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RELIGION/POLITICS :: CHURCH/STATE: RIVER WALL

Once you think about its title, this Thinksheet's all over except its typing. Language as lexicon (word-choice range) de-fines (ie, sets specific limits to) & de-scribes (ie, roughly sketches) what's (1) thinkable in a language & (2) important in the language's originating culture. As an overlay on this "grammar" (in Chomsky's wider sense), each living culture & subculture elevates, as though statues in the public square, particular metaphors that have, at that time & place for those people, holophrastic force--are, in the anthropological sense, "symbols."

Jefferson's "wall" metaphor for "the separation of church & state" has been gaining force as it's become, for the increasingly aggressive secular humanists in America, a banner & rallying cry. This Thinksheet suggests (1) that "wall" is now being overread & (2) that "river" would better (a) represent the reality in America yesterday & today, & (b) enable productive public discourse on a subject which (as the communist countries evidence) would not go away even if government were to become ideologically antireligious.

NOTE on my own lexicon here: In the above, I've used "secular humanism" without quotes. The left & center have been ignorantly (to be generous about it) slurring the right with this phrase, which was a cool invention of the left for self-description: Leo Pfeffer four decades ago began to use the phrase as an accurate academic & proto-legal way to distinguish America's atheist & agnostic humanists (as, eg, of the Humanist Manifesto I) from traditional religious humanists. The error continues to be perpetuated even by such a scrupulous work as Roof & McKinney's AMERICAN MAINLINE RELIGION (Rutgers/87): p.30: "the Religious Right...unceasingly labels 'secular humanism'" its opponents "on one issue after another." The statement is true (to the Religious Right's usage) & false (in implying the phrase to be of Religious Right coinage: feel the force of the verb "labels"). In this present logomachy, what's important here is to expose the slipperiness of the left, as eg People of the American Way, in tarring the right with the phrase, thus: (1) Accusing the right of betraying "the American Way," and (2) Defending itself as representing as secular the heart of "the American Way." Two-pronged attack, double illusion!

As far as I know (which isn't very far), till my 2nd cup of coffee this morning nobody had ever thought of calling what this Thinksheet favors "the Budapest Factor." My way of giving me & you more to chew on, as a concrete analogy (viz, the Danube as it meanders both through Budapest & between Buda and Pest), than merely "river" as an abstract analogy. Let's mess around with it till the end of this page:

1. As motivation to public caring is nourished mainly by the "soft" (Bellah) social structures--church, school, family--candidates for public office tend to be religiously motivated, so their campaigns tend to raise the religion/politics ("river") issue, which the left conveniently treats as the church/state ("wall") issue. ("Free speech" does not mean I'm free to use others' speeches: "river" I got from a Boston Kennedy Library forum a few days ago, from Lawrence Fuchs of Brandeis U.)

2. Buda/Pest (a.k.a. "Budapest") has eight trans-Danubian bridges behaving bridgely, viz, separating & joining--as do our historical documents, our national motto, our Pledge of Allegiance, our legislative & armed-services chaplaincies. Politics deals with what is; religion, with what ought to be....Some bridges should be built, some repaired, & some razed.