

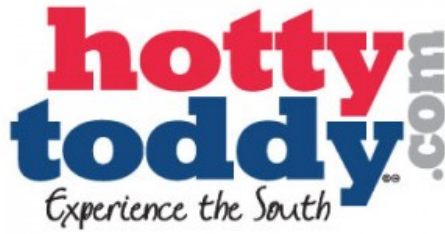


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Dunagin: Late Duncan Gray Jr.'s 1962 Sermons Echo

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What's said about a person at the end of life can speak more about one's character than a chapter of popularity during troubled times.

The Rev. Duncan Gray Jr., retired bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, was being remembered last week for his courageous stand during one of the dark periods of Mississippi history when James Meredith's enrollment as the first black student at the University of Mississippi was accompanied by a riot that bordered on insurrection.

Segregationist Gov. Ross Barnett, along with a strong cadre of supporters in the Legislature, the Citizens Council, much of the Mississippi news media and the general public, had fanned the flames of resistance to desegregation and the federal government to a fever pitch.

There were a few voices of reason, including Duncan Gray's, scattered about the state, but most of them were ignored if not hotly resented to the extent that some who called for obeying federal law

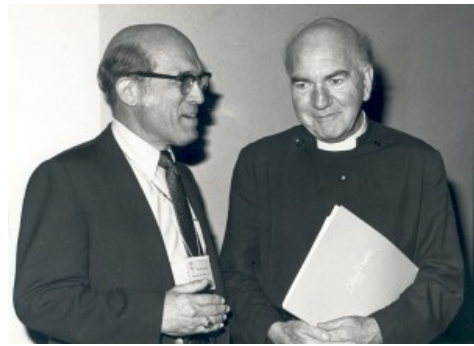


Charles Dunagin

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were threatened with boycotts of their businesses, loss of their pulpits or even physical harm.



Bishop Gray (left) and his mentor, Anglican theologian and Episcopal priest, Reverend Canon John Macquarrie, 1983 (Photo from EpiscopalArchives.org)

Gray, who died last Friday in Jackson at the age of 89, was rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford at the time.

Excerpts from his sermons before and after the Ole Miss riot have been printed in several newspapers, including the Oxford Eagle Sunday which editorially called Gray a "bright light for Mississippi and its people during a long career."

Gray's words in 1962 are applicable, even to today's divisiveness and troubles.

"The seeds of anger and hatred, bitterness and prejudice, are already widely sown, and as Christians, we need to do our utmost to uproot and cast them out," Gray said in a sermon on Sept. 30, the day before Meredith, escorted by federal marshals, enrolled.

A week later, Gray said in his sermon that all people in Mississippi should face up to their guilt in the violence that killed two people during the riot.

"You and I didn't go out there and throw the bricks and the bottles. You and I didn't go out there and fire the guns," Gray said. "Yet you and I, along with every other Mississippian, are responsible in one degree or another for what happened. We are responsible for the moral and political climate in our state which made such a tragedy possible.... The decent, respectable and responsible people of Mississippi have failed when events like those of last Sunday night can take place within our state."

Those old enough to remember 1962 in Mississippi can testify that it took a lot more courage to speak those words to a white congregation then than it would take today.

Charles Dunagin is a retired editor and publisher who is currently residing in Oxford, Mississippi. He can be reached at cdunagin@enterprise-journal.com.



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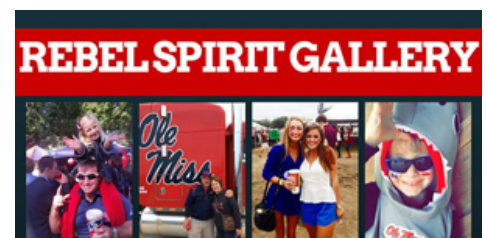
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