

Theological Tempest After An Expression Of Solidarity

Wheaton College wrestles with the questions of faith, belief and religious expression.

1. Navigating Religious Differences

A Facebook post may cost Wheaton College professor Dr. Larycia Hawkins her job. Hawkins' Dec. 10 post was an announcement of her decision to wear the hijab – the headscarf that some Muslim women wear – during the holidays. But it was the political science professor's passing reference to a sentiment she attributed to Pope Francis that got her in trouble.

"I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book," Hawkins posted. Wheaton College officials placed Hawkins on administrative leave five days later. She now is facing termination after refusing to clarify her theological position, according to the college.

"It wasn't a theological treatise," she said during a Dec. 21st interview on WTTW-TV's "Chicago Tonight" program. "It was simply a Facebook post inviting people into a bigger narrative about embodied solidarity with Muslims who are currently being maligned and mistreated for their religious devotion."

The reaction of Wheaton officials to Hawkins' post reflected a different point of view and focus. "While Islam and Christianity are both monotheistic, we believe there are fundamental differences between the two faiths," according to a statement on the college website. The nature of God is listed among those differences. "What I said in my post has been affirmed by the Christian church for centuries, and is affirmed by many prominent evangelicals that have even spoken on Wheaton's campus," Hawkins said.

Hawkins certainly has her critics, she also has found support on and off the Wheaton campus. Some student groups have called for the college to reinstate her and apologize. A group of Christian clergy, including Jesse Jackson, have also been publicly supportive of her.