

in a

# Word

Xavier University  
celebrates growth  
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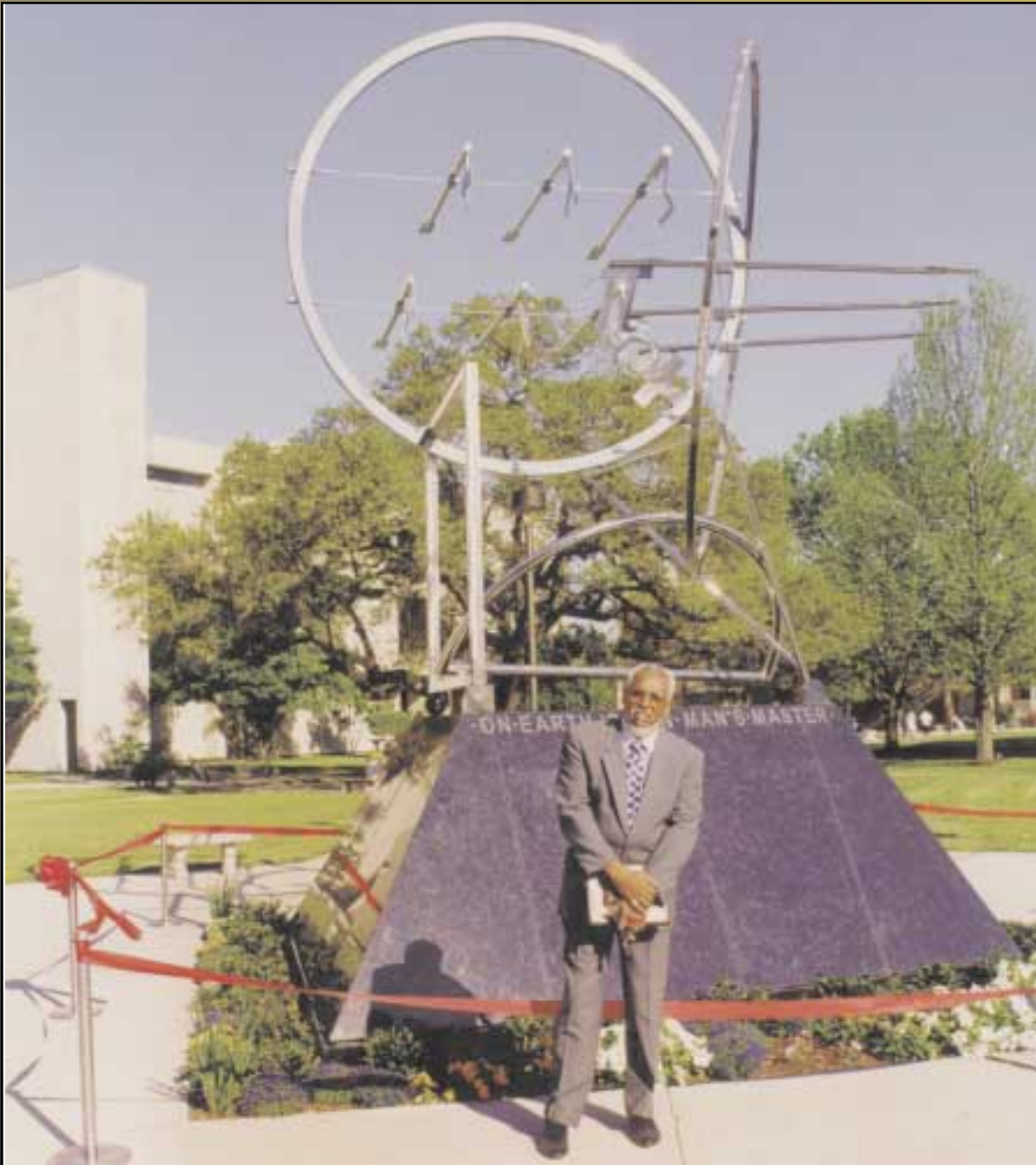


Photo by Father Pawlicki, SVD

***“God’s greatest work on earth is man.  
Man’s master art is the leading of man to God.”***



## Reflections on Life! *Rejection and forgiveness*

Rev. Jerome LeDoux, S.V.D., syndicated columnist

Burning tears ran down the anguished man's face as he squirmed in his wheelchair, desperately begging the jury to spare the life of his son by imposing a life sentence instead of the dreaded death penalty.

A jury had just convicted his son, John William King, of capital murder in the hate driven, blood chilling, fanatical slaying of James Byrd, Jr. of Jasper, Texas.

John William King had been charged with chaining James Byrd, Jr. by the ankles and powering a pickup to drag him **live** and struggling almost three miles until his body was decapitated by a concrete culvert near the end of the run.

Coughing painfully from emphysema, and clutching an oxygen tube, Ronald King choked as he pleaded: "Anything is better than losing him. We've invested a lot of love in that boy. I'd hate to think we're going to lose him."

For all his love for his son John, Ronald King went out of his way to distance himself from his son's racist beliefs. On that note, he had begun to wheel himself out, when he encountered Renee Mulling, a daughter of James Byrd, Jr.

"I told him God bless him. It wasn't his fault," Renee informed the press gathered around them. She thus followed closely in the footsteps of her younger sister, Jamie, who forgave her father's murderers right after the tragedy.

In this kind of brutality, we witness the ultimate in rejection, inasmuch as murder is total and final rejection. It forces all of us to examine our consciences, our attitudes and reluctance to be in the company of different cultures.

Flight into the suburbs and beyond may have partial roots in the fear of crime, but an ugly unwill-

ingness to be near people of another hue or culture should smite the consciences of any persons who flue neighborhoods on this account.

Neighborhood flight is but a shadow of the larger problem which entails a distaste and repugnance for any kind of contact in the workplace, in social matters, even in church.

While John William King's cruel execution of James Byrd, Jr. rocks our complacency, even coldness, about meaningful contact with our fellow humans, Jamie and Renee Byrd's forgiveness of their father's killers inspires us intensely.

Murder, the ultimate in rejection of someone's company, set the stage for an exercise in the most difficult, yet the most basic and necessary, mandate of Jesus.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:26-28).

Jesus, the Prototype of rejection *and* forgiveness, showed the way as no other could, as he hung suspended from a tree- his tormentors jeering and cheering for his impending death:

"Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)".

Bear in mind that an enemy is anyone hostile. That often includes the people who live in our bosom. Those closest to us confirm, "it's a thin line between love and hate".

The skin crawling mental image we all have of James Byrd, Jr. 's dragging and decapitation forces each one of us to acknowledge the ultimate projection of our petty disdain for and lack of appreciation of both our own and other peoples.

# ANCESTRAL LEGACY

Xavier University of Louisiana recently celebrated amazing growth with a "open house" day on campus. The only African American Catholic college in the United States has seen its student enrollment skyrocket in the last ten years. Strong academic programs in the sciences and liberal arts have brought the small school a reputation for quality education of young people.

The open house invited people to tour the campus and see the new facilities and become acquainted with the programs which are offered. Alumni and alumnae along with many parents and young people interested in a Xavier education attended.

One of the highlights of the day was the dedication of a sculpture by John Scott. The internationally known African American artist had created a unique sculpture for the Xavier campus titled "**Ancestral Legacy**".

The piece celebrates the classical forms passed down by the ancient Egyptians to build the future. Mr. Scott said, "The Egyptians built these magnificent things we call pyramids. To do that, they dealt with an awful lot of ideas - mathematical ideas, engineering ideas, all of those things. So to me, those things are symbolic of a holistic human experience in terms of creativity."

The artist chose stainless steel and black granite as the materials for the piece - stainless steel because he has used the industrial material on many of his sculptures and black granite for its permanence, durability and historical significance. The artist wanted a sculpture that was symbolic and elegant. The frame of a triangle, a protractor, a square and two large circles link together like a chain. Four small, black-granite shapes prop up the sculpture: a sphere, a rectangle, a cube and a pyramid. A large version of this black granite pyramid supports the entire structure.

Nine steel rods, with a different mathematical symbol on the end of each, are strung with steel cords and rock in the wind, much like a seesaw. Symbols such as +, \*, ~ and \* bob up and down. The moving pieces of the sculpture are based on the physics of a wave and the principle of energy running through a stainless-

steel cable.

"The concrete forms are all stable," Scott explains about the geometrical shapes. "The symbols are all kinetic, because those ideas are evolving and changing all the time." Since Xavier historically has been an African American university renowned for its strong science and math departments, the sculpture is especially significant. Scott says he wanted to refute stereotypes that limit blacks' talents to sports and dancing. Rather, he hoped to convey that blacks' skills in mathematics and science date back to ancient African cultures such as Egypt.

Although the sculpture was designed to celebrate these classical forms passed down by the Egyptians, Scott emphasized that the sculpture, like its elements, relates to all cultures. "A square, a pyramid, a triangle, a circle are all mathematical forms; they have no ethnicity. They're beyond that."



To complete the sculpture, the top of the granite pyramid is wrapped with the engraved words from the cornerstone of Xavier's Administration Building: "**God's greatest work on earth is man. Man's master art is the leading of man to God.**"

Four benches surrounding the sculpture honor scientists and mathematicians of African descent. Their names are carved into the benches, which are constructed of slabs of black granite resting on stainless-steel cylinders. Not only do the benches signify the achievements of many blacks and provide a place to

rest, but they also serve as a learning tool. Scott noted that the names carved on the benches are those not usually found in textbooks. "I wanted to make sure people get exposed to who and what these people were," he says. "The idea is to teach without saying [anything]. If you're sitting on a bench with all these names day in and day out, eventually you're going to be curious, I hope."

Congratulations to John Scott and Xavier University. In a world of so much inhumanity and violence may they continue to be lights of understanding that "**Man's master art is the leading of man to God**".

*We thank Autumn Cafiero whose article in the New Orleans Magazine March 1999 - Vol. 33 - Issue 5 - was condensed here.*

## in a word or two

**The Josephite Society and the principals and pastors of nine African American Catholic elementary schools in Louisiana and Mississippi are seeking a Development Coordinator** who will solicit financial support through grants, contributions and memorial donations for the nine schools. Six of the schools are located in the New Orleans, LA area. One is in Baton Rouge, LA. One is in Pascagoula, MS, and one is in Natchez, MS.

**Qualifications:** A commitment to Catholic education; bachelor's degree; development experience in nonprofit or educational setting. Send resume and references to:  
Rev. Patrick Healy, S.S.J.,  
St. David Church,  
5617 St. Claude Avenue,  
New Orleans, LA 70117  
or fax to: (504) 948-7852.

**The annual NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY NETWORK (NAACYMN) membership meeting will be held on April 30-May 2, 1999,** at the Town Center Hotel in Silver Springs, Maryland-Washington-DC area.

The gathering will be a Symposium for all who minister to African American youth. The theme will focus on *Mapping Out Our Destiny* as youth ministers and directors of religious education. The facilitator/keynote speaker will be Fr. Joseph Brown, SJ.

This Symposium will be an in depth study of the presentation given by The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D., Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis, *Take Into Account Various Situations and Cultures*, An Address to the Bishops on Evangelization and African Americans on August 29, 1997 at the Eighth National Black Catholic Congress in Baltimore, Maryland and its impact on youth ministry in the African American community.

**The Junior Knights and Junior Daughters of the Knights and Ladies of Saint Peter Claver will hold their National Convention in Washington, DC, July 8-11, 1999.**

Established in 1917 and 1930 respectively. The membership consists of Roman Catholic youth ages 7-17. The youth branches and courts are found in 39 states.

The present Junior Supreme Knight is Jeremy Miles. He is a member of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Junior Branch #139, Houston, Texas. The present Junior Supreme Lady is Blair Friday, she is a member of Angels of Christ, Ct. 265, Kansas City, Missouri. Ms. Friday, 16

years old, was one of nine youth who addressed Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to St. Louis during a Youth Rally.

There are 99 Branches and 166 Courts. The present membership as of December 1998 is as follows:

Junior Knights, 1233; Junior Daughters, 2,033.

**Unity Explosion will be held on July 15-19, 1999 in Houston TX at the Westin Galleria Hotel.** *Unity Explosion* is a conference on Roman Catholic liturgy focusing on enhancing worship through inculturation and education in an environment that is authentically Christian, African American and Catholic. The mission of *Unity Explosion* focuses on the expressed need of African American Catholics in dioceses around the country to bring the contributions of Africa and African American culture to the universal church through liturgy preparation, prayer, art, environment, delivery of the Word, music, sacred movement and hospitality. Unity also offers many workshops geared to youth. For more information, please contact Charolette Davis at the Office of African American Ministries: 713-741-8733.

The First Annual Archbishop James P. Lyke African American Male Image Awards was held on February 20, 1999 at the Holiday Inn-Lakeside in Cleveland, Ohio. The Image Awards honored 12 African American Men for their achievement in the church and community. The afternoon luncheon was sponsored by the local Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver Council and Court #227.

**Institute for Black Catholic Studies will be held June 27-July 17, 1999 at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana.** Msgr. Ray East of Nativity Parish in Washington, DC will deliver the 1999 ICBS Seminar on July 8 and preside at Vespers on July 9. A video of the Institute is also available. The excellent video describes the history and rationale for the Institute. It answers questions about applying, who can attend, how the program is structured.

For more information call: [504] 483-7691 or [504] 485-5138.

**Divine Word Missionaries** is an international missionary community of over 5,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among blacks in the southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

**In a Word** is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center.

James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, and Nicole Swan comprise the editorial staff.

All correspondence to Media Production Center, 199 Seminary Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520, 504-244-6343, FAX 504-244-3343. Electronic messages may be addressed to our Internet address, editor@inaword.com.

Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>