

Native sons

by [Merrill Hawkins Jr.](#) in the [June 17, 1998](#) issue

*By Will D. Campbell, And Also with You: Duncan Gray and the American Dilemma. (Providence House, 274 pp.)*

Though the civil rights movement was created by southern African-Americans and, to a large extent, in the African-American churches, a few white southerners supported it. Will Campbell's book tells the story of one of these, Duncan Gray, who was rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford, Mississippi, during the 1960s.

Ten years before Gray arrived in Oxford, Campbell was director of religious life for the University of Mississippi. A native Mississippian educated at Yale Divinity School, Campbell was one of the first white southerners to call for integration and support of *Brown v. Board of Education*. It cost him his job. In telling the story of men like Gray, who supported the civil rights movement out of their theological, not political, concerns, Campbell tells his own story.

The book has two subjects, although only one is reflected in the title. One hundred years before Gray's time, a group of college students eager to support their Confederate nation formed Company A, Eleventh Mississippi Infantry Regiment. Popularly known as the University Greys, this regiment left Ole Miss for military service in 1863. The entire lot was wiped out at Gettysburg. Campbell intertwines their story with Gray's--men separated by time but united by region and the issue of race. Though the two stories have no organic link, and though Gray's story is primary, their linkage is still justified.

When James Meredith arrived at the University of Mississippi in 1962, escorted by U.S. marshals, Gray attempted to address an unruly crowd, calling on them to obey the law and support integration. He chose for his podium a Confederate monument located at the entrance to the campus. On the other side of the monument, addressing the same crowd, stood retired General Edwin Walker, who called on the crowd to resist integration by force. Walker, the outsider, spoke to the mob mentality of the group, while Gray, the native son, challenged people's character. The speech almost cost the young rector his life. What brought him to that moment?

Gray grew up in Mississippi, the son of an Episcopal rector who later became bishop of the Diocese of Mississippi. While a divinity student at the University of the South, he led a movement to integrate the university and divinity school. Many of the faculty supported him, but Gray's uncle, the school's chief academic officer, did not.

Soon after Gray began parish ministry, the Supreme Court issued its school integration ruling. Gray called on his congregations to obey. This made him, with Campbell, one of the few white Mississippians who spoke out in support of the ruling immediately after it was issued. A member of the department of Christian social relations of the Diocese of Mississippi, Gray led the diocese in drafting a statement supporting integration as the only legitimate Christian response.

Gray eventually became bishop of Mississippi, and saw gender and language join race as controversial issues. Would Episcopalians accept women priests? And how was the prayer book to be changed? On both these issues, the bishop came out on the progressive side. Several of the people who were with him on race did not stand with him on gender or liturgy.

In writing about Gray, Campbell has a forum to express his own ideas--themes that have been with him throughout his writing career. Campbell has long critiqued the evil power structures. The people who perpetuated violence in the name of segregation were themselves victims and symptoms, rather than causes.

In *Brother to a Dragonfly* Campbell shifted blame for racism from Klansmen to "the mammas and daddies of the young radicals." In *Also With You*, Campbell depicts the University Greys marching off to battle as pawns. They were "victims of the seeds of time, seeds they did not plant but whose harvest was imposed upon them." In criticizing power structures such as the landed gentry who controlled the southern economy and political system at the time of the Civil War, Campbell calls on southern readers to be responsible. Even white progressive southerners have a tendency to blame other people, such as poor, unenlightened whites, for the region's problems. Campbell says, "You and I and every other white Mississippian are responsible for what has happened."

Another of Campbell's key themes is the importance of religiously informed social activism. One of his criticisms of the church's role in race relations is that it followed the Supreme Court's lead. Campbell calls on religiously oriented social activists to find in the teachings of the church the motivation to address social issues.

Gray is the perfect example of such an approach. He was conservative enough to take seriously the words of the Book of Common Prayer and the liturgy. Gray's starting place was not humanity, but the sovereignty of God and the incarnation.