

This Christian College Refuses to Bow the Knee to Caesar

Over the past couple of years the Obama administration has made it clear that when religious freedom conflicts with their political agenda, religious believers are the ones that will have to set aside their conscientious objections. And to be honest, I suspected that would be what happened more often than not. Sure, you'd have some brave holdouts, like the owners of Hobby Lobby and the dedicated nuns of the Little Sisters of the Poor. But for the most part, I expected Christian organizations would find a way to defend a "principled compromise." For instance, I assumed Christian colleges would be the first to cave on issues like the contraceptive-abortionifacient mandate. After all, what are they going to do, stop providing health insurance for their students? Well, yes, they will. At least that's what Wheaton College has done:

Taking a firm stand against Obamacare's controversial contraception mandate, Wheaton College on Friday will stop providing any health insurance for students. The decision, announced to students July 10, will halt health care coverage for about a quarter of the college's 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students, forcing them to shop for other plans just weeks before their coverage ends. Health care insurance for faculty and staff is not affected... During an information session for students last week that was streamed live online, Paul Chelsen, Wheaton's vice president of student development, said he regretted the last-minute decision and the hardship it brings. "What has brought us here is about student health insurance, but it's bigger than student health insurance," Chelsen said, according to a recording of the session obtained by the Tribune. "What really breaks my heart

is that there are real people that are affected by our decision. But if we don't win this case, the implications down the road in terms of what the government will tell us what we can and cannot do will be potentially more significant.

It is indeed regrettable that some students will be without health insurance coverage. And some students and alumni are already blaming the school. But the loss of the health insurance is the fault of the Obama administration, not the administration at Wheaton. The college has repeatedly asked for a compromise that would not require them to violate their religious beliefs—and the federal government has repeatedly refused to concede to such a reasonable request. In a recent court ruling on Wheaton's case, Judge Richard Posner wrote, "This is hardly a burdensome requirement." Indeed, the Romans thought the same thing about Christians who refused to offer a small pinch of incense at the statue of Caesar. It's such a small thing, they thought, and certainly nothing to die over. But many ancient Christians understood there is no greater burden than that which is placed upon one's conscience. They understood that if they could not live according to their faith, then life was not worth living. Fortunately, Christians in America do not face the same dire consequences as did the Christians in Rome. We don't face death or torture, but merely scorn and derision. The secular world—and far too many Christians—will condemn Wheaton for not backing down. "This is hardly a burdensome requirement," they'll say. But Wheaton College made the right choice. They did the hard thing, the unpopular thing, because they refuse to compromise on what the school stands for. For their boldness they deserve the praise and admiration of those of us who still believe that we answer to a higher authority than the federal government. *Reprinted from the Acton Institute.*