

*T*HEA *B*OWMAN

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THEA BOWMAN

In My Own Words

*Compiled and Edited by
Maurice J. Nutt, C.Ss.R.*



Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province
The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri
www.liguori.org
To order, call 800-325-9521.

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Complete Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-0-7648-1782-3

Sources and permissions are listed at the end of the book.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1
First edition

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

“Go Down Moses”
The Wisdom of the “Old Folks” 1

“Got a Home in That Rock”
The Black Family 9

“Tell Them You’re a Child of God”
The Giftedness of Children 19

“Walk Together Children”
On Being Church 25

“Give Me That Old Time Religion”
On Being Black and Catholic 35

“A Little Talk With Jesus”
The Power of Prayer 45

“The Lord’s Been Here”
Faith 53

“O Mary, Don’t You Weep, Don’t You Mourn”

Hope 59

“I Never Felt Such Love in My Soul Befo’ ”

Love 69

“Little David, Play on Your Harp”

Black Spirituality and Songs of My People 75

“Give Me Jesus”

Jesus and Justice 81

“Done Made My Vow to the Lord”

“Each One, Teach One” 87

“I Know the Lord’s Laid His Hands on Me”

Witnessing 93

“Deep River”

Living With Suffering and Dying 99

Epilogue 109

Sources and Permissions 111

INTRODUCTION

The very name she claimed as a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, while honoring her father, Theon, must have also pleased God. This mighty witness for the Lord would be called “Sister Thea,” a name that literally means God.

Born Bertha Bowman on December 29, 1937, in Yazoo City, Mississippi, Thea was the only child of Theon and Mary Esther Bowman. Undoubtedly, Thea’s call to service and ministry was ignited by the example of her parents. Her father had a promising future as a physician in New York, but an aunt told him doctors were needed to serve the African American community in Mississippi because many African Americans were being denied medical care in the segregated South. Her mother was a teacher by profession and instilled in Thea a love of learning and an appreciation for culture and the arts. Thea often commented on how her mother wanted her to be a proper, sophisticated, and sweet young lady, but Thea had a tendency to be bold, loud, and rowdy. She learned to love and accept herself



“GO DOWN MOSES”
The Wisdom of the “Old Folks”



*When Israel was in Egypt's lan'
Let my people go.
Oppressed so hard they could not stan'
Let my people go.
Go down Moses way down in Egypt lan'
Tell ol' Pharaoh
Let my people go.*

AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUAL



I'm what they used to call an “old folks” child. When I was growing up, my parents, especially my mother, made a concerted effort to keep me in touch with the elders. She wanted me to hear from them. She wanted me to learn the old songs and the old stories. She wanted me to learn from their lips about slavery and what they had been through.

SR. THEA: HER OWN STORY

We were taught that the old people were the treasures of the people: they were the teachers, they were the preachers, they were the healers, and they were the lovers.

SR. THEA: HER OWN STORY

My mother wanted me to be sweet and cultured; she wanted a child who was going to be a little lady who would sit right and talk right, but instead she got a little “rowdy!”

SR. THEA: HER OWN STORY

My mother was born in Greenville, Mississippi, and her mother was a teacher, and she lived in an area where people were very, very poor but very, very proud. They valued learning, they valued music, and they valued the arts. My father was really dedicated to trying to help people, and I grew up with that example.

ALMOST HOME

God was so alive in my world. I was reared around a lot of old people. They knew Scripture. I knew people who could not read or write, but they could quote you a Scripture with the chapter and verse. They would use Scripture when they were tired and a Scripture when they were frustrated, a Scripture to challenge us...a Scripture to threaten you, a Scripture to reward you or to praise you or to teach you; I grew up in that kind of world.

ALMOST HOME

Old folks used to say, “God is bread when you’re hungry. God is water when you’re thirsty. God is a shelter from the storm. God is rest when you’re weary. God’s my doctor. God’s my lawyer. God’s my captain who never lost a battle. God is my lily of the valley.”

ALMOST HOME