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Obligation to Speak Truth

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Obligation to Speak Truth

Abstract

Kathy Ianello has been pilloried for disclosing Truth as she discerns it. It troubles me that much of the criticism levied against her seems disengaged from her original words, or from the ample evidence of excellence in her long career; it horrifies and disgusts me, however, that she has suffered through epithets and threats to her personal safety simply for voicing a thoughtful, heartfelt opinion, however provocative or controversial. [*excerpt*]

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Speak Free or Lie: Academic Freedom & the Obligation to Speak Truth.

Kathy Ianello has been pilloried for disclosing Truth as she discerns it. It troubles me that much of the criticism levied against her seems disengaged from her original words, or from the ample evidence of excellence in her long career; it horrifies and disgusts me, however, that she has suffered through epithets and threats to her personal safety simply for voicing a thoughtful, heartfelt opinion, however provocative or controversial.

As a Quaker, I have raised my children to follow a set of "testimonies" drawn by early Friends from the teachings of the Gospels. Integrity is a key testimony. Because Quakers practice silent worship until we feel the divine spirit move us to speak, Integrity includes the imperative to speak Truth, however inconvenient or unpopular, when one's conscience bids one do so.

I hold myself and my family to that standard, and I respect it in others, whether or not I agree with the ideas they articulate: Thoughtful, sincere expression of Truth is the highest form of worship to me; it is also vital to democracy and such a fundamental American value that it is enshrined in the First Amendment. Indeed, un-

popular and even provocative speech, thoughtfully articulated by a person with character enough to stand up and take responsibility for her words, is the very life's blood of democracy, and it is so central to the academic endeavor that it is protected by the institution of tenure, which exists primarily to protect such speech.

At times professors voice unpopular opinions and perspectives in the classroom to foment respectful debate; it's a big part of the job. As a Quaker I attempt to see the best in others, and to trust that they, as fellow children of the God I worship, have insight into aspects of Truth, perhaps some of which are obscure to me. We have the obligation to speak Truth however, even if that act makes us unpopular.

I teach my children to try to meet hate with love, as Christ instructs us so very clearly, but I would rather be hated for standing up for my beliefs than tolerated for sitting in silent cowardice, and I am blessed to have colleagues like Kathy, who feel the same way.

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