

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-Day Saints v. Amos

483 U.S. 327 (1987) · No. Nos. 86-179 and 86-401 · Decided June 24, 1987

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court considered whether applying Title VII's religious-employer exemption under 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-1 to the secular nonprofit activities of religious organizations violated the Establishment Clause. The Court held that the exemption was constitutional and reversed the judgment of the United States District Court for the District of Utah. The decision emphasized that the exemption alleviated governmental interference with religious organizations' ability to define and carry out their missions.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the United States
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Justice White; Chief Justice Rehnquist; Justice Brennan; Justice Marshall; Justice Blackmun; Justice Powell; Justice Stevens; Justice O'Connor; Justice Scalia
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	June 24, 1987
DOCKET	Nos. 86-179 and 86-401
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Direct appeal from a final judgment of the United States District Court for the District of Utah declaring § 702 of Title VII unconstitutional as applied to the secular nonprofit activities of religious organizations.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the constitutional validity of § 702 and its application to the nonprofit activities of religious employers.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	United States Supreme Court precedent
PARTIES	Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, United States v. Amos, Mayson, Other appellees

TOPICS

establishment clause

first amendment

employment discrimination

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether applying § 702 of Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-1, to the secular nonprofit activities of religious organizations violates the Establishment Clause.
2. Whether § 702, as applied to nonprofit activities of religious employers, violates equal protection by giving religious employers greater freedom to discriminate on the basis of religion than secular employers.
3. Whether the exemption impermissibly entangles church and state by delegating governmental power or endorsing religious discrimination.

HOLDINGS

1. Section 702 does not violate the Establishment Clause when applied to the nonprofit activities of religious employers. The exemption serves the permissible purpose of alleviating significant governmental interference with religious organizations' ability to define and carry out their religious missions, and any advancement of religion is attributable to the religious organization rather than the Government.
2. As applied to the nonprofit activities of religious employers, § 702 is rationally related to the legitimate purpose of alleviating significant governmental interference with religious organizations' ability to define and carry out their religious missions.
3. Section 702 does not impermissibly entangle church and state; instead, it effectuates a more complete separation by avoiding intrusive judicial inquiry into religious beliefs and the religious character of activities.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This Court has long recognized that the government may (and sometimes must) accommodate religious practices and that it may do so without violating the Establishment Clause.” (483 U.S. at 334)

“Under the Lemon analysis, it is a permissible legislative purpose to alleviate significant governmental interference with the ability of religious organizations to define and carry out their religious missions.” (483 U.S. at 336)

“A law is not unconstitutional simply because it allows churches to advance religion, which is their very purpose.” (483 U.S. at 337)

“The proper inquiry is whether Congress has chosen a rational classification to further a legitimate end.” (483 U.S. at 339)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Deseret Gymnasium was a nonprofit, publicly accessible facility in Salt Lake City operated by two corporations associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mayson worked there for approximately 16 years as an assistant building engineer and then building engineer. The Church-related employers discharged him in 1981 because he failed to qualify for a temple recommend, a certificate showing compliance with Church standards and eligibility to attend its temples.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Mayson and other purported class members sued the Church-related corporations, alleging religious discrimination in employment under Title VII after Mayson was discharged for failing to qualify for a temple recommend. The District Court held that the Deseret Gymnasium's activity was nonreligious and that applying § 702's exemption to it violated the Establishment Clause; it entered summary judgment for Mayson and ordered reinstatement with backpay. After vacating the judgment to permit the United States to intervene, the District Court reentered final judgment for Mayson, and the Supreme Court reversed and remanded.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remanded to the District Court for further proceedings consistent with the opinion.

CASES CITED

- *Hobbie v. Unemployment Appeals Commission of Florida*, 480 U.S. 136 (1987)
- *Walz v. Tax Commission*, 397 U.S. 664 (1970)
- *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971)
- *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952)
- *Board of Education v. Allen*, 392 U.S. 236 (1968)
- *Larson v. Valente*, 456 U.S. 228 (1982)
- *Estate of Thornton v. Caldor, Inc.*, 472 U.S. 703 (1985)
- *United States v. Lee*, 455 U.S. 252 (1982)
- *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972)
- *Mueller v. Allen*, 463 U.S. 388 (1983)
- *Committee for Public Education & Religious Liberty v. Nyquist*, 413 U.S. 756 (1973)
- *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668 (1984)
- *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985)
- *Serbian Eastern Orthodox Diocese v. Milivojevich*, 426 U.S. 696 (1976)
- *Kedroff v. Saint Nicholas Cathedral*, 344 U.S. 94 (1952)
- *Grand Rapids School District v. Ball*, 473 U.S. 373 (1985)

