

God? Not for My Father!

My father was a raving athiest. He was a brilliant man who harbored an enormous hatred for religion and its role in human misery throughout the ages. We all learned not bring up God or religion at the dinner table if we wanted to enjoy our meal! His railing against religion increased as he aged, though he seemed to mellow in every other way.

Where did it come from, this vitriolic rant that would spew forth at the least provocation? He was the son of a minister and in his youth had been commandeered by his father to teach Sunday school for seven years. He was a very gifted teacher so I imagine that he enjoyed the teaching but wished it were a subject he could embrace, like art. Perhaps teaching Sunday school was the making of him, as he went on to be an art educator, but the inner conflict must have been fierce as he taught Bible passages to his students. Since he never discussed his father, who died before I was born, I was never privy to the father-son dynamic that might have been key to this lifelong adolescent rebellion against God the father, of whom my grandfather was an earthly minion.

Sometimes we would discuss religion over cocktails and I would put forth the idea that he was throwing out the baby with the bath water, that perhaps institutionalizing spirituality was the evil of which he spoke, but that spirituality itself had value. He wouldn't hear of it. Out with the whole damn mess!

I once had a discussion about religion with my grandmother, the minister's widow and a lifelong churchgoer and knitter of scarves and mittens for the shivering downtrodden of Cleveland. I was visiting her as a young mother, having flown in from California on my way to visit my parents in Philadelphia, showing off my four month old son Josh. I don't remember how the conversation started. Perhaps she asked me if I went to church, or if Josh had been baptized. I truly do not recall. But in response to something she said, I said that maybe someday the sky would be the church's ceiling, that institutions wouldn't be necessary. To her great credit, she only expressed the generous amused delight that elders that love children show when outlandish statements are made.

Both my grandmother and my father are long gone. To where? I have to wonder.

Stephanie Noble
stephanienoble.com