

ROBERT PENN WARREN REVEREND GALAMISON TAPE # 2

RPW: Tape #2 with Reverend Galamison - proceed.

Rev.G.: Yes. We are affirming the right of people to send their children to private or public schools. Beyond this, the motivations and the truth or inaccuracy behind the motivation must be considered. And in terms of the question raised I would say this, that a man may have a right to take his child out of an integrated school because he feels that the standards are going to go down because the school becomes desegregated - I'm saying this is his right. But there would be almost no scientific data to support his supposition that the standards are going to go down. That is, let me put it this way - while the standards of the school generally may be lowered because you're bringing in a group of children who are below standard in terms of over-all norms the standards may go down. The standards of the individual child do not go down. That is, in those experiments and pilot projects that have been attempted in various places around the country, the last two reports came out on pilot projects in California on Christmas day - it's indicated that those children who were performing continued to perform, that the standards of those children that are up to norm and above norm continue at the same pace, and that over a period of time those who are behind in their standards catch up. So while I'm saying that this is a very realistic and understandable fear that people ought to understand whether their fears have any real foundation before they operate on the basis of these fears.

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RFW: That point, Mr. Galamison, is a little different - though I'm glad you spoke to that one too. The man who believes in integration and says, if you come to the school where my child now is I'll welcome you, but if my child is transferred I will protest it, I will fight it, because it would be to an inferior school.

Rev.G: Well, you see, it isn't the school itself, the building, that's inferior - if the Negro child is behind standards, below standards, let me put it that way, he's going to be below standard whether he moves to the white school or whether the white children move into his school. I contend that this is not the issue behind the refusal on the part of people to transfer. Only one construction can be put on the kind of attitude which says it's all right for Negro children to transfer into my community, but I will not have my children transfer or travel to a Negro school, and the construction that I would put on this is just race arrogance. This is all it is. And an assumption that integration is completely to the benefit of the Negro without realizing that there are many other values apart from academic values which would accrue to the white child in a situation like this, you see. And I contend that it's only a lopsided master racist feeling that allows people to make expressions like this. I don't mind if Negroes transfer to my school but I will not support any integration effort which involves the movement or inconvenience of my own child. I mean, children are children. Why should a white child be any better to transfer to effect from desegregation than a Negro child, you see, and it's

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because the school system supports this arrogance and this lopsidedness that we protest, because this is precisely what the New York City system is willing to do - transfer Negro children all over the place even on a compulsory basis, but refuses to transfer white children. Do you understand what I'm saying?

RPW: On the question of transfer I think what is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander as far as inconvenience is concerned. I wasn't raising that question. I was simply taking the case where the child - white child in school A would be transferred to school B, which is for the moment an inferior school, irrespective of race, you see.

Rev.G: Yes, but you see, but the school is inferior because no white children are in it. Now, by this I don't mean that Negro children are inherently inferior - this is not what I'm saying at all. The question goes right to the heart of why the Negro school is inferior, and the Negro school is inferior because of the racial and cultural attitudes and ethnocentricisms that the average teacher brings to the school, and the school is inferior because there are no white children in the school to protect the Negro child from a white school system.

RPW: All right. Now, let's say this - if - how long would it take to make that school equally good - bring school B to school A? - That is to say, the Negro school up to the school A which is predominantly white, say?

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Rev.G: If it were done in the right way and with real purposefulness, this can be done with the repopulating of the school and the revising of the curriculum over a summer. That is, when the school opens in the fall the standards are set - new standards - the curriculum which is a comparable curriculum has been revised, the teaching staff has been carefully selected, and all the elements that go into the making of a good school can go into this school. Now, maybe you still - you have the Negro children in it, you see. These children may not catch up right away, but over a period of time they will if history is accurate in any way catch up to the others.

RPW: I think that clarifies some of the things I had in mind. Let me ask you about the present collision between Dr. Kenneth Clark and Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. What seems to be at stake in that collision? In terms of social good?

Rev.G: I have been avoiding dealing with this question publicly because there are so many aspects here that can be verbalized and misunderstood. I would suggest, first of all, that much of the - I hate to say this - don't have this typed out - I mean, I'm saying I hate to say it -

RPW: You'll have a transcript anyway.

Rev.G: First of all, there appears to be a problem of controlling the funds. This is a natural problem that would arise over a hundred million dollar grant to a community, and I think that basically this is the local struggle - who will have charge of distributing the funds and who will control the personnel that handles the purse strings. But

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secondly, the question about the degree to which this is political is - well, it's a question that almost doesn't require an answer, because my feeling is that this war against poverty operation represents a new kind of political patronage anyway, that no longer do we have a number of jobs and old types of patronage to distribute as political powers, but this idea of social work, this idea of getting into the community and involving as many people as possible and making large grants in terms of funds, is pretty much a political operation. I'm not saying it's bad - it's very good in its effects, and it's very good in what it intends to do, but I don't think anybody should overlook the basic motivation behind it, and the basic motivation behind it is I think a political motivation. I had a hard time getting that ~~RPW~~ out. I've been dodging this question of course.

RPW: Congressman Powell told me that all the old leadership is dead - they're finished. That is, all the organizations - the Urban League, the NAACP and all the rest of them, all are dead. The new leadership will be recruited from other sources. How would you respond to that remark?

Rev.G: I would say that this depends on the manner in which established organizations (interruption) - I agree that there is movement among the people that transcends at this moment movement among the constituted civil rights organizations. However, I would take the position that the degree to which the civil rights organization survived depends on how they will keep pace with what goes on. That is, I'm not at all convinced that the established organizations are going

to let the people completely go by them and not fit in in any way in terms of serving the needs and aspirations of the people who are on the move. My feeling is that they may well do this. I think that there is a place in the struggle at this point for all kinds of levels of operation. For example, I think that the white community has great confidence in the established civil rights organization, much more so than it has confidence in the smaller organizations or in the new movements which are springing up. This means that they will continue to support the established organizations, and it also means that the degree to which white support is won to various efforts may depend on the degree to which the established civil rights groups will involve themselves in this effort. It's just a little difficult for me to believe that established civil rights groups are going to allow themselves to be left by the side of the road in this struggle.

RPW: How do you define the nature of the new impulse you say that is - that has been manifesting itself in the masses. What is the nature of that impulse? How would you define it?

Rev.G: It is, I think, a growing feeling of frustration and a growing intolerance with injustice. That is, for a long time I think the Negro people did not protest against their own plight and felt that there was no way out of their own plight. For a long time I think Negro people accepted the image of themselves that had been projected by white society, and regarded themselves in many ways as undeserving and inferior, and white society as superior. However, I think that these attitudes no longer exist among the masses of the people, and

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that Negro people are beginning to more and more realize that their deprivation is not due to any inferiority on their own part but due more so to a moral lapse on the part of white society, and that they have - or their predicament has been created by the cultural and social and economic influences which are hangovers really of the slavery era, and that with this new image of himself and with this new understanding of the perpetration of injustices and discriminations on the part of white society, the Negro masses are moving to- if not redeem themselves, certainly to rescue their children from these historic practices.

RPW: Did you see the review in the New York Times Book Review two weeks ago of a new book on the race question - Crisis in Black and White - in a review by Mr. Saunders Redding?

Rev.G: No, I didn't.

RPW: That rather undercuts my question. He was saying this - quite the opposite of what you were saying. He was outraged because the author of this book had said that the great crisis in the Negro revolution was a re-definition of identity.

Rev.G: Well, this is pretty much what I have said.

RPW: That's what you said - yes.

Rev.G: This is not at all far afield from the same thing that I'm saying, and I believe infinitely that a man's own opinion of himself is a very important thing, and if you have a feeling of pride and self-respect about yourself, then you do not allow people to do to you some of the things that you would permit when you don't have a

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sense of pride and a sense of self-respect. And I think that the Negro people have grown in pride and have grown in respect and have altered their own image of themselves considerably and they have also altered their image of white society, and that with this altered image of society generally the Negro has found motivation to fight and not accept the kinds of situations in which he permitted himself to be placed before.

RPW: Yes, that's the question I had hoped you would speak to. A moment ago you were talking about white - it wasn't acceptance but it may have been cooperation - with the established organizations. This implied the efficacy of the movement involved somehow white attitude and white activity. Now, what is the role of the, say, the white man - liberal, I almost said - who is spoken so badly of by James Baldwin and others in relation to the movement. The person who has some sympathy with the Negro aspirations and some sense of the justice of their claim. What's his role?

Rev.G: I happen to be one of the people who feels that this struggle will not and cannot be won without the active participation of white people. In fact, I have said jestingly sometimes that I think white people are going to take the civil rights movement over and perhaps this is not a jest. Perhaps this^{is}/the way it ought to be. I remember after a meeting in Sheepshead Bay one evening, being interrogated by a number of vociferous white parents in the school lobby who were distressed by some of the things that I had said, and there was a

white man in the community who stood beside me and who said, this is our fight - you know - this is my fight with you - this is our fight with each other. Don't badger him with these kinds of questions. I don't know that he wasn't right, and I don't know that there is a great deal of work to be done among white people and also with Negro people in the civil rights area, that white people cannot involve themselves and very effectively. When you inquire after the role of white people in the struggle, I feel that white people have an indispensable role in this struggle, and I think a good bit of it is among white people as well as with Negro people.

RPW: That's not quite James Baldwin's remark that the white liberal is an affliction, unless we stop to re-define liberal there.

Rev.G: Well, I think the word liberal has become so distorted that it's almost impossible to define what a white liberal is at the moment. I don't know that I would agree altogether with Mr. Baldwin. I don't know that he would expect me to. Max Lerner complains - he's a great admirer of Baldwin's literary genius - but he complains that Baldwin doesn't leave him any alternative, that is, that Baldwin both condemns him for what he hasn't done and then accuses him of some peculiar motivations for what he might do, so that he doesn't know what to do. I think what Mr. Baldwin is saying in essence - and I'm taking great liberty in trying to say this - what Mr. Baldwin is saying in essence is that a great many white people bring to the civil rights struggle the same kind of paternalism and the same kind of rugged indifference to the feelings and the aspirations of the Negro

that they have exercised in other areas, and that this is not a good place for feelings of paternalism and feelings of domination that white people who get in the struggle must bring their cooperation and they must bring their gifts and share them with the Negro people, but that they must not try to take over, as it were, you know, within Negro groups, the leadership or the pace at which the movement, you know, will go, and they must not try to dictate and fall back on the same old patterns, you see, of missionary-ism.

RPW: Right. Let me read a question - or statement, rather, by Dr. Kenneth Clark about Dr. King's philosophy. On the surface, King's philosophy appears to reflect health and stability, while Black Nationalism betrays pathology and instability. A deeper analysis might reveal that there is also an unrealistic if not pathological basis for King's doctrine. The natural reaction to injustice is resentment. The form that such resentment takes need not be overtly violent, but the corrosion of the spirit seems inevitable. It would seem, therefore, that any demand that the victim of oppression be required to love those who oppress them places an additional and intolerable psychological burden upon the victim. How does that strike you?

Rev.G: The remark amazes me because Dr. Clark is a psychologist, and it would just seem to me that a psychologist of all people would know that hate is a consuming passion, and that hate does as much harm, if not more, to the individual who entertains that hate, who internalizes that hate, than it does to the objects of the individual's hatred.

That when we are motivated by hate or any other consuming passion, we

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do not function objectively, we do not function realistically, as it were, and that no man can afford to live motivated by hate. In other words, let me put it this way - it's one thing if an enemy tries to destroy you, but he has driven you to the supreme destruction when he can drive you to self destruction, which is a consuming hatred of him or of anybody else.

RPW: That is, you support the philosophical basis of Dr. King's non-violent policy as well as a practical basis, is that right?

Rev.G: Yes, I think I would support both. I would also add that one can act against a wrong or an injustice or an enemy without hating the enemy. That is, the fact that I do not hate the person who is exercising some kind of evil against me doesn't mean that I can't rise up and fight him and defend myself against him and move to correct the injustice that I think needs fighting. In other words, activity doesn't have to be born of hatred.

RPW: Nor does it have to be violent - is that also a correlary?

Rev.G: Yes - nor does it have to be violent. I would say this, I am not sure that every effort of this magnitude might not be served in some way by some segment that's willing to retaliate in kind. But I think that history teaches us that violence begets violence and that ultimately and in the long run, violence isn't the real answer to anything.

RPW: If I understood you correctly, you were saying that you were not certain but that some violence - a dash of salt in the stew - might

serve a good end. Is that right?

Rev.G: Well, let me put it this way -

RPW: Something's going to happen anyway.

Rev.G: Yes. Passive resistance and nonviolence assume a civilized enemy - a humane enemy, or at least a human enemy, and this of course is not always true. There are, as the Scripture puts it, some adders that cannot be charmed. And it does give some people comfort in their exercising of evil to know that nobody's going to strike back in kind. Therefore, I contend that this is not a certainty in which a man should be allowed to rest, that nobody will ever do unto him as he has done unto them, and while I believe that violence is not the ultimate answer or the best answer to anything, I think that violence can have a certain restraining effect on the person who is doing the evil. That is, if a man who does injustice or exercises injustice begins against a group of people or against another man, is not quite sure whether he will suffer the same in retaliation, he will be restrained.

RPW: That is, a few rifle clubs is O.K. - is that right?

Rev.G: Well, we have a few rifle clubs, and about this rifle club business, that is, whether we are for rifle clubs or against rifle clubs, I ask people have they ever been against the existence of rifle clubs before, that is, if we're against rifle clubs or are we just against Negroes having rifle clubs. And it seems to me that people who intend to live by justice and by truth and by mutual respect and decency should not have to fear Negroes having a rifle club any more than

they fear existing white rifle clubs, don't you see.

RPW: Yes, that would be true enough. What I really meant to say is this - in a place like, say, Mississippi, if we want a little violence, a little salt in the stew, just to keep it straight, you know, the record straight, then someone should in Machiavellian spirit, have a kind of stern gang, a little gang of dedicated retaliators, or would that follow, or just trust nature to take care of that?

Rev.G: Yes, well, what I'm trying to say is, while I'm not - I refuse to advocate violence as a principle, that some group - and almost all oppressed people have had such a group - that will retaliate in kind, might serve some kind of purpose in bringing about a swifter resolution of a problem that exists. This is what I'm trying to say. In general about rifle clubs I am not opposed to anybody's having a rifle club. In Mississippi if white people are permitted to have weapons then Negro people ought to be permitted to have weapons. In other words, I just refuse to separate people racially in terms of the right to bear arms. This is the right I think of every person in this country, and if we're in the kind of situation where some people might have more respect for the rights of others and might be less inclined to commit violence against others if they had arms, then certainly these people have a right to have arms just as everyone else does.

RPW: I have heard it advocated - this is the Conference on Non-Violence at Howard University last fall - that perhaps there should be a calculated policy among Negroes of the brinkmanship of violence,

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to use the phrase used there, to toy with violence, violence as a short of lethal threat in the air, even though not forced all the way.

Rev.G: I think that nonviolence does this. I think that passive resistance does this anyway, that the objective end of nonviolence and passive resistance defined by sitting in and demonstrating, is to precipitate the opposition to violence.

RPW: End of Tape #2 of the conversation with Mr. Galamison. See Tape #3.

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