

in a

# Word™

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**BLACK LIVES  
MATTER!**

Photo by Father James Pawlicki, SVD

**NO KIDDING, WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND**

by

**Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD**

There is no doubt in my mind that the time-honored saying “What goes around comes around” took its origin from Ecclesiastes 1:5, 6 & 9, “The sun rises and the sun sets; then it presses on to the place where it rises. Shifting south, then north, back and forth shifts the wind, constantly shifting its course... What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new under the sun!”

In early September 1943, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi was a small town whose immediate environs was a veritable wilderness. The loose urban core of homes and small businesses was surrounded by formidable wooded areas, at times intercepted by near impassable swamps. While such a wilderness atmosphere may sound more than a bit daunting, even inhospitable to many, to a 13-year-old boy it was paradise.

Trailing my first cousin Robert Harold Perry – our mothers were sisters – by 13 years, Leonard Olivier by 6 years, my older brother Louis Verlin by 4 years and several other boys from Sacred Heart Church in Lake Charles, Louisiana, I boarded the L & N (Louisville and Nashville) train for Bay St. Louis. It was a Negro thing, of course, to sit behind the engine with coal cinders flying into my eyes. As soon as I had learned Latin, I dubbed the L & N “Lente et Numquam” – slowly and never.

After the brief misadventure of crying for a spell on the afternoon of my first day at St. Augustine Seminary, I suddenly took off running to explore the magic of the strange theater into which I had been thrust. For sure, I had never seen the likes of such a place that my Lake Charles homeboys ahead of me called “The Bay.” From that point on, there sprouted in me an undying attachment and loyalty to the place.

Quite unknown to me at the time, St. Augustine Seminary existed only because there was no other place in the North, South, East or West in the United States where a Negro boy could study for the priesthood. Discrimination and its legal cousin, segregation, reached from church pews to the altar to the priests to the deacons to the religious women and men to the bishops everywhere. As Spanish and Portuguese missionaries had done in Latin America, everyone disdained minorities.

No one in America had the faith, the fortitude or the stomach to do anything about the Catholic Negro problem. Ironically, the solution had its genesis in a land across the sea. Because of the iron fist of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who waged a religious war (Kulturkampf)

against the Catholics, Arnold Janssen, a priest from Goch, Germany, crossed to the right bank of the Meuse River to found the Society of the Divine Word on September 8, 1875 in the village of Steyl, Holland, an institute devoted to the exclusive evangelization of peoples in foreign countries. Seeing the great demand for evangelizing the New World, German SVDs set out to supply it.

Only a century old and still very much a mission country, the United States beckoned to Arnold Janssen and his crew. It was at one and the same time an economic and a religious beckoning. Straddling the two largest of the earth’s five oceans, the United States was a young economic colossus and religious hotbed that would be a market for SVD magazines and a field ripe for harvesting the Good News.

So in October 1895, Arnold Janssen put Brother Wendelin (Joseph Meyer) on a ship to New York where he contacted immigrant Germans whose addresses he had. Brilliant, congenial and business-savvy, he quickly sold subscriptions for SVD publications and readied the way for Brother Homobonus in 1896.

When Brother Michael Fecken and Fathers John Peil and Joseph Fischer arrived, a community was formed headed by Father Peil. In 1898, they decided that New York/New Jersey was not the area to establish SVD headquarters. On a tip from a priest friend in Chicago, they purchased a farm in Shermerville, some 20 miles north of Chicago where they established a technical school; hence the name Techny.

Father Aloysius Heick was dispatched from Techny in 1905 to establish a parish among the Negroes in Merigold, Mississippi. Seeing how Negroes gravitated to Negro preachers, Father James Wendel began to talk about a seminary for Negro priests, a goal that was realized in 1920 when Father Matthew Christmann established a seminary in Greenville. Moved to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi in 1923 for more room, St. Augustine Seminary went on to ordain four score priests and, until about 1960, 40 percent of all black priests had studied at least part-time at St. Augustine.

Next month will mark 72 years from my first day in the seminary till now, with lowlights of lapses and downright blunders, with highlights of insights and wisdom, begging forgiveness for any neglect and hurt I have inflicted, thanking God for any kindness, service or healing I have rendered to any sister or brother.

# BLACK LIVES MATTER!

*In these past months of violence, wanton murders, and confrontations with police a movement began centered on the phrase "Black Lives Matter". The firestorm that erupted has been bitter to say the least.*

*In a September 4, 2015 opinion section the New York Times published an editorial with the headline **The Truth of Black Lives Matter** in response to the vitriolic attacks against use of the phrase. There have been many opinions and attacks on this article since it appeared. We believe that this editorial has merit and deserves examination.*

*The second to last paragraph we emphasized with bold print.  
-Editor of IN A WORD-*

"The [Republican Party](#) and its acolytes in the news media are trying to demonize the protest movement that has sprung up in response to the all-too-common police killings of unarmed African-Americans across the country. The intent of the campaign — evident in comments by politicians like [Gov. Nikki Haley of South Carolina](#), [Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin](#) and [Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky](#) — is to cast the phrase "Black Lives Matter" as an inflammatory or even hateful anti-white expression that has no legitimate place in a civil rights campaign. Former [Gov. Mike Huckabee](#) of Arkansas crystallized this view when he said the other week that the Rev. Dr. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), were he alive today, would be "appalled" by the movement's focus on the skin color of the unarmed people who are disproportionately killed in encounters with the police. This argument betrays a disturbing indifference to or at best a profound ignorance of history in general and of the civil rights movement in particular. From the very beginning, the movement focused unapologetically on bringing an end to state-sanctioned violence against African-Americans and to acts of racial terror very much like the one that took nine lives at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., in June.

The civil rights movement was intended to make Congress and Americans confront the fact that African-Americans were being killed with impunity for offenses like trying to vote, and had the right to life and to equal protection under the law. The movement sought a cross-racial appeal, but at every step of the way used expressly racial terms to describe the death and destruction that was visited upon black people because they were black.

Even in the early 20th century, civil rights groups documented cases in which African-Americans died horrible deaths after being turned away from hospitals reserved for whites, or were lynched — which meant being hanged, burned or dismembered — in front of enormous crowds that had gathered to enjoy the sight.

The Charleston church massacre has eerie parallels to the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. — the most heinous act of that period — which occurred at the height of the early civil rights movement. Four black girls were murdered that Sunday. When Dr. King [eulogized](#) them, he did not shy away from the fact that the dead had been killed because they were black, by monstrous men whose leaders fed them "the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism." He said that the dead "have something to say" to a complacent federal government that cut back-room deals with Southern Dixiecrats, as well as to "every Negro who has passively accepted the evil system of segregation and who has stood on the sidelines in a mighty struggle for justice." Shock over the bombing pushed Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act the following year.

During this same period, freedom riders and voting rights activists led by the young John Lewis offered themselves up to be beaten nearly to death, week after week, day after day, in the South so that the country would witness Jim Crow brutality and meaningfully respond to it. This grisly method succeeded in Selma, Ala., in 1965 when scenes of troopers bludgeoning voting rights demonstrators compelled a previously hesitant Congress to acknowledge that black people deserved full citizenship, too, and to pass the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#). Along the way, there was never a doubt as to what the struggle was about: securing citizenship rights for black people who had long been denied them.

**The "Black Lives Matter" movement focuses on the fact that black citizens have long been far more likely than whites to die at the hands of the police, and is of a piece with this history. Demonstrators who chant the phrase are making the same declaration that voting rights and civil rights activists made a half-century ago. They are not asserting that black lives are more precious than white lives. They are underlining an indisputable fact — that the lives of black citizens in this country historically have not mattered, and have been discounted and devalued.**

People who are unacquainted with this history are understandably uncomfortable with the language of the movement. But politicians who know better and seek to strip this issue of its racial content and context are acting in bad faith. They are trying to cover up an unpleasant truth and asking the country to collude with them."

# in a word or two



The Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) of Xavier University of Louisiana will host a symposium titled, **“Black Lives Matter: Race, Violence, Poverty.”** The symposium will be focused on addressing issues of racial conflict and the need for racial reconciliation, the current culture of violence in our country and the enduring effects of poverty especially among those in the African American community. Xavier University of Louisiana founded by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1925 is the only historically Black and Catholic university in the Western Hemisphere.

This noteworthy event seeks to address critical and urgent concerns of the black community and to serve as a catalyst for new solutions and clear actions. The Black Lives Matter: Race, Violence and Poverty Symposium will be held at Xavier University of Louisiana, in New Orleans on November 6-7, 2015.

The symposium will include, keynote addresses, workshops and panel discussions. Keynote addresses will be given by Marquette University moral theologian, Father Bryan N. Massingale and Miss Brittany N. Packnett, Executive Director for Teach for America in St. Louis and member of the Ferguson Commission. Workshops will delve into issues of poverty, Black Mass incarceration, ethnic and cultural consciousness, understanding white privilege and dealing with law enforcement.

Founded in 1980, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) of Xavier University of Louisiana offers programs in pastoral theology, religious education and pastoral ministry. The IBCS provides an intellectual, spiritual and cultural immersion in the Black Catholic experience for all those interested in or committed to Catholic ministry within the black community. To view speakers and agenda go to <http://www.xulablacklivesmatter.com/>

The 2015 National Black Catholic Men’s Conference will be held October 8-11, 2015. Sponsored by the Bowman Francis Ministry Team the event will be held in Layette, Louisiana at the Double Tree Hotel.

The Conference provides a forum for African American males and youth to discern the critical issues and challenges facing them in the community. It also provides an environment of mentorship and support those seeking a vocation the priesthood, brotherhood, or diaconate. For registration visit <http://www.bowmanfrancisministry.com>

THE NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC CONGRESS 12 (NBCC XII) is scheduled for **July 6-9, 2017** at the Hyatt Regency Orlando in Orlando, Florida. The theme is: Congress XII 2017: “The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Us: act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.” More information to come.



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Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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