

To take stock of the self in this study I must briefly discuss my own religious genealogy so readers can assess from their own perspectives the question of researcher bias or, to put it less elegantly but more succinctly, “where I’m coming from.”

My paternal grandfather, an immigrant from Lebanon to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, was “religiously unmusical,” or one might also say ecumenical in his thinking.<sup>3</sup> When the local Catholic priest in the Massachusetts town where he lived came to ask him to become a member of the local parish, he told him that he would just as soon worship in the mosque as the church! My maternal grandfather, a Brazilian journalist whom I never met, on the other hand, was a pacifist, staunch agnostic, and highly anticlerical (according to my mother), perhaps because of the sectarian troubles that had overwhelmed Lebanon in the previous century. He translated the lectures of Robert Ingersoll, a well-known American atheist, in his newspaper, a newspaper he published in Sao Paulo until 1936. He also published in it a cartoon of a fat priest driving away beggars from the door of the church at the same time that he retrieved the money from the charity box on the same door and took it into the church.

My paternal grandmother reflected another side of my religious background. She was a follower of the Eastern Catholic rite, which had not yet built a church in central Massachusetts. The local Roman Catholic priest had come and asked her to become a member of his parish church in the 1930s. Regretfully, she declined, saying that her own religious community was building its own (Melkite or Eastern Catholic) church, which it subsequently did. She often urged me to accompany her to Sunday worship services, which were held in a Semitic language (not Arabic) that neither my grandmother nor I could understand. Of course, I was not eager to do this, and seldom went with her. But in her later years I drove my grandmother to church and picked her up at the end of the service. On one of these occasions at a time when I had returned to my hometown tired and beset with a mild case of the flu on a midterm break from graduate school, I picked my grandmother up from church. As she got in the car she handed me a small urn of what I presumed to be holy water. She told me to drink it, and I would feel better. I refused. She pressed it on

me. My Protestant sensitivities took hold (I went to a Methodist Sunday school), and I refused again. Suddenly, she took the urn and spilled it over my face! My grandmother was endowed with a spontaneous religious nature. She was a true believer in the church and the power of the holy to work its wonders in this world.

My mother and father were married in a civil marriage ceremony in Brazil and then were married in the Methodist church after coming to the United States. As a result, I suppose, and because it was close by, my sisters and I were sent to Methodist Sunday school. I can remember attending only basketball games and other strictly secular activities as part of my Sunday school upbringing. I remember getting no religious education whatsoever there, and that might account in part for my own interest in religion when I began teaching in the university. Perhaps I felt somehow ignorant or cheated about a subject I needed to know more about.

In the following years I attended Quaker meetings, the Lutheran church, and the Unitarian church, all without becoming a member. My exposure to the Unitarian tradition was far more than my experience with the others, particularly after my parents became members of one local Unitarian church and my brother-in-law became the minister of another in the local area. More recently I have been introduced to Judaism, particularly the Reform tradition, through my wife in a small city in upstate New York.