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I Knew Sister Thea Bowman

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Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., Ph.D. (1937-1990)

The year 2010 marks another anniversary, this one more somber than the others. Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., Ph.D., after a great deal of suffering, finally lost her battle to cancer in 1990. Her zest for living, her profound spirituality, and her joy marked all those who had the honor of knowing her. Here are two reflections on her life and influence, the first by Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. who worked with Sr. Thea at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, and the second by one of her former students, Maurice Nutt, C.Ss. R., D.Min.

I Knew Sister Thea Bowman

**Cyprian Davis, O.S.B.
Saint Meinrad Archabbey**

My friendship with Sister Thea Bowman began with faculty membership in the Institute for Black Catholic Studies in the summer of 1980 (1984) at Xavier University in Louisiana. Those were the “glory” days of pioneer and new initiatives. From the beginning, Sister Thea was like one whom I had never known before. It has to be admitted that I was this very “prim and proper” Benedictine monk whose preconceptions were waiting to be shattered by a remarkable Franciscan nun.

Our institute faculty was small. We came to know each other, inside and out. The Holy Spirit was alive. He made us all reconfigured with joy. Often we were on the River walk in the Quarter in the evening. Sister Thea came singing with an aria from Puccini, followed by a Gospel hymn and then a Spiritual. I was mortified. Nuns do not do that. She was overjoyed. I am sure that the angels took up the song.

Sister Thea taught me a lot about living and about dying. She also taught me about fearing and freedom. She was extraordinary. All who worked with her and taught with her came to know this in

one way or another. She would never want to be called “extraordinary.” But the truth is that she had a gift in making us all a little bit out of the ordinary.

Dom. Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., a Benedictine priest since 1956, is Professor of Church History at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. He also serves as archivist for Saint Meinrad Archabbey, the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictines, for the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, and for the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, and is a founding member of the National Black Clergy Caucus and the BCTS, out of which arose the Institute for Black Catholic Studies.