

ROBERT PENN WARREN REV. GALAMISON JUNE 17 TAPE # 1

RPW: This is Tape #1 of a conversation with the Reverend Galamison, June 17. Proceed. ... may provoke something. Do Negroes want real integration, or what Eric Lincoln calls - quoting him - a conspicuous superficial integration which relieves them of any self hatred and insecurity but allows them to lead a life separate from white society? Let's talk toward that general topic.

Rev.G: Well, of course, integration doesn't mean leading a life separate from the mainstream of society. Integration, on the other hand, may not mean assimilation and loss of identity, and this is what I think Negro people are trying to make clear, that Negro people don't want to feel that they have to completely lose their identity to the degree that there is a cultural difference or a color difference. The color difference of course we cannot lose. There must be integration and acceptance in spite of whatever differences may exist, and what disturbs many Negroes in terms of talking about integration is that it's felt by some that we must completely lose our identity. So I would put it this way, that I think the Negro wants integration into the mainstream of American life in terms of jobs, in terms of education, in terms of the ability to purchase a home and live where he wants to live, and to really partake of the fruits and advantages and opportunities of American society. He does not, however, want to sacrifice being a Negro or to feel so much disrespect for himself that he doesn't accept himself as a person in

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order to achieve it. And I don't think it's necessary that the Negro completely lose his identity.

RPW: Do you remember the article by Norman Padoritz in Commentary a little while ago, in which he said the only solution for the race question is assimilation - do you remember that article?

Rev.G: I remember the article and I've heard the point of view expressed before, but I don't agree with this point of view. I feel that if - well, that we are not that limited as human beings, that we cannot accept people in spite of differences, and if complete assimilation means losing our identity, then this we will never do as a people. And there may be some question about what the word "assimilation" means in its deepest aspects, but assimilation even to me at - if this is the term we want to use - doesn't actually mean losing one's identity.

R PW: He's talking about actual blood absorption, of course - Padoritz is.

Rev. G: Well, there's been a great deal of that already. I think only a small percentage of Negroes in this country are now actually whole blooded Negro people, as it were. And yet the Negroes who are not altogether Negroid, that is, who apparently are the result of some kind of intermingling, are still regarded as Negro. And I think that this will continue to be the situation, and I don't see that anything is particularly wrong with it. But Negro people are going to have to be accepted as Negro people. We can't wait till the whole human race in the United States is so intermingled and so confused

that everybody has lost his racial identity.

RPW: That is, you view it as a kind of pluralistic society with individual choices being the criterion of all major relationships, is that it?

Rev.G: This is true. And I understand that there are other cultures where the differences of people are respected, and where the differences of people do not represent insurmountable barriers to unity and to living together and to sharing all the other things that human beings share. I feel that we in America are going to have to get to this point where we will accept people, not because they are like we are necessarily, but because they're people.

RPW: This leads off in several directions. One is duBoise's old notion of some split in the Negro psyche, the pull toward the absorption into the Western European American cultural complex, the other being the pull toward African or the American Negro tradition, the real problem for some Negroes and still is for some Negroes by their own account. You don't feel this is an issue, I gather.

Rev.G: It is an issue in a sense, but only because we are passing through a certain period in American history. My feeling is that the extreme leaning toward African culture among Negro people is based on the rejection and the lack of acceptance that the Negro has felt in his own culture. It's also due largely to the fact that Negroes feel that everybody has to have a home base and just as the Jewish people for example have re-established Jerusalem, or Israel, as it were, and have the right now to call this home, Negroes need some place to call

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home in order to give them a complete feeling of identity and status as human beings in the world. Now, this, however - this whole idea of the relationship to Africa, I think, has been grossly exaggerated. I think, for example, that the American Negro is much closer to American culture than he could possibly be to African culture, that we cannot write off three hundred years. However horrible they may have been in the experience of any Negroes, and however unwelcome the Negro may have felt in this culture over these three hundred years, he certainly is much more closely related to the American scene and the mainstream of American life than he is to the major ways of life in Africa at the moment. And if many Negroes were to go to Africa they would see this.

RPW: As Richard Wright found out.

Rev.G: Yes. Richard Wright, after being disillusioned in America went to France, and after being disillusioned in France went to Africa, and died a disillusioned man, realizing that he didn't have the kind of affinity with African culture that he thought he would have.

RPW : On the matter of integration again, Oscar Handlin's recent book, A Bell in the Night, makes a sharp distinction between integration and equality, and he goes on to say that the emphasis on integration can actually turn that word into a shibboleth while the real focus should be on problems of equality. Does this distinction concern you? Is this a fundamental distinction?

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Rev.G: Yes, it may be a meaningful distinction, but so long as the Negro feels that his failure to achieve equality is due basically to his race, then he has to work in other areas. My opinion is - and I'm trying to turn this over in my mind - my opinion is that the only real equality for Negroes in America is integration. That is, short of integration he has no equality. Short of his participation in the mainstream of American life in terms of the same education that every- one is getting, in terms of the same kind of housing everyone else is getting, and in terms of the same kind of employment that every- one else is getting, he can't have any kind of equality. And these areas of life are denied him basically, we feel, anyway, because of race.

RPW: Undoubtedly that's true. Let's say, the racial difference has made for inferiority of opportunity of various kinds. We know that, beyond the shadow of a doubt. I think he has in mind some specific problems that arise. Now, one problem would be the problem you have been intimately associated with, that is, the integration of the New York schools. The problem of just the racial, Negro and white children of school age in public school systems. How can you integrate, you see, in the absolute sense, given that situation. This is a problem you have given a great deal of thought to. He was - in Washington, D.C., for instance, where integration as such, he would say, is not the prior concern because of special just numerical problems. It has to be approached on terms of equality then, not in terms of integration as such.

Rev.G: Well, you see, if you accept the philosophy behind the Supreme Court decision, that apart from integration in the public school system there can't be any equality, then it's difficult to accept this premise that this particular gentleman is holding forth. I agree that there are some areas in which the Negro problem must be solved apart from integration. Education I would contend though is not one of them. I agree, too, that in some areas in the educational system we have a growing number of Negroes in proportion to white. This should not be a barrier to integration. It should not be assumed that white people always have to be in the majority in a particular situation before integration should be attempted or effective. This is another bad philosophy I think that we are victims - of which we are victims, let me put it that way. The statistical problem or the logistics problem in most areas is not at all insurmountable, and there is hardly any area, however urbanized it may be, where a meaningful degree of integration cannot be achieved. Now, if this particular author is saying that there are some problems in America which even transcend the race problem I would certainly agree with this.

RPW: That is, class -

Rev.G: Class, yes, indeed - I certainly agree that there are some that transcend the race problem. I would agree that we have a class problem too, that needs to be overcome, that discrepancies in income and disparities between classes of people have not been resolved by the democratic system as many people felt they would be resolved.

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RPW: Both black and white you're talking about now.

Rev.G: Yes - and black and white people suffer from the class stratifications in the culture. But the Negro not only wears the badge of an inferior class because of his color, no matter how comparable he may be in every other respect, culturally, educationally and monetarily, he is still an inferior misfit in the minds of other people within the framework of the culture. What disturbs me most, though, about the thinking of many people in our society is they think that class prejudice and class discrimination is more forgivable than race discrimination, and my contention is that any kind of discrimination or any kind of prejudice is bad, no matter on what superficial basis it may be exercised.

RPW: To what extent would you accept the present program of the New York school system? What reservations do you have about that program now?

Rev.G: My feeling is that there are two school systems really in New York City, not one. One system is the all white school system and to a degree the integrated school system, and the other system is the segregated school system which certainly is not producing the best in terms of our Negro children. That is, the discrepancy is seen mostly in the academic performance, and the academic performance of the children in the segregated schools is invidious by comparison to the academic performances of the children in the first system that I allege to exist. Now, my major criticism is that if we don't solve

the segregation problem we haven't solved any basic problem, because this is the basic problem. My feeling is that all the prejudices and discriminations of the culture which affect the Negro in housing and in employment and in areas of social life, that is, I don't want a Negro in my home, I wouldn't want a Negro to marry my daughter, are also brought to bear on the Negro in the educational system. Tragically enough, people refuse to recognize this, and that we need an integrated school system not only to protect the Negro from what happens to be a white dominated school system, but we also need an integrated school system to protect white children from the arrogances and the racial supremacy feelings that they are inclined to feel, being defended - I put that in quotation marks - from contact and classroom relationships with Negro children. The whole culture, unfortunately, the pattern of the culture dictates the impossibility of having an equal educational system that is segregated. Now, New York City has not made meaningful steps in the direction of desegregating the school system. They are hedging and avoiding and procrastinating, and managing all kinds of efforts which are not bringing about the timely and the planned desegregation of the school system. They feel free to place the onus for integration on some Negroes in terms of open enrollment, but they do not feel that white children apparently should be inconvenienced in any way to help bring about a desegregated classroom, and this is the thing that distresses me.

RPW: What about the acceptance of the present proposal by the various organizations. How do you react to their acceptance?

Rev.G: These proposals of course have not been accepted at all, as far as I can see. That while the board of education publicly cried that organizations that were interested in desegregating school system ought to submit plans, it is not my feeling that these plans and programs submitted by the organizations were ever taken very seriously. Secondly, everyone knows that it would be almost illegal for the board of education to take a plan or a program submitted by a secular group or a layman's group or a civil rights group and to impose this plan upon the city. So there wasn't really, I don't feel, much sincerity behind these demands for plans and programs to be submitted, but they did manage with these demands to divert the public from the real issue, and that is that the board was not desegregating the school system. Now, to further dramatize what I accuse to be insincerity, our board of education dumped the responsibility for developing a plan ultimately on the state, and Commissioner Allen of New York State appointed a three-man committee here in New York City to work out a program. This program was worked out and printed up within the space of about two months and became known as the Allen proposals. Then Dr. Gross came out with a plan behind the Allen proposals, after saying this is the kind of thing around which we ought to rally, which almost completely bypassed the Allen proposals and which was a diametrical contradiction actually of what Commissioner Allen had proposed. And this is about where we are at the moment. This plan has been modified to a degree, and some embellishments have been placed on it, and some of the civil rights groups have said they will now

support Dr. Gross's plan, but it still falls far short of the Allen proposal which was supposed to have been some kind of an official proposal with status, and there just doesn't seem to be any serious intent on the part of educational officials to implement with purposeful and deliberate speed a desegregation program in the city.

RPW: That is, you would not go along with the other organizations in these provisional acceptance of the Gross plan?

Rev.G: In a sense I must go along, because some of my people were involved in the deliberations, and I was not when perhaps I ought to have been. So I must of necessity support the Gross plan because I indicated that everyone should exercise his own judgment in relation to the Gross plan. However, personally I am far from satisfied with it and I still think it's a complete betrayal of the Allen report.

RPW: Here's the kind of problem that we often get stuck with, the question of your relation to your own children and your relation to the public school system. If my information is correct about the private school - well, one child is.

Rev.G: Yes, well, now, about the public school system, of course the public school system here as in many areas of the country, is deficient, and one would wish that people might unite to protect the school system or to improve it, as it were - I meant, improve it. But one of the reasons why whites don't realize how badly the school system needs improvement is because the Negro situation is so much worse, and because there is some playing of the Negro community against the white community, and it's been difficult to achieve unity

because of the integration struggle, and the school system does not generally improve. Frankly, I would say that the profession of teaching is suffering as are many professions. We seem to be getting more and more people today in all kinds of work who are only salary conscious and clock watchers and who do not take professional pride in their work, who are not artistic about their professional activities and of course workers like this don't produce the best kind of results. I think the school system is suffering from the kind of professional deterioration that almost every profession is in this country. I think this would be true of nursing, I think it would be true of the ministry, I think it would be true of medicine, and a number of other areas.

RFW: On the question of your own son, you thought you couldn't sacrifice his development in terms of supporting an abstract principle, is that it?

Rev.G: Well, let me put it this way. My son's being in private school was not at all related to this struggle in the beginning. I don't think I was involved in this struggle, if I remember correctly, when we first put our youngster into private school. He started in a nursery school. It was simply a matter of having him in school and my wife was working and we felt it was time sort of wean him away from home. Now, when he got to the age where he was ready to enter public school, there came a question of whether he should go to my wife's school where she taught or whether he should go to some other public school. Well, now, if he had gone to another public school there

would have been no one home to care for him in terms of lunch and that sort of thing. And my wife didn't feel that it would be an objective situation to have him in her school where she was teaching. So we continued him on in private school. Then by the time he got to the age when he might have gone to public school, I was so involved in this struggle and I was being so villified by many people in the school system that I did not feel that I should expose my child to the kind of attitude which I knew prevailed in the school system against me among many principals and teachers. I did not feel that he could be dealt with objectively and I think he's paid a high enough price for what his father is doing simply in terms of, you know, absence from home and all this sort of thing. At least he's entitled to the best education we can give him and this is what we're trying to do.

RPW: Let's try to find a parallel problem on the part - or see how far we find a parallel problem - let's explore it - on the part of a parent who says I believe in integrated schools - who honestly does believe in integrated schools, let's say - let's posit this man - but I don't want my child now put in the schools as they exist to support this matter of integration. I want to keep the child here so I can protect his interests, next year and the year after and the year after, whatever period you say. Now, he's over a kind of a barrel too, isn't he? As I was over as you were over.

Rev.G: Well, it depends on what our motivations are, and whether -

RPW: Assume this man is honest, you see, and really wanted to integrate the schools, integrate society. But who will say no, I won't permit this, I'll fight it, because the school he'll go to can't be made decent within three years or four years.

Rev.G: Well, this may be, and of course this is the right of private choice, for people to send their child to public school or to private school.

RPW: Or to fight the transfer - that's his right too, legally.

Rev.G: Well, he can fight a transfer. You see, if it's not at the expense of what you're trying to do to the school system or what you're trying to do to other children. You see, when you talk about sending children to private school, I contend that for many white parents in the New York City community they have a private school anyway. The only difference is everybody is paying for it. And not only is it a private school, it's a kind of school from which they - in which they are protected from anything that they may not want in it including Negroes. So this is my argument. You know, when it comes to the integration situation here in New York City, my contention is that we don't even have a public school system in many respects, that it's being operated for the benefit of some at the expense of others, and of course it's being operated, I would contend, at the expense of the children who are not faring well or who are being deprived because of the pattern of the culture, and the feelings in the culture, which generally exist toward Negro or minority group children.

RPW: That's clear. There's no argument about that I think. I don't

think anybody could reasonably say there is an argument about that. It's a question of how you deal with a man who though he may be mistaken thinks he's acting for the good of his child even against his - a certain set of principles he may believe in. It's not a question of good guys versus bad guys, is what I'm getting at in this matter.

Rev.G: Well, this of course is a matter of opinion. I don't think that - you know, I'm interested in categorizing people as bad guys necessarily, but I think that we have lived too long in America where we are willing to entertain the prejudices and discriminations of some people, however much they may exist to the disadvantage of other people, and still we're willing to label these people decent people. Now, I think we've just got to get to the point in this culture where we realize that people who do not treat other people as human beings because of their race or their color are not functioning as human beings themselves, that you can't dehumanize someone else without dehumanizing yourself to a degree, that you can't be dishonest and unfair to other people without being dishonest and unfairly as a person, and that we can no longer accept this as something that just happens to people, and accept it as a perfectly normal thing, you see. So I couldn't agree with you in terms of your description of the kind of person you're talking about. Such a person is objectionable to me as a person, and I think that, you know, too long we have paid the price for people like this in the culture and allowed them to feel that they're wonderful people when really they are not.

RPW: Well, now, what about the person - another hypothetical case -

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who elects the private school, say, as I have elected against my principles. I still pay my taxes but I put my child and my own enthusiasm into the private school - against my will.

Rev. G: Now, this is an individual right. On the other hand, I would argue - and this is my criticism of you - I would argue that we have a responsibility to correct those things in the public school system which may have prompted us to send our children to private school. In other words, we still have a responsibility I think to all children, and if we do try to salvage our child, at least we still ought to continue fighting in the public school area.

RPW: Suppose a man down the road who fights the transfer system - still fighting for the improvement of schools so he could transfer. He is in the same moral position as I would be or you, wouldn't he be? He's still working to change the schools, make them adequate - up the road, there. Change the school he doesn't want his child to go to now. Excuse me, just a minute. I've got to change the tape. This is the end of Tape #1 with the Reverend Galamison. See Tape #2.

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