

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Rev. John E. Brooks, S.J.  
Volume 107**

© Society of Jesus of New England  
2009 All Rights Reserved

Editor: Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
Associate Editor: Paul C. Kenney, S.J.  
Assistant Editors: Joseph V. Owens, S.J.,  
William J. Cullen, S.J., Joseph A. Paquet, S.J.

ISBN 1-60067-107-1

December 2009

Oral History Program  
Campion Center  
319 Concord Road  
Weston, MA 02493-1398  
781-788-6800  
[info@jesuitoralhistory.org](mailto:info@jesuitoralhistory.org)  
[www.jesuitoralhistory.org](http://www.jesuitoralhistory.org)

AMDG

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or sometimes two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.

## Publications

1	Fr. George W. Nolan	60	Fr. Arthur H. Paré
2	Fr. John F. Broderick	61	Fr. Richard T. Cleary
3	Fr. Joseph S. Scannell	62	Fr. Gerard L. McLaughlin
4	Fr. Joseph G. Fennell	63	Fr. Francis J. O'Neill
5	Fr. James F. Morgan	64	Fr. Neil P. Decker
6	Fr. John V. Borgo	65	Fr. Joseph R. Laughlin
7	Bro. William J. Spokesfield	66	Fr. John J. Karwin
8	Fr. Lawrence E. Corcoran	67	Fr. Paul T. Lucey
9	Fr. John J. Caskin	68	Bro. Edward P. Babinski
10	Fr. William F. Carr	69	Bro. Vincent M. Brennan
11	Fr. Alwyn C. Harry	70	Fr. James J. Dressman
12	Fr. John F. Foley	71	Fr. Lawrence J. O'Toole
13	Fr. Leo F. Quinlan	72	Fr. William J. Cullen
14	Fr. Patrick A. Sullivan	73	Fr. Thomas Vallamattam
15	Fr. John J. McGrath	74	Fr. Edward J. Hanrahan
16	Fr. Victor F. Leeber	75	Fr. Donald L. Larkin
17	Fr. Charles G. Crowley	76	Fr. Paul A. Schweitzer
18	Fr. Wilfrid J. Vigeant	77	Archbp. Lawrence A. Burke
19	Fr. James T. Sheehan	78	Fr. William C. McInnes
20	Fr. Francis X. Sarjeant	79	Fr. Stanley J. Bezuska
21	Bro. Italo A. Parnoff	80	Fr. John B. Handrahan
22	Fr. Dudley R.C. Adams	81	Fr. Henry "Harry" J. Cain
23	Fr. Martin P. MacDonnell	82	Fr. William D. Ibach
24	Fr. Robert E. Lindsay	83	Fr. Herbert J. Cleary
25	Fr. Ernest F. Passero	84	Fr. Martin F. McCarthy
26	Fr. Walter M. Abbott	85	Fr. Francis A. Sullivan
27	Fr. James P. McCaffrey	86	Fr. Robert J. Daly
28	Fr. Aram J. Berard	87	Bro. Cornelius C. Murphy
29	Fr. Joseph F. Brennan	88	Fr. Robert D. Farrell
30	Fr. James W. Skehan	89	Fr. James F. Bresnahan
31	Fr. Joseph P. O'Neill	90	Fr. Raymond G. Helmick
32	Bro. Calvin A. Clarke	91	Fr. William J. Hamilton
33	Fr. Edward J. Murawski	92	Fr. John J. Paris
34	Fr. Paul T. McCarty	93	Fr. Donald J. Plocke
35	Fr. Anthony R. Picariello	94	Fr. Joseph F. X. Flanagan
36	Fr. Joseph H. Casey	95	Fr. James J. Hosie
37	Fr. Joseph E. Mullen	96	Fr. Robert R. Dorin
38	Fr. Joseph A. Paquet	97	Fr. Michael A. Fahey
39	Fr. William G. Devine	98	Fr. James W. O'Neil
40	Fr. Philip K. Harrigan	99	Fr. George A. Gallarelli
41	Fr. John J. Mullen	100	Fr. Francis R. Allen
42	Fr. James B. Malley	101	Fr. Walter R. Pelletier
43	Fr. John F. Devane	102	Bro. Paul J. Geysen
44	Bro. H. Francis Cluff	103	Fr. Joseph T. Bennett
45	Fr. William J. Raftery	104	Fr. J. Thomas Hamel
46	Fr. John J. Mandile	105	Fr. Joseph B. Pomeroy
47	Fr. John W. Keegan	106	Fr. Simon E. Smith
48	Fr. William A. Barry	107	Fr. John E. Brooks
49	Fr. Robert G. Doherty	108	Fr. John P. Reboli
50	Bro. Edward L. Niziolek	109	Fr. Charles J. Dunn
51	Fr. Albert A. Cardoni	110	Fr. James C. O'Brien
52	Fr. David G. Boulton	111	Fr. Robert F. Regan
53	Fr. Alfred O. Winshman	112	Fr. Edward J. Small
54	Fr. Paul J. Nelligan	113	Fr. Vincent A. Lapomarda
55	Fr. Edward F. Boyle	114	Fr. Earle L. Markey
56	Fr. John F. Mullin	115	Fr. Normand A. Pepin
57	Fr. John J. Donohue	116	Fr. Gerard C. O'Brien
58	Fr. Richard W. Rousseau	117	Fr. George L. Drury
59	Fr. Francis J. Nicholson	118	Fr. Clarence J. Burby
		119	Fr. Denis R. Como

Interview with Fr. John E. Brooks, S.J.  
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
March 25, 2009

**EARLY YEARS**

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** Welcome to our conversation. It should go along very nicely. Let's begin with when and where you were born, as well as something about your father and mother.

**JOHN BROOKS:** Well, I was born, like many children of Catholic families in Boston in the early 1920s, at St. Margaret's Hospital in Dorchester on July 13, 1923. I grew up in the West Roxbury section of Boston and began my schooling at a Boston public school named the Randall G. Morris School, long since demolished and replaced by apartments.

On completing sixth grade, the teacher I had, a Miss Helen Sullivan, urged my parents to send me to the Boston Latin School. There I enrolled in what they called the Sixth Class (the seventh grade). For the next six years I studied there and completed my high school education.

There was considerable travel involved, as I would board a street car each morning in West Roxbury, travel to Forest Hills and the Arborway, transfer to another street car that took me through Jamaica Plain and into Roxbury. It was about a one-hour trip each way.

Latin School was quite rigorous and demanding academically. The workload was heavy, and I'm not sure that I fully appreciated at the time the education the school provided me during the years I was there. There wasn't much "*cura personalis*" [personal attention]; you either did the work or were dismissed.

#### HIS FATHER

RR: Before we go further with schooling, could you tell us something about your father, your mother, your siblings?

JB: My Dad, also John Brooks, was employed by the New England Telephone Company. Over the years, he rose to the position of Division Plant Superintendent. In those days, the company was led by a president to whom a general manager reported. Under the general manager were four division plant superintendents located in Boston, Springfield, Brockton, and Portland, Maine. At one time or another, my father held that position in Portland, Springfield, and Brockton.

When he was stationed in Springfield, my family moved to there, but I was a member of the Armed Forces in Europe at the time. When he was appointed to Brockton, the family moved to Needham. Following his retirement, my father lived for another twenty-three years, and was well into his late eighties when he died.

## HIS MOTHER

RR: I see. All right. So now tell us something about your mother.

JB: My mother, Mildred McCoy, was born and brought up in Dorchester. She was one of nine children and lived to the age of 94.

RR: Did she stay at home all the time?

JB: Yes, she was a homemaker all her adult life. Along with my father, she was a tremendous support for all our family.

RR: How about any brothers and sisters?

JB: I am the oldest of four children. Next is Mildred, Marion, and Paul.

## HOLY CROSS

RR: So what did you do when you completed high school?

JB: Throughout my years at Latin School, I knew that I wanted to attend college at Holy Cross. That was probably due to the fact that among my parents' very good Jesuit friends was Fr. Timothy Phelan, S.J., who was at that time the moderator of athletics at Holy Cross. This relationship meant that my father and I were in attendance at countless Holy Cross football and baseball games at Fitton Field from 1935 to early 1940s.

School days at Latin School ended at 2:30 PM, and it was not unusual for my Dad to pick me up and drive to Worcester for a late afternoon baseball game.

RR: So it's easy to see why you wanted to go to Holy Cross for college.

JB: Among the many Jesuit friends my family had were the McManus brothers, Fr. Paul and Fr. Frank, at B.C. They were related to us on my father's side of the family. We were also very close to Fr. Maurice Whelton, S.J. at B.C. So it would not be unusual for me to come home from school and find a Jesuit in the house who would join us for dinner. My father then would drive the Jesuit back to B.C.

RR: So then you went to Holy Cross?

JB: Yes, I graduated from Latin School in 1942 and enrolled at Holy Cross.

#### UNITED STATES ARMY

RR: What impact did World War II have on your education?

JB: By 1942 the war had started, so I remained at Holy Cross for only one semester. In January 1943 I volunteered for the United States Army, and along with many friends and classmates began a military career.

After basic training at Fort Monmouth in New Jersey, I moved on there to be trained in a school of communications. Eventually, in June 1944 I was shipped out to England aboard a transport ship. By the last week in June I was transported over the English Channel and landed on the beaches of Normandy.

For the remainder of the war, I worked with "repeaters" or telephone volume boosters, so that as Patton's Army made its dramatic moves forward across



France, communication lines were kept open and operative by our installation and maintenance of newly installed repeaters.

RR: Did you settle down some in one place?

JB: I spent considerable time in a small town named Stainville, about half-way between Paris and Nancy. I was there with three other enlisted men; we were what you might call “abandoned” there. We neither saw another American, nor received mail or pay for months. But we were able to procure food only through the kindness and generosity of a nearby RAF unit.

Eventually, we were “unearthed” and moved to a larger French city, Châlons-sur-Marne. There I remained until the end of the war, working with French telephone personnel on more sophisticated equipment.

#### BACK TO HOLY CROSS

RR: What happened to you when the war ended?

JB: Discharged from the Army in January 1946, I returned to Holy Cross in March along with a large number of returning veterans. When I first entered Holy Cross in 1942, I asked to pursue a science curriculum, but was denied by the then dean, who said to me, “You’ve been studying Latin and Greek for a number of years, so that’s what you’ll continue to do.” On my return in 1946, however, I was allowed to enroll as a physics major. That decision pleased me, and I graduated in 1949 as a physics major.

RR: What did you feel you were working towards?

JB: I had an interest in becoming a petroleum engineer or a geophysicist.

## FROM GEOPHYSICS TO THE JESUITS

RR: How did you develop your interest?

JB: I enrolled at Pennsylvania State University as a graduate student in geophysics under the tutelage of a new and well-known department chairman.

RR: At that point, you certainly knew what you wanted to study.

JB: Yes, but while at Penn State I began to think seriously about the Society of Jesus. I had not spent time at Holy Cross addressing the idea, but it now seemed to consume me. Why now and not earlier, I don't know. Perhaps it was because I was now in a very different environment. In any event, when I returned to Boston at Thanksgiving time, I made an appointment to visit the provincial's office on Commonwealth Avenue. There I met with Brother Kilmartin, and was interviewed by several Jesuit priests.

RR: Do you remember who interviewed you?

JB: I don't recall the priests' names, but I do remember the answer I received. I was told to return to Penn State, earn my degree, and then contact the provincial's office. However, in January 1950, after I had returned to the university, I received a letter informing me that I was to report to the Shadowbrook novitiate on February 19.

Why the change in plan, I've never learned. But over the years, I've surmised that what probably occurred was that the then Provincial, John McEleney, S.J. was named Bishop of Jamaica in January, and in the process of clearing off his desk decided to have me enter immediately.

#### STARTING AT SHADOWBROOK

RR: So you then went ahead as requested?

JB: Yes, I arrived at Shadowbrook in February 1950, immediately after a very heavy snowstorm. On arrival, I learned that I knew at least one novice, namely Joe Flanagan, who had also grown up in West Roxbury. Joe Flaucher was my "angel" [guide for the first few weeks].

RR: Were there any others entering with you?

JB: No, I entered alone. My official entrance date was February 20, 1950, which in those days was the Jesuit feast day of Robert Southwell, S.J. His feast day was subsequently changed in a re-organization of the Jesuit calendar to December 1, which he shares with St. Edmund Campion and other English martyrs.

RR: All right. Tell us more about your experience at Shadowbrook.

JB: First, I have to say that I was very happy at Shadowbrook. I made many good friends there such as Paul Hayes, Eddie Hanrahan, and Jack Dempsey. Due to my age, I did not follow the normal two full years in the novitiate. After a year and half, while still

a novice, I was moved on to the juniorate in pursuit of its regular course of studies in the classics.

#### TO WESTON FOR PHILOSOPHY

RR: So we're talking about a year and a half?

JB: Yes, I moved on to Weston in 1952 for studies in philosophy, a subject that proved not to be of particular interest to me and one that I was never tempted to pursue academically. On completing the philosophy course over two years, I was pleasantly surprised to be assigned to Holy Cross for regency to teach mathematics and physics.

There I worked for two happy years under the direction of Fr. Tom Smith, Chairman of the Math-Physics Department. We enjoyed a wonderfully happy community life at Holy Cross with nearly one hundred Jesuit priests, three or four scholastics, and four or five Jesuit brothers.

RR: Those were literally the great days of the Province.

JB: Yes, we had a group of scholastics; over my two years there they included people such as Larry Dore, Jake Handrahan, Joe Pomeroy, and Pat Ryan. Most of us prefected in the student resident areas of Fenwick and O'Kane Halls, and had the challenging task of taking attendance each morning at a compulsory student Mass. I can still recall students hurriedly running toward St. Joseph Memorial Chapel. as we were required to bar the doors promptly at 7:00 AM.

RR: I have vivid memories of that myself when I was a student at Holy Cross. What about your teaching?

**JB:** I enjoyed teaching mathematics and physics, and even introduced a geology offering for non-science majors.

#### **RETURN TO WESTON FOR THEOLOGY**

**RR:** And then to theology?

**JB:** Yes, after two years I was assigned to Weston to begin my studies in theology. These were very significant years for me, as I became quite attracted to theology. The serious study of theology gradually opened a whole new world to me. I recall listening to Fr. Frank Lawlor, S.J., lecturing us on church councils, something that I had never before heard of. It was exciting, and as time went on, I learned more and more. I expressed an interest in pursuing further theological studies. It was only on the completion of tertianship that I learned of my assignment to Rome and further study in theology at the Gregorian.

**RR:** Was that an important decision for you?

**JB:** Yes, it has proved to be most satisfying for me; I have no regrets about moving from the field of science to theology. I find theology to be not only extremely interesting, but also truly refreshing.

**RR:** Could you conclude this time in your life by telling us a few interesting things that happened to you during those theology years at Weston?

**JB:** Well, I was a very close friend of Joe MacDonnell's and both of us were strongly competitive by nature. As we went through the course, we would take great delight in organizing our baseball and touch football

games—particularly those played against scholastics living on the opposite side of the house at Weston, who were studying philosophy. We had lots of fun and plenty of laughs.

While at Weston, I also worked a bit with Fr. Dan Linehan, S.J., and Jim Skehan, S.J., in the B.C. Geophysics building. There I was able to keep up my interest in geophysics, learn a bit of geology, and acquire some familiarity with seismographs.

## ORDINATION

RR: How about your ordination? Tell us something about that important moment in your life.

JB: I was ordained along with thirty-one others, I believe, on June 13, 1959. I can still recall the time we spent in preparation under the direction of Fr. John Lynch, S.J. Ordination day was a beautiful day, and we were ordained by Cardinal Cushing in the order of our seniority in the Society.

Being a member of the Society only since 1950, I had less seniority and, therefore, was the next to last to be ordained, while my good friend Frank Miller, who had first entered Holy Cross with me back in 1942, was the thirty-second and last one.

## TERTIANSHIP AND DOLDRUMS

RR: So after theology you went to your tertianship?

JB: Yes, I went to St. Robert's Hall in Pomfret, Connecticut, for tertianship. It was not a particularly exciting or challenging year, and the ten months seemed to be an eternity. The tertian master, Fr. Bill Murphy, S.J.,

was a wonderful human being, but there was little life in the house and we were only occasionally sent to a parish for a weekend.

From the point of view of one's health, there probably could not have been a better regimen. There was plenty of exercise by way of walking and volleyball, a healthy diet fortified by fresh vegetables grown on the farm, and an abundance of rest—far more than we needed. I was undoubtedly never healthier than I was as a tertian, but very little was accomplished by way of work.

RR: Did the tertian master let you out much?

JB: We had very, very few parish calls. Some of us never got out of the house until Lent, and afterwards it was back to St. Robert's. I did give a Novena of Grace at St. John's Church in Cambridge, and that proved to be my only assignment.

#### GREAT YEARS IN ROME

RR: When you left tertianship, where did you go?

JB: I went to Rome to study theology, a move that turned out to be one of the greatest gifts of my life. In 1962, my second year there, the first session of the Vatican Council convened, bringing immense excitement to life in Rome. I enjoyed a number of excellent professors in Rome, including teachers at the Gregorian and the Biblical Institute.

I was taking a course at the latter institution under the direction of Fr. Stanislaus Lyonnet, S.J., when suddenly the Holy Office removed him and a colleague of his at the Biblicium, Fr. Max Zerwick, S.J., from their

teaching positions. As rebellious students, many of us who were enjoying their classes began formulating a single-page statement extolling the professors' strengths and virtues, publishing them in English, French, Spanish, German, and Italian, and then distributing them to the Council fathers as they exited St. Peter's each noon.

RR: Did they listen to your protests?

JB: Well, they readily accepted them, and it was not very long before the professors were returned to their teaching positions.

#### COUNCIL UPDATES

RR: What about the council itself? Were you able to attend any sessions?

JB: No, we were not allowed entrance to the council sessions. However, we did have access to a number of bishops, with whom we had interesting discussions about issues that were being debated by council fathers. It was not unusual for an American bishop to join the American Jesuits in residence at the Bellarmino to talk about matters under consideration in the council. Council documents labeled "sub secreto" were available for a price on the street. This was all a new experience for me and one that I thoroughly enjoyed.

RR: It sounds wonderful.

JB: Yes, we had many interesting exchanges with these bishops. They were quite open, asked many questions and related interesting stories. It was a fascinating era



to be in Rome. Council sessions ended at noon each day and by 12:15 PM the city was flooded with rumors as to what had transpired in St. Peter's that morning. Texts of the various schema under discussion could be purchased, and I still have copies of some of them that I use in class to this day. These were days when I acquired a whole new understanding of the Church.

RR: In some ways it may have been overwhelming?

JB: It was certainly an unusual experience, especially when bishops occasionally invited us students out to dinner, engaging us with stories and questions about what was taking place at their council sessions. Some had more difficulty with the Latin employed in their meetings, and from time to time they would seek our advice about issues.

#### TEACHING AT HOLY CROSS

RR: At the end of your studies in Rome, you returned to the States and went to Holy Cross?

JB: Yes, I returned home and was assigned to Holy Cross to teach theology. This appointment had come somewhat as a surprise to me, as I had been led to believe that I was going to be assigned to B.C. I would readily have gone wherever superiors chose to send me, but I've come to believe that Fr. Ray Swords, S.J., then the Holy Cross president, intervened and prevailed upon superiors to have me assigned to Holy Cross.

RR: I gather that he knew you and what you were interested in doing?

**JB:** Yes, he did. He had come to know me and my feelings about Holy Cross during my two years of teaching there as a scholastic. Within a year after my return to campus, I was appointed chairman of the Religious Studies Department and began immediately to build up and improve its quality.

Fr. Swords was an inspiring man to work under. He had a strong work ethic, loved Holy Cross, enjoyed a wonderful vision of what he wanted the college to be, and gave unsparingly of himself to providing superb leadership of the college.

In the mid-60s, however, difficulties began to surface as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) began to emerge on campuses across the country, including Holy Cross. I'm sure that you recall the frightening scenes photographed at Cornell University in which students, armed with rifles, bandoleers, and bullets stood before an administrative building they had occupied, voicing demands they were making of the administration.

**RR:** It was a very difficult time. All this reminds me, how as chairman of theology at the University of Scranton, I used to meet you at our annual theological conferences around the country.

**JB:** That's right. There were always conversations at those meetings about such events.

**RR:** Let's return to your narrative about these troubled times at schools, including Holy Cross.

#### **TOUGH DAYS WITH GENERAL ELECTRIC**

**JB:** Those were difficult times for everyone on college cam-

pus. I had a student in my office just a few days ago who was preparing a kind of a capstone project and was inquiring about the 1968-70 years. I had been appointed Dean of the College in the fall of 1968. In December of that year we experienced a student strike on campus, when General Electric sent recruiters to campus seeking job applicants. The more radical students were protesting against General Electric, because of the company's involvement with providing armament for U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam.

RR: Those were complicated times.

JB: On the day the GE recruiters came to campus, hundreds of student strikers lined up in front of Hogan Campus Center and denied entrance to the GE personnel. College Security intervened and identified a handful of students judged to be responsible for the strike.

RR: Was that the end of it?

JB: No, because, while there were hundreds of white students among the protesters, the handful that were apprehended were all black students. When their being selected was seen as racism, the black students threatened a walk-out. Again, Fr. Swords displayed his leadership skills. He gathered a small group of active, involved faculty and administrators, including an outside, black psychologist, whom some of us knew well and respected.

This group met every day for about a week. There was little or no communication with anyone outside the group. The sessions were long and arduous, and Fr. Swords listened intently and said very little as the

discussions went on. Finally, on Sunday afternoon around five o'clock, Fr. Swords raised his hand and announced that he had decided to grant amnesty to the black students that had been apprehended.

That evening, before an overflowing crowd in the Hogan ballroom, Fr. Swords announced publically his decision to grant amnesty. He received thunderous applause and cheering in response. While the decision was enthusiastically received by all on campus, the reception was not as positive among alumni around the country.

#### APPOINTMENT AS PRESIDENT

RR: What did the alumni do?

JB: In the beginning of 1969, Fr. Swords did what he did every year and began a series of visits to alumni across the country. The response he received was very mixed. Many of the alumni from the 1930s and 1940s had not yet come to grip with racist issues, and had little understanding of what was transpiring within an evolving nation. They were harshly critical of Fr. Swords for "giving in" to the black students. It was a difficult time for Fr. Swords, and he was physically and psychologically worn down by these alumni.

At one point, he asked me to complete these alumni visitations for him, an assignment I was very happy to undertake, as I had absolutely no problem defending his decision. His health continued to decline, and it became clear that fatigue was setting in on him. In September 1969, Fr. Swords informed me that he was going to resign, and he did so shortly thereafter. So in the spring of 1970 it was announced that I was to be Fr. Swords' successor as president of the College of the Holy Cross.

RR: Obviously a major moment in your life. What was your most urgent task?

JB: It was the question of coeducation. While I was dean, we had made an attempt to enroll women, but the board of trustees shot down the idea. At that time, I believed that the arguments offered against Holy Cross enrolling women students were somewhat spurious. I felt that the issue remained an open question and moved quickly to place it before the trustees.

The plan developed was soon approved to begin in the fall of 1972 with a freshman class of approximately 300 women students, and a much smaller group of women in the sophomore and junior classes who were transfers from other colleges. These were women who led the way for the 1,400 or more women students currently enrolled.

We embarked with an interesting plan in mind. There were a number of other undergraduate, liberal arts colleges introducing coeducation around the same time, in particular Amherst and Bowdoin. I was acquainted with the presidents of both schools, and each felt that in moving to coeducation they should simply add women students to the number of men enrolled. With Holy Cross being a bit larger than either of these two colleges, we chose to keep our student size the same.

Hence, in a bold decision we chose to enroll 300 fewer men in the fall of 1972 than we did the previous year and bring in 300 new women students, who would be academically equal to or better than the top 300 men enrolled. This arrangement, of course, vastly improved the academic quality of the first-year class. It was an overall plan that has worked very well and been demonstrated to benefit the college's reputation.

RR: That was certainly a plus.

JB: The negative side, of course, was that we received a number of alumni complaints. As time passed, however, objections became fewer and fewer, and eventually everyone became comfortable and supportive of the change. I hate to think about where Holy Cross would be today had the transition to coeducation not taken place!

RR: What would be some of your other highlights at Holy Cross?

JB: One of the important undertakings Fr. Swords pursued and one I certainly followed up on was the development and professionalization of the faculty. That effort consumed considerable time; it accounted for many meetings and seemingly endless discussion. But today the faculty enjoys a significant and important role in the development of the curriculum and administration by way of its active participation in the school's committee structure.

## DEVELOPING STUDENT ATHLETICS

RR: These days the cooperation of faculty is critical.

JB: Yes, it certainly is. Another project of particular interest to me was athletics. I have long had a strong interest in athletics and the role it can play on campus. At the same time, I have observed and am well-informed about what I believe to be the harmful and unhealthy direction college athletics has been headed over the past twenty or thirty years, particularly at schools playing in Division 1 competition.

Rules violations and abuses are uncovered nearly every day, and the NCAA doesn't seem to be able to curb the offenses. In the course of my presidency, I became a founding father of what today is referred to as the Patriot League, a group of higher educational institutions that began as a football league, but has expanded to be inclusive of all sports.

Among the founding schools were Bucknell, Colgate, Holy Cross, Lafayette, and Lehigh. Working with a formal representative of the Ivy League schools, we were able to develop a football schedule that included inter-league play, plus a football game with three or four Ivy League schools. The basic restriction agreed upon was that beyond an academic index required of all enrolled student-athletes, athletic scholarships were not permitted. Financial awards to an incoming student-athlete were not to exceed that particular student's demonstrated financial need.

RR: Were there changes in the league as time went on?

JB: Yes, there were. A couple of schools that had earlier affiliated with the Patriot League moved out of the league, e.g. William and Mary, and Davidson College. Both were excellent schools, but due to a number of issues they encountered, were forced to withdraw. Without an additional school or two, there are problems.

Georgetown, for example, is a member in football only. Fordham also has been a member for football, but this might well change with their recent announcement that they plan to award football scholarships. Some member schools, e.g., Holy Cross, have broken the scholarship restriction and introduced full athletic scholarships in basketball. Such moves, however, tend

to weaken league structure and complicate the future of the league's direction. The future remains to be seen, and with numerous changes in league presidencies over the years, it's difficult to predict the future. Our original group of presidents believed strongly in the value of what we did, but I don't see many followers on the horizon.

#### FAITHFUL ALUMNI

RR: Yes, you all had and have a good reputation. Is there some other area you would like to touch on?

JB: Like all presidents, I've had to contend with economic, financial issues. There is never sufficient funding to do all that you aspire to do. On the other hand, I was tremendously blessed at Holy Cross with the generosity of its very loyal and faithful alumni. Year after year, a very high percentage of alumni (over 55 percent last year) contribute to the college. The national average is probably around 17 percent and declining. While our alumni may occasionally complain about something they've seen or heard, their loyalty and generosity to the college remain strong. These factors are a very important part of the Holy Cross success story.

#### STUDENT AND FACULTY SUPPORT

RR: As a Holy Cross graduate myself, I can really attest to that.

JB: The availability of student financial aid is always an administrative concern as tuition rises. When I first returned to Holy Cross in the early 1960s, tuition charges were somewhere around \$1,800 to \$1,900 per



year. Today, annual tuition approaches \$40,000. I vividly remember sitting at my desk the day our tuition first exceeded \$20,000 and wondering, “What have we done and where are we headed?”

Faculty compensation is another administrative matter that demands constant attention and additional resources. The quality and dedication of faculty are extremely important ingredients that contribute to the well-being of a college. To attract and retain the best of scholarly teachers, a school’s faculty salaries must be competitive.

#### IMPACT OF COST

RR: And I’m sure that there is an equal burden on the school itself?

JB: Yes, particularly today, given the difficult economic environment in which we labor. A contemporary college president is ever confronted with multiple and challenging problems. While we are coping quite well at Holy Cross and enjoying an academically strong applicant pool each year, it’s imperative that we not stand still and rest on our laurels. One must keep in mind that, if you do stop to rest, competitors will quickly run past you.

There is always a flow of questions that demand careful and thoughtful responses, e.g., How can the school raise more of the financial resources that it needs? How do you continually develop and strengthen a faculty? What new buildings are needed and how are they to be financed? By what means are we to maintain the physical plant and not be weakened by deferred plant maintenance? The issues, it seems, are endless.

RR: Still, you've stood up well under all that.

JB: Yes, I suspect I have. More importantly, I've enjoyed the challenge. In spite of a rather heavy annual travel schedule that drew me off campus for considerable periods of time, I managed to conduct a seminar on Contemporary Christology each fall term, something I continue to do today. I thoroughly enjoy the classroom, and have had some very wonderful students. This past fall, for example, ten excellent students were enrolled as we explored the Christologies of Theologians such as Teilhard de Chardin, Dupuis, Kasper, Küng, Moltmann, Pannenberg, K. Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Schoonenberg, and Jon Sobrino.

RR: That's a good way to give them quite a choice of someone outstanding.

JB: Yes, each student chooses one theologian, familiarizes him or herself with the chosen theologian's background (biography), and then spends the term reading and discussing his/her theologian's Christology. At the term's end, we conduct a two-and-a-half-hour oral exam, where the students are interrogated by three or four Religious Studies Department faculty members whom I've invited to the session. At the end, we all gather together for a festive dinner, at which the students continue to talk with faculty about their particular theologians. In this way, the students acquire a great sense of achievement and are proud of what they've accomplished.

RR: What do you hear from them afterwards?

JB: I read the comments they've submitted on the Student Evaluation Forms they've composed at term's end.

They regularly express appreciation of the pressure they've experienced because of the heavy reading assignments each week. They also appreciate the fact that they have been forced to think. They clearly enjoy the challenge and will frequently note the influence or impact their particular theologian has had on their own spiritual development.

#### GOD'S PROVIDENCE

RR: Great. Now let me ask you the general question we usually ask at the end of our interview: As you look back over the years of your life as well as the people you've worked with, have you felt the presence and influence of God's providence?

JB: Yes, definitely. God is always at work in our lives. There is no way I could have survived twenty-four years as President of Holy Cross without God's presence every day.

As for my personal life, I have a much deeper understanding and gratitude towards God than I ever had in my younger days. I don't find myself complaining much these days. I'm very much aware of the fact that my entire life has been a gift. There is nothing I've done entirely on my own. While in the past I undoubtedly took many of life's gifts for granted, I've now reached a stage of life where I know more than I once did of the importance of the role God plays in my life. I've had a very happy life in the Society of Jesus, for which I'm genuinely grateful.

RR: It has been informative, interesting, and impressive to hear your story. We're grateful. Thank you. God bless you!

## MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,  
That never was it known  
That anyone who fled to thy protection,  
Implored thy help,  
Or sought thy intercession  
Was left unaided.  
Inspired by this confidence  
I fly unto thee.  
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
Despise not my petition,  
But in thy mercy  
Hear and answer me.  
Amen.

**Fr. John E. Brooks, S.J.**

- Born:** July 13, 1923, Dorchester, Massachusetts
- Entered:** February 20, 1950, Lenox, Massachusetts, St. Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook
- Ordination:** June 13, 1959, Weston, Massachusetts, Weston College of the Holy Spirit
- Last Vows:** August 15, 1966, Worcester, Massachusetts, College of the Holy Cross
- 1938 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Latin School - Student
- 1942 Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy Cross Student (fall semester)
- 1943 United States Army - Stationed in France
- 1946 Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy Cross Student, physics major
- 1949 Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University - Graduate student in geophysics (fall semester)
- 1950 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook - Novitiate
- 1952 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied philosophy
- 1954 Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy Cross - Taught mathematics, physics, geology

- 1956 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
theology
- 1960 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert Hall - Tertianship
- 1961 Rome, Italy: Pontifical Gregorian University -  
Doctoral student in theology
- 1963 Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy Cross
- |       |                                                          |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1963- | Taught theology                                          |
| 1964  | Chairman, Religious Studies<br>Department                |
| 1968  | Vice President for Academic Affairs,<br>Dean             |
| 1970  | President                                                |
| 1994  | President Emeritus<br>Loyola Professor of the Humanities |

### Degrees

- 1949 Bachelor of Science, Physics, College of the Holy  
Cross
- 1954 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Boston College
- 1958 Master of Science, Geophysics, Boston College
- 1963 Doctor of Sacred Theology, Pontifical Gregorian  
University, Rome