 25 because I have been away, I have been inordinately busy, and I have had to take the time to get and examine the transcript of the testimony given by you and others recently before the Priest Committee of the United States Congress.

I am in complete agreement that we would be approaching the end of Freedom's Road if we regarded all who are of a different opinion as necessarily wicked or treasonous. I do not regard you as either wicked or treasonous because you have scientific opinions different from your fellow scientists'. You have known this for seventeen years. I like to feel that you do not consider me wicked or treasonous because I question the method you use in disseminating your scientific views.

You may recall that I in no way criticized the validity of your scientific opinions. I do not possess the capacity to do that. I did, however, make observations on the propriety of your repeating on every occasion possible the same scientific views in opposition to the use of the Salk vaccine which you first expressed over two years ago. This seemed to me to pass beyond the field of legitimate scientific discussion and enter an area where the burden of proof was on you to demonstrate clearly that you were not acting as you were described in the Cincinnati Enquirer of June 3, 1955, as "one of Dr. Jonas Salk's outstanding scientific 'competitors'", but were expressing a detached scientific opinion.

You say that heated debate among scientists is all to the public good because it ultimately leads to more knowledge and a wiser course of action. I doubt that heated debate ever accomplishes
anything. One certainly doesn't expect to encounter it in scientific discussions. Intelligent debate on those matters that are generally within the public knowledge is likely to bring about the results you indicate.

But prolonged heated debate on the same questions in the technical field of science, with which the public is not generally familiar, brings only fear and confusion in the minds of the public.

Time after time you have set forth the same grounds for opposing the use of the Salk vaccine. I admit your right to do this, but you must realize that the public doesn't understand that you are not making a new contribution. Every time you speak or write on this same theme, you are carried prominently by the press, as you know you will be. The resulting public impression is that something new has happened, when that is not the fact. This seems to me to be carrying the right of scientific discussion and debate beyond the point where it can properly be still described as such.

You are opposing the use of a safe and reasonably effective vaccine on the grounds that you believe there can be a safer and more effective one. Everyone knows there will be improvements in any new vaccine. But to refrain from using a safe and effective vaccine to prevent paralytic polio in children because eventually there will be a safer and more effective one, is a conclusion with which one may justifiably disagree. Such a conclusion involves not only questions of science, but questions of morals. There is a moral obligation which scientists must and do recognize, to give to the public a product which is safe and will protect from harm, even though it is expected that at some later time the product will be improved.

You asked me to answer four questions, which I shall now do.

First, you asked me whether Dr. Enders and Dr. Stanley are "envious and ignorant." Not being able to read their minds, I do not know whether they are envious. I do, however, know they are not ignorant, because they are both Grantees of the National Foundation. However, lack of ignorance does not create total
wisdom. One may be particularly skilled with reference to a part of an operation not relating to safety and lack competence to pass on the safety of the total operation. It was this kind of thinking, presumably, that led Dr. Stanley to state that he was not competent to vote on the question as to whether the use of the Salk vaccine should be continued.

Secondly, you asked me whether or not it wouldn't be better if I, as President of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, observed a more impartial attitude regarding the scientific work and contributions of all the scientists whose work is supported by donations from the American people. Curiously enough, it occurs to me that you are the one who should be asked whether it wouldn't be better if you as a scientist observed a more impartial attitude regarding the scientific work of those other scientists. I am neither partial nor impartial regarding the scientific work of those scientists. I have no competency to be either. I repeat that my statement indicates clearly that I was in no sense critical of the validity of your purely scientific statements.

Thirdly, you asked me whether or not it is a fact that at the Congressional hearing the panel unanimously recommended that the virulent viruses currently used in the manufacture of the Salk vaccine be replaced as soon as possible by attenuated viruses of similar immunity-producing capacity. Frankly, I don't think that is a fact, but I know you did not intend to make a misstatement. I am not aware that the reference was to all of the strains currently used in the vaccine, but related primarily to the Mahoney strain of Type I. Is there anything new about this? I heard you discuss this with others as long ago as October 24, 1953, at a meeting in Detroit, and you surely must admit that you have written papers on it and discussed it frequently ever since. Furthermore, you apparently have forgotten that the suggestion that less virulent strains be sought for was incorporated in the first draft of the Minimum Requirements, dated May 20, 1954, and is still there.

Fourthly, you asked me whether it isn't also a fact that as a result of work carried out in your laboratory during the last two years, with the financial aid of the National Foundation, attenuated strains for all three types of poliomyelitis are now available
for tests by all manufacturers. I have no reason to question this statement, but I am sure that you didn't intend to imply by it that these three strains are now ready to be substituted for those presently used in the Salk vaccine. As you say, "they are now available for tests by all manufacturers." You know that those tests will take time and that no one can predict their results.

And now may I ask you a question? Is it not a fact that at the Congressional hearing in Washington, the scientific panel, by a vote of 8 to 3, approved the continuance of the use of the Salk vaccine? (Dr. Salk not voting.)

I agree with you that we should conserve our energies for fighting against our common enemy -- poliomyelitis. It seems to me that this can best be done by the manufacturers turning out Salk vaccine properly made as soon as reasonably possible, by the United States Public Health Service releasing vaccine for public use as soon as it properly can, by the vaccine being given promptly to children to prevent paralytic polio, and by scientists interested in this fight pursuing promptly in their respective laboratories the solution of those factors which may give the public a better and possibly a cheaper vaccine.

In the postscript to your letter you suggest that I make your letter and my reply public because you believe that would be in the best interest of the National Foundation, and you asked that if I did not see fit to do so, I give my reasons. In this connection, may I remind you that since the criticisms of the Salk vaccine which you made before the Priest Committee were carried extensively publicly, as you must have known they would be, I had no alternative but to make my observations publicly, too.

The National Foundation believes that the publication of this correspondence will only create further confusion in the public mind. However, if you think that in fairness to yourself it should be published and will so advise me, I shall see to it that this correspondence is made public in the usual manner.

Dr. Albert B. Sabin
The Children's Hospital Research Foundation
Cincinnati 29, Ohio

Very truly yours,

President