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THE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaves so skillfully.

Sometimes He weaveth sorrow
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And explain the reasons why

The dark threads are as needful,
In The Weaver's skillful hands
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

B.M. FRANKLIN (1882-1965)

On two different occasions I was called on to give a public confession of my faith in class. Both were difficult experiences. The first came in a biology class, which featured what I thought to be an overemphasis on evolution.

The instructor intrigued me. I had imagined a high-ranking professor to look polished and professional, wearing a suit and heels. Instead she had long, stringy, gray hair and wore hippie clothes and Birkenstocks when she lectured. I admired her nonconformity. She proved it was possible to excel academically and professionally while still maintaining one's individuality. She encouraged her students to think and speak freely, believing that active engagement in the subject matter was a valuable part of the learning process. If a student answered a question incorrectly, the instructor was prone to say something like, "Hmm, interesting thought. I can see where you might get that impression. Does anyone else see it differently?"

Even in this atmosphere of openness, I still hid bashfully toward the back of the lecture hall. Then one day she asked the question, "How did the universe come to be?" She scanned the students, who sat at tables in an arc around her, each curved row slightly higher than the previous.

I tried my usual evasive tactic. I stared at my notebook and pretended the notes I was scribbling were of vital importance. But I could feel her looking at me. "Go ahead," she said.

I glanced at the students seated beside me, hoping one of them would answer. When they didn't, I pointed at myself and gave the professor a sheepish look that said, "Who, me?"

"Yes, you," she answered. "Please tell us how the universe came to be."

My mind raced. I knew the answer she wanted me to give. I also knew that I didn't believe it. I quickly weighed my options and ultimately decided that this wasn't an Iranian classroom where I was required to give the teacher the answer she demanded. This was America. Here I was free to think and to say what I believed.

Clearing my throat, I very quietly quoted Genesis 1:1, the very first words of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Though I knew it wasn't what she wanted to hear, I still presumed she would react with her usual tact. Instead she berated me. I was humiliated. After class, students I had never met approached me to apologize on her behalf. They didn't all agree with what I said, but they felt bad that I had been so cruelly rebuked. Some did agree, and one even went so far as to thank me for speaking up. "I wish I had your courage," she said, patting me on the shoulder.

The second such experience came in a different class not long after the murder conviction of Jack Kevorkian, the doctor who championed the cause of physician-assisted suicide. This lecture hall was narrow and deep. I had learned that the best place to hide was in the middle of the front row, directly in front of the professor. She naturally looked well above me, into the center of the mass of students.

"As I'm sure you've all heard by now, Jack Kevorkian, 'Dr. Death,' was convicted of murder. I want to hear from you. Should he have been convicted? Was what he did really murder, or was it mercy?"

I sat calmly, waiting for the professor to call on someone in the middle of the room. Instead, she stopped in front of me and asked, "What do you think?"

"I think the jury was right to convict him."

"Okay. Why?" she prodded.

"I believe God gives life, and he's the only one who is justified in taking it."

The class exploded at the mention of God. Suddenly everyone, it seemed, had something to say. Tempers flared. Most of the comments did not center on whether euthanasia was right or wrong. Instead they focused on speaking out against me and my statement. Some asserted there is no God. Others held that it's not God who gives and takes life. Still others insisted there is no room in modern society for what they perceived to be antiquated, ignorant, and prejudicial religiously based ideologies.

I was shocked and infuriated. Who was being prejudiced? Not me, but the ones who were lambasting me for my beliefs. I had been asked for my opinion and I had given it. Why was all this anger being directed at me? Why the shouting? Why the hostility? Why was I coming under personal attack? I wasn't telling them they had to think the way I did. I wasn't yelling and pointing my finger because we had different opinions.

Again I sat there thinking, *This is America. What is happening? As an American, am I not guaranteed the right to freedom of religion? Am I not guaranteed the right to freedom of speech? That's what makes this country so great. We are free to disagree.*

When I was younger, Mom had taped a newspaper clipping to the edge of her computer monitor. The words were attributed to the French philosopher Voltaire: "I may disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." It became frighteningly clear to me that day that where religion was concerned on my campus, that philosophy did not apply. In the name of political correctness, religion and specifically Christianity had become taboo.