

High court says World Vision can hire only Christians

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WASHINGTON (ABP) - The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld a lower-court ruling that the Christian humanitarian organization World Vision can fire employees over religious doctrine.

The high court declined without comment Oct. 3 to review an August 2010 ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denying religious discrimination claims by three World Vision workers dismissed in 2006 for denying the divinity of Christ and disavowing the Trinity.

When they were hired Silvia Spencer, Ted Youngberg, and Vicki Huls all submitted required personal statements describing their "relationship with Jesus Christ" and acknowledged "agreement and compliance" with World Vision's statement of faith.

They lodged their complaint alleging discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The act exempts religious corporations. They tried to argue that because it carries out secular work like economic development and disaster relief, World Vision did not qualify for the exemption. A district court ruled against them, finding that the self-described "Christian humanitarian organization" has a "purpose and character that are primarily religious.

Based in Federal Way, Wash., World Vision employs more than 40,000 staff around the world. It hires only employees who agree with the organization's statement of faith and the Apostle's Creed.

The case was watched closely by other corporations with similar hiring practices.

"Today's action by the U.S. Supreme Court represents a major victory for the freedom of all religious organizations to hire employees who share the same faith—whether Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, or any other religion," World Vision U.S. president Richard Stearns said in a press release. "I am pleased, relieved and gratified with the court's action. After four years of litigation, we at World Vision U.S. may now put this matter behind us, and continue our policy of hiring Christians."

World Vision has received about \$650 million in federal funding over the past decade for its anti-poverty work. Candidate Barack Obama said while campaigning in 2008 that groups that get a federal grant should not be allowed to discriminate but recently said religious organizations have “more leeway” to hire somebody of a particular faith. Fifty-six groups, including the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, signed a letter asking the president if he has changed his position on “government-funded religious discrimination.”