STRIKE, YOU!
There can be no settling down with past ways, no complacency over past achievements. What we need is to learn to listen, to let other be other, and meet him on his own terms, to trust that genuine meetings will generate new and richer meanings.

The important thing is to keep all avenues open, to see things not merely in their differences but in their connections and relationships, their capacity to complement and reinforce one another.
When did it really begin? What was the first sign that Holy Cross was to have, just before Christmas, 1969, one of the most decisive weeks of its 125-year history? Was it the walkout of the black students, or the conviction of the “Holy Cross 16” for violation of the campus rules on demonstrations; or was it the original confrontation itself? Perhaps it really began at the December 1 faculty meeting which was to consider the issue of an open campus, though afterwards many doubted that the issue had been dealt with adequately, if at all. That meeting was of course preceded by the visit of the Marine recruiters. In addition to objecting to the Marines because of their role in the Viet Nam War, members of the Revolutionary Students’ Union saw them as the front line of the “imperialist, exploitative” foreign policy of the United States. The RSU is another name for the SDS, a group which first formally appeared at Holy Cross in the fall of 1968 after another long, hot summer – this time Chicago was the primary focus of attention.

Expression of student opinion against the war was not completely new at Holy Cross. The previous spring had witnessed the McCarthy phenomenon in Worcester, along with reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King and the increased recruitment of black students to Holy Cross. Perhaps it somehow began as much as 10 years ago, as Holy Cross imperceptibly began to move away from its rigid, classical curriculum, its Tridentine religious orientation, its monastic dorm life; and Raymond J. Swords became the 24th President of the College. As one of his first acts, Fr. Swords asked about 30 students not to return to the campus after the summer. Now that same man, in that week in December, granted amnesty to sixteen students who had been suspended for the remainder of the academic year by the College Judicial Board.

Crisis, in particular, and historical events, in general, are the product of the inextricable course of events and the actions of given individuals at critical times. It was society, which Holy Cross reflects in its own “Jesuit, liberal arts” way, with its problems, fissures and complexities, that set the stage for the events of the week. Individuals, by their actions, were able to reflect upon that society and transcend the limitations of the absurd theatre of legalisms and intransigent principle and give meaning to the situation. It was, in a real way, the response of a person, Raymond Swords, to other persons, the individual Black students, which brought the crisis to an end. His was the truly Christian response. Any other response would have been out of character for the school and for its President. Those of us at Holy Cross claim to interact with persons and learn as individuals, giving not only of our knowledge but also of ourselves. His decision was a moral one – “In this as in all human decisions, the morally right course of action is also the honorable one.” (RJS, 15 October 1969).

In retrospect, the mosaic of that week is composed of personal vignettes interspersed with decisive actions taken by recognizable individuals. It was, after all, the radical down the hall and the quiet, long-haired fellow in Intermediate French who put their
academic careers on the line in the confrontation. It was the senior chemistry major who sought an interview. It was the very human and humane dean of men who had to ask for passage, request the G.E. recruiter to leave and testify to what he saw. It was the young professor and the corridor chaplain who sat in judgment. It was the wide-eyed, unbelieving assistant dean, witness to all night meetings, trying to comprehend what was happening to many of the students he knew, some whom had not only a malaise, but also a blackness and a conscience that could not be compromised.

They were unusual days; a peculiar weekend. Some students and faculty members returned for their Monday classes, found them empty and wondered what happened while they were gone — what really happened. They, like the people outside the campus, may never know. Was the issue the Marines or "open campus" or G.E. or racism? The local press called for a hard line; some alumni angrily wrote overtly racist letters, ending their financial support of the College. The president of a prestigious liberal arts college in the West remarked privately that, by his action, Raymond Swords was making the already precarious position of the college president even more difficult.

But on campus, things were seen from an entirely different perspective. The view of the president was unique; he was concerned with what had transpired but his perspective was not completely circumscribed by the border of the campus. The "crisis committee", a group of advisors organized before the G.E. incident, met with Fr. Swords intermittently from Friday afternoon to slightly more than half an hour before the Sunday announcement. The personalities in the room shifted from time to time, one person leaving now, others joining the group, including Dr. John Scott of the Worcester Human Rights Commission, who served as special mediator, and Rev. Archie Smith, who joined the group early Sunday morning. The group was uncommonly candid in its discussions and more or less isolated from the events of the rest of the campus. Even as the students assembled Sunday in Hogan moved from a call for amnesty to strike to a free university, it became clearer as time went on that the decision would ultimately be that of one man alone.

The decision to grant amnesty to the black students was reached early Saturday evening. Dr. Scott made his presentation of the situation and gave his advice as to the appropriate action. Fr. Swords said little, occasionally asking for clarification; through it all he was a considerate host — making sure all had enough coffee. He was obviously tired from meeting all day with the Trustees and was, more than anyone else, aware of the gravity of the situation, including the implications and ramifications of any action taken. One of the Trustees was also there for most of the deliberations, giving his advice as a lawyer and making observations as a genuinely concerned and knowledgeable alumnus. It was not difficult for the group to reach a consensus. It was apparent from what Dr. Scott had said that the Black students were determined to leave Holy Cross, as they announced Friday at their news conference. It was clear from what Fr. Swords said later that he was impressed with the sincerity of those students he knew who were involved. While he might not have been able to understand completely all the ramifications of what was at stake, he realised that if a Senior R.A., on his way to law school, and a serious, Junior pre-med. could leave school, jettisoning all that they had worked for at Holy Cross, there had to be some validity to the Black students' statement that they had been the victims of de facto racism.

Late Saturday night discussion turned to the problem of the white students involved. There were a number of alternatives suggested, though no real consensus was reached. At 3 A.M. it was decided to break off the discussion. Fr. Swords directed that the lights be left on, to avoid suspicion; all left Loyola by various doors to avoid the woman from the press in the vestibule. At 10 A.M. Sunday, when the deliberations resumed, a definite shift in position occurred. Now, a member of the group, a man of amazing stamina, made a short statement that seemed to clarify the situation, endorsing Dr. Scott's original recommendation. After this, it was only a matter of time before most of the group had talked and reasoned its way to the final solution. One man played the devil's advocate throughout — he forced the rest to clarify, flesh out and support their position. After questioning each of the group privately and informally at lunch, Fr. Swords apparently reached his decision. The statement that Fr. Swords was later to read was written in sections, by different groups, to be edited and revised by him. The statement was designed to maintain the integrity of the judicial system and the dean of men's staff, and still readmit the suspended students to the school by Presidential amnesty — not a mitigation of guilt but a suspension of sentence.

At first Fr. Swords had been reluctant to make the announcement himself; later he saw it was his responsibility. The deliberation had been an ordeal. For those who saw from the start what
the final solution was to be, it was less tiring. In the beginning, Fr. Swords had no clear idea of what the outcome would be. Only once did he show any doubt or hesitation. On the stairs of Loyola, leaving for the ride to Hogan in the gently falling snow, he requested: "Now let's say a prayer that this is the best thing."

In Hogan, the situation was tense. The group had worked itself to the position that it would leave if amnesty were not granted. There were no Black students in evidence, though two BSU spokesmen were present. They had known the night before what the decision was to be. The suspended white students sat in the lounge in a circle on the floor. The nervous humor and revolutionary rhetoric had now vanished in an atmosphere of tense anticipation. With characteristic wit, Fr. Swords began his announcement: "Only 198 days..."

The audience remained quiet for the duration of the announcement. At the end, the hall resounded with a hearty, yet solemn standing ovation. Back stage and in the auditorium there were men of Holy Cross in tears, exhausted, relieved and joyful that somehow a settlement had been reached.

This was the first time that a crisis at Holy Cross reached the level of a major campus disruption. That it occurred was perhaps unfortunate. Holy Cross could have avoided most of the more difficult aspects of the crisis if the school had not made a sincere ("white liberal" and perhaps belated) effort to recruit Black students. The events of that week were unique in many ways. All the activities were completely non-violent. The tactical move of the black students - the walk-out - was perhaps the ultimate weapon, a master stroke. The response of the student body was also unique. Rarely has such a united student body emerged from similar situations elsewhere. This sense of unity was not unanimous. A number of faculty members objected to Fr. Swords' action on either procedural or substantive grounds. Only time will reveal the effect this week had on the make-up and attitude of the faculty.

A week of years after the G.E. confrontation, the first semester of the Free University came to an end after prolonged discussion on a wide variety of topics. Some students found they had an extra week of vacation to work or ski. A telling number of other students, however, stayed on to try to understand what had happened and to grope toward solutions.

The emotional aspects of such occurrences give rise to many expressions of sincerity and to much easy talk. It remains to be seen whether the furor of the first section of the Free University will have been drowned in mid-year holiday cheer. Hopefully, there will be more lasting effects evident in the many semesters at Holy Cross to come.

If there is to be a difference, it will be up to the students, the people who live and study and smoke and drink at Holy Cross. The leader-type Seniors, the Freshmen with their malaise, the pre-med, the Sophomore, and the prospective Fenwick scholar must join with the individuals who will emerge with recognizable identities from the faceless mass at Holy Cross, the all too silent majority, who will have to pluck up and tear down, to build and to cultivate.
There’s a kind of native curiosity on the students’ part. They feel the way they get a lot of the material is not actually relevant to their main concern, the quality of our society, the quality of life. It seems to me that education at any particular time, if it’s really to function as an education, has to begin with the kinds of problems facing society at that stage of its development. If they come here and all of what they have prescinds from this, then naturally they’re going to feel that this is all irrelevant. It’s one of the great words now, it’s a cliche. Students are getting a certain amount of truth, but there’s no real creative process going on here. Unless we can face the kinds of concerns that are actually theirs, what they are really curious about and bring all the disciplines we have in some sense to bear upon this, then I don’t think we’re really doing anything.