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83-152

Moyers Urges Baptists Not To Avoid Politics

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists "cannot turn away from politics just because it is not the place where souls are saved," television journalist Bill Moyers said at a two-day conference focusing on Baptist identity.

Moyers, correspondent and senior news analyst with CBS Evening News, told participants at a Religious Liberty Conference, sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Baptists have inherited a rich tradition with a passion against any "unholy yoke of church and state."

Nonetheless, he added, "for Baptists, possessed of a civic self, politics, like tolerance, is desirable because it is necessary. Here is where liberty will be saved or lost, laws deliberated, issues decided, justice mediated and values defended.

"Leave politics to others," he warned, "and you will wake up one morning governed by three-pieced theocrats wearing shiny shoes, saintly smiles and the head of a pin in their lapel," or by "pious politicians" who espouse "sweet and sickly civil religion."

Moyers, who within months following his graduation from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, joined Lyndon Johnson's vice presidential campaign staff and later worked as close advisor and press secretary for President Johnson, dismissed the notion Baptists have nothing to contribute to democratic politics.

"The fact is," he said, "Baptists have something profound to say in the streets where democracy does its business."

Suggesting Baptists bring a "special gift" to that arena, Moyers said "the realities of the world are enormous--misery, injustice, poverty, bigotry, and cruelty. But there is no way to change these realities without changing people first so that they will want to do the right thing."

Political solutions become more essential, he said, in the face of church inactivity.

"Sometimes politics is all we have," he said. "I believed in the 60s that government must fight a war on poverty because our churches had declared their neutrality. I believed that government must champion, in the 60s, the civil rights of black Americans because our churches had not and many had joined the enemy.

"But in the long run," Moyers continued, "I know as a Baptist, it is not legislation, laws and programs that lead men and women to want the right thing. It is a change of heart."

Moyers, whose public life in politics and journalism rendered him more visible and controversial than most Baptists, described himself as a "prodigal."

He told conference participants of falling "if not from grace, at least from the goodwill of many of my brethren" during a career which led him down a road dissimilar from the one traveled by most Baptist seminary graduates.

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One experience he recalled was the reaction to a 1965 wire service photograph appearing in newspapers across the country showing him "imitating a frenzied voodoo rainmaker of the now extinct Watusi tribe."

Afterward, Moyers said, "I was engulfed in the billowing smoke of a thousand pulpits whose occupants mistakenly thought I was dancing, a clear violation of the Sunday School Board's prohibition of the public display of enjoyment."

One telegram he received following the incident which typified the response of many Baptists read: "First, with your popish sentiments for Kennedy and now with your pagan rituals for Johnson, you have sullied the parchment of your seminary degree and proven yourself destined for eternal damnation unless you return to the Cooperative Program the investment we made in you, plus interest."

In the intervening years, Moyers said, much was forgiven "thanks to the tendency of Baptists to forgive prodigals in general and those in particular who are strategically placed."

Baptists are "congenitally prodigal," Moyers said and suggested the roads traveled by prodigals are not without value.

"One almost has to go off to a far country to live on his inheritance, drawing from it extravagantly..., in order to appreciate fully what it is that's being spent and from whence it came," he said. "We owe far more to many more than I ever realized in my youth."

Moyers reminded participants of Baptists in history who paid a heavy price for the heritage of tradition and conscience passed on to their followers. Though he was born into that Baptist tradition, he said, the "day came when I had to claim the tradition as my own, or lose it. It doesn't travel second hand."

It was in a Baptist church, he said, where he learned about democracy, equality of individuals, inviolability of the conscience, commitment and caring. But it was also there he learned about "schisms, heresies, lunacies, hypocrosies, compromises, crimes, controversies, division and ignorance.

"And the ugly things that happened in my Baptist church actually kindled my faith in democratic possibilities," he added.

Surveying his Baptist inheritance, Moyers said, "You're grateful for what others have given," naming Baptists from history and from his own experience who link him with Baptist heritage.

"Indeed, in such a company, you have been born on the wings of tradition and conscience where you see the whole world, past and present and waiting."

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Baptist Leaders Ask Reagan
To Avoid Shinto Shrine

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press
10/7/83

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Baptists in Japan and the United States have urged President Ronald Reagan to delete a planned visit to a shrine which includes among its gods the spirit of Japan's World War II dictator Hideki Tojo.

A spokesman in the media liason office of the White House said Oct. 6 the President's travel dates and itinerary while in Japan have "not yet been released," and would not confirm or deny Reagan is planning such a visit while in Tokyo.

However, the executive committee of the Japan Baptist Convention approved a letter to Reagan on Aug. 24 based on its und rstanding the shrine has been included in Reagan's plans.

Japanese Baptist leaders warned the president such a visit would "be misinterpreted as an act of Shinto worship by the President of the United States" and "an attempt by the U.S. to force Japan to rearm."

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Shuichi Matsumura, president of the Japan Baptist Convention, and Sumio Kaneko, executive director of the convention, signed the letter to Reagan and sent copies to Duke McCall, chancellor of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and president of the Baptist World Alliance; James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, and president of the 14-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, and Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

The Southern Baptist leaders were asked to intervene with Reagan and urge him not to visit the shrine.

The Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto place of worship. Shinto is an indigenous religion of Japan characterized by the reverence of deified nature spirits and spirits of ancestors. Since 1978 the Yasukuni Shrine "gods" have included Tojo, and six other "war leaders," the Japanese Baptists told Reagan.

The "souls" of Japanese warriors who died in battle are said to be enshrined there but Matsumura and Kaneko noted the shrine, "lacks the non-sectarian status" of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington.

Attempts to have the Yasukuni Shrine declared an official national monument have "successively met with defeat in the Diet (Japanese legislature) and its nationalization is opposed by Christians and others who wish to maintain the gap between religion and state and by those who believe in freedom of worship," the letter pointed out.

The Japanese Baptists said their countrymen could interpret a Reagan visit to the shrine as "an official call to militarization and tantamount to interference in Japan's internal affairs" and noted other U.S. presidents have "wisely avoided" visiting the shrine.

When Queen Elizabeth of England visited Japan in 1975, "she found it unwise to attend this shrine and cancelled her plans," Reagan was told.

McCall entreated Reagan, "not to embarrass the Christians in Japan along with the Christians in the United States." Bennett and Draper joined him in urging the president to alter any plans that included a visit to the shrine.

Copies of the message to Reagan were sent to Mike Mansfield, U.S. ambassador to Japan.

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Widow Contests \$14 Million Will
Which Favors Baptist Schools

Baptist Press
10/7/83

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--The widow of a multi-millionaire Virginia real estate developer has filed suit to nullify a 1982 will made by her husband which excluded her and benefited several Southern Baptist institutions.

Reportedly included among the beneficiaries to the possible \$14 million estate of Howard E. Sigmon are: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; Oak Hill Academy (an institution of the Baptist General Association of Virginia) and Rosalind Hills Baptist Church in Roanoke.

Ferrum College, a Methodist school, and Friendship Manor Apartment Village Corp. also were listed as beneficiaries. Sigmon's sister reportedly was named to receive furniture and other items. Norma Jean Sigmon, who married the widowed Sigmon in 1975, received nothing.

Sigmon died Aug. 18.

Mrs. Sigmon's suit, according to a story in the Roanoke Times, alleges Sigmon's lawyer, Richard Pence, and Baptist seminary officials influenced her 82-year-old husband to cut her out of his will and leave his fortune to several nonprofit organizations.

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She said Sigmon suffered from Alzheimer's Disease and "insane delusions" she was having affairs with numerous men.

Mrs. Sigmon, 58, reportedly is an active member of Rosalind Hills Baptist Church as was her husband. She had never married before she married Sigmon.

A Roanoke County Circuit Court judge has temporarily blocked Pence from serving as executor and appointed a local bank to oversee the estate until the matter is settled. All the Roanoke area judges disqualified themselves from the case and the Virginia Supreme Court appointed retired judge John P. Hooker to hear the suit.

Another will has been introduced in court and reportedly several others will be introduced later in the case. A hearing on the will has been scheduled for Oct. 20.

Roland Lazenby, a reporter for the Roanoke Times, said Mrs. Sigmon was entitled to one-third to one-half of the estate, under Virginia law, no matter what her husband's will said. However, her suit seeks the entire estate which has been valued anywhere between \$4 million and \$14 million.

All parties to the suit have filed responses with the court, according to Lazenby. However, Southern and Southeastern seminaries spokesmen have declined public comment on the advice of their attorneys.

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Texas Court Dismisses Suit
Against Foreign Board

Baptist Press
10/7/83

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A \$5 million damage suit against the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board was dismissed by a U.S. District Court judge in Fort Worth, Texas, for lack of jurisdiction.

The suit was filed by Nasser Lotfi of Austin, Texas, who claims he was beaten by Turkish immigrants while serving as a Foreign Mission Board volunteer in West Germany.

Judge David O. Belew Jr., noted in his ruling negotiations related to Lotfi's service overseas were made through the mail and during a meeting in Virginia, not in Texas, and the injuries Lotfi says he sustained were incurred in Germany.

Lotfi, identified by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram as a former colonel in the Iranian air force and a naturalized U.S. citizen, went with his wife to West Germany in January 1982 for a two-year volunteer term. They were assigned to minister to Turkish immigrants in the Augsburg area, working alongside Southern Baptist career missionaries and in cooperation with the German Baptist Union.

Mission board officials said Lotfi was selected because of his apparent Christian commitment, his Middle East background, his language skills and his intense desire to go. Officials said consultations were held in July 1982 and a decision was made to end the agreement under which the Lotfis went overseas.

The suit claimed Lotfi was "set upon" by a group of men while performing his duties and "beaten into unconsciousness." The beating, it says, resulted in injuries to his back and spine as well as a "traumatic neurosis...."

Sterling W. Steves, Lotfi's attorney in Fort Worth, told Baptist Press he has filed a motion for a rehearing in the case because "we feel he (Lotfi) is a resident of Texas and was hired in Texas. We feel the Foreign Mission Board is doing business in Texas."

If the motion for rehearing is denied, Steves said, he plans to appeal the ruling to the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

It is not known when Belew will rule on the motion for rehearing.

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Southwestern Seminary Revival
Overflows Three Rooms

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Students overflowed Truett Auditorium into two other rooms during the annual fall revival meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dan Yeary, pastor of University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, Fla., using no pulpit, preached with personal transparency and intensity that had students, faculty and administration filling the 1,200 seats in the auditorium, lining the walls and watching by video in first one, then two overflow rooms.

Yeary said, "The world is dying and we're playing intramurals," and Satan has moved into Southern Baptist fellowships and divided them with a whole lot of catchwords that are "absolutely of the devil."

"I just can't justify my existence if I don't bring people to Jesus," he explained. "I don't care what my philosophy is or what my theological hang ups are.

"Heaven help us if we only do what we like," Yeary said, traversing the stage, slightly bent with intensity and with large leather Bible cradled in his hand, cover turned back.

Preaching from the "fifth Gospel, the book of Ego," Yeary charged, "We attempt to make Jesus' gospel a little more palatable. We live like we have a conviction that he really didn't mean us to take him so seriously, like we're trying to improve on what he taught.

"That's the number one temptation for the rest of our life, doing only what we like.

"It was from the cross that Jesus saved the world, not from a safe address," Yeary pointed out.

He said Christians living by the fifth Gospel read "tolerate your enemies," instead of "love your enemies" and "seek eventually the kingdom" instead of "seek ye first the kingdom."

Christians can avoid falling victim to such palatable mediocrity by recognizing that "a Christian's ultimate goal in life is not to be happy, but to glorify God" and "a Christian's attitude toward life, church and family is determined by our attitude toward God."

Many argue "the church is full of hypocrites," Yeary said. "I say 'No, it's not. There were empty seats last Sunday.'"

He said the church is a hospital for hypocrites. It is the only place where they can be healed, so Christians should save plenty of seats for them.

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Missionary Home Robbed;
Car, Money, Jewelry Taken

Baptist Press
10/7/83

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (BP)--Three or four armed men robbed the home of Southern Baptist missionaries Doug and Paula Simrell of Alabama the evening of Oct. 4, taking money, jewelry, a video tape player, a camera and the mission car.

Mrs. Simrell and her 13-year-old daughter, Ruth Ann, were home when the robbery occurred, but Simrell and the couple's other two children were away.

None of the property has been recovered, but missionaries took up an offering to replace the money that was taken, said John Mills, Foreign Mission Board director for West Africa.

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Gaddy Resigns Broadway Church
For New Position At Mercer

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--C. Welton Gaddy, senior minister at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, resigned Oct. 5 to become campus minister and professor of Christianity at Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

Gaddy's resignation will take effect Oct. 30 and he will assume the newly-created position at Mercer Jan. 1, 1984.

Last June Gaddy was elected to a second four-year term as a Texas member of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, a position he will give up because of his move to Georgia. He is also a member of the Christian Ethics Committee of the Baptist World Alliance.

Gaddy, 42, said he accepted the position because of the "opportunity to work with people at a very important point in their lives and to represent with intellectual integrity a faith commitment to people in various disciplines who value intellectual credibility."

He said he also will seek to "represent the importance of the religious dimension in the decision-making process and operations of the university."

Before becoming senior minister at Broadway in 1977, Gaddy served as director of Christian citizenship development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Nashville, Tenn., (1973-77) and pastor of Beechwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. (1971-72).

He taught communication arts at Bellarmine College in 1971 and served as dean of Simmons University in 1970. Both schools are in Louisville.

"Mercer at this particular time seems ready to give high visibility and prominence to the religious dimension in its life," Gaddy said. "I will be preaching regularly in chapel and be pastor to those in the university community. I'm not likely to be in the classroom every quarter. I do want to do some teaching but that will not be on an every term basis."

Gaddy received his bachelor's degree from Union University, Jackson, Tenn., and his master's in theology and doctorate in philosophy from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

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Heritage Commission Sues Over
Baptist Church Building Plan

By Bob Terry

Baptist Press
10/7/83

INDEPENDENCE, Mo. (BP)--A Missouri "heritage district" commission has sued a Southern Baptist church to block construction of a 1,150 seat auditorium and other improvements.

Old Independence, Inc. has sued First Baptist Church of Independence and the Independence city council, charging the church has been exempted unconstitutionally from having its building plans approved by the local Heritage Commission which oversees the Harry S. Truman Heritage District in which the church is located.

The church has already raised \$1.5 million for a building fund and final drawings are being made by architects. Presently the church, which has experienced 10 percent annual growth the past five years, is holding two worship services each Sunday morning and renting Sunday School space at a nearby junior high school.

The tensions which resulted in the court suit go back to least a decade. In the early 1970s, Independence officials established a National Register Heritage District around the home of former United States President Harry S Truman.

No limitations were placed on property owners by federal officials when the National Register district was created. However, Independence officials created a Heritage Commission to oversee property in the area. This commission was given power to approve all building, alterations and even landscaping on property within the designated area.

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First Church, located one block from the Truman home, objected to the broad powers proposed for the Heritage Commission. Before the Independence city council, a church spokesman remarked, "What we have trouble with is the notion that, in order for a certain 'heritage' of a certain area of our city to be preserved, (First Church) must beg or petition the civil government for the privilege of exercising a constitutionally-guaranteed right--religious liberty.... We think our church, not the Heritage Commission, should determine how we will use our properties."

Despite Heritage Commission objections, the city council agreed with the church and an exemption was granted "established churches" within the heritage district.

Independence pastor John Hughes argues the exemption was necessary for the "free exercise" of religion. "A church is not a building," Hughes said, "but a building is an aid to the religious purposes and character of the church. Buildings are important to the church's worship, instruction and religious ministries.

"If a church cannot determine how best to use its properties to advance its religious ministries, then the church cannot freely exercise its religious ministries in the name of Christ," Hughes charged.

The suit contends the exemption for churches violates the "no establishment" of religion clause of the U.S. Constitution. The suit says churches enjoy a privilege (exemption from Heritage Commission control) not enjoyed by other property owners within the district.

The suit also seeks to prevent the church from tearing down houses owned by the church and using the land for parking spaces. The suit even attempts to prevent the church from using vacant land adjacent to an existing church parking lot and owned by the church from being used as a parking area.

Independence officials feel differently. On Aug. 1, 1983, the city council adopted a resolution endorsing a church proposal that the vacant land, located half a block from the Truman home, be jointly used by the church and by visitors to the Truman home.

Observers believe underneath the announced issues in the suit are at least two sub-plots--power and profit.

In 1979, the Independence city council unilaterally enlarged the area controlled by the Heritage Commission. However, authorities indicate no local district can be "certified" if the local district has any exemptions.

Since property owners in the heritage district enjoy certain tax benefits if they renovate their property and put it into commercial use, certification of the expanded local district would extend the tax benefits to property owners in the added territory.

In the meantime, First Church faces a dilemma. If the church does not move forward with its building programs, Hughes fears the church will revert to its years of decline. If the church builds and loses the lawsuit, the court could order the properties returned to their original conditions.

The suit has all the ingredients of a United States Supreme Court bound case. That could mean resolution is years away.

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Georgia Church For The Deaf
Removes Barrier Of Isolation

By Joe Canzoneri

Baptist Press
10/7/83

ATLANTA (BP)--Deafness, labeled by Helen Keller as the worst disability because it cuts people off from people, is a handicap Georgia's Crusselle-Freeman Church of the Deaf exists to overcome.

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The 152-member church in Atlanta is believed to be the only church in the Southeast owned and managed by the deaf. Started as a mission in 1903, the church was constituted as an independent church in 1957 and affiliated with Southern Baptists three years ago. Crusselle-Freeman, self-supporting from the beginning, now gives 10 percent of its \$45,000 income to the Cooperative Program.

Average attendance is 90 and resemble those of typical Southern Baptist churches. While other churches may provide interpreters who sign for deaf members, however, at Crusselle-Freeman all signs are "voiced" for the 10 percent of the congregation which can hear.

Voicing the signs is important, says pastor Wilber Huckeba, because "Crusselle-Freeman is a total family church." By providing a church in which deafness is no handicap, Crusselle-Freeman helps keep families together, overcoming the isolation which plagues the deaf.

Preaching in two languages is a recurring challenge for Huckeba. His hands are in constant motion, echoing his spoken words, as he strides back and forth behind the pulpit.

"I have to keep moving," he says. "The average length of eye-contact is about eight seconds. By moving, I keep the congregation's eyes fixed on me." While the hearing can divert their attention and still follow the message, the deaf stop "hearing" when they look away.

But Crusselle-Freeman provides more than Sunday fellowship for the deaf. Before the end of the year, the church will also offer residential care for the elderly deaf.

Adequate care for the elderly deaf is perhaps the most pressing need Huckeba has encountered since beginning work with the deaf 37 years ago. "I get two or three calls a month from people looking for assistance in finding a nursing home that will accept their elderly deaf relatives," he says.

Most nursing homes either will not take deaf residents or will charge an excessively high fee. Even then, the deaf are rarely cared for properly; most retirement facilities are not equipped to minister to their special needs.

To remedy that, the church has purchased and renovated a house next-door into a special home equipped for the deaf. With donations of money and furnishings, "everything is paid for, free and clear," Huckeba reports. When the church finds a manager and a van, the Watchful Care Home will be ready to open for as many as 14 residents.

The need for such ministries is evident when you realize there are some 42,000 totally deaf people in Georgia alone, Huckeba observes. Nearly 30,000 of those live in metro Atlanta. Sixty-five percent of all deaf adults wind up in metro areas because of job opportunities and the social contacts that are less available elsewhere.

Huckeba, who has been employed by the postal service for more than 33 years, insists deafness is no handicap. "The deaf may have an inability and that can be worked into a capability," he says. "Hearing people handicap the deaf. But the deaf are very inventive in getting around this 'handicap.' It's a matter of survival."

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(Adapted from Oct. 1983 issue of SBC Today. Joe Canzoneri is a journalist in Decatur, Ga.)
(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Nativity Dispute Tops List
Of New Church-State Actions

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
10/7/83

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a week highlighted by legal arguments over a Christmas nativity scene, the U.S. Supreme Court also declined to hear several church-state cases as it returned to the bench for the 1983-84 term.

Grabbing the lion's share of media attention was the nativity case, pitting the city of Pawtucket, R.I. against the American Civil Liberties Union. The issue: whether city taxes may be used for the erection of an outdoor display depicting the birth of Jesus.

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For its part, the city contended in oral arguments before the high court that the nativity scene is but a minor part of a larger secular celebration. Christmas in America, the argument went, is "a national folk festival" and "a vast conglomeration of folk customs and symbols, feasting and fraternizing, music, literature and art. The religious origins in the holiday have evolved into a secular humanism."

Pawtucket's nativity scene is part of a larger display that includes a talking wishing well, a miniature New England village, a Santa's house with a live Santa Claus, a spray of reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh, and assorted cutout figures depicting other non-religious figures associated with the Christmas season.

Attorneys for a group of Pawtucket taxpayers who sued the city over the nativity scene argued that two lower federal courts were correct in striking down the practice as a violation of the separation of church and state.

They argued Pawtucket's purchase and display of the nativity scene violates the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion by placing the imprimatur of the state on one set of religious beliefs and by showing preference for one religion over all others.

Because the justices chose to hear the case on the second day of the new term, observers are speculating their decision may be rendered before the coming Christmas season (821256, Lynch v. Donnelly).

In other actions, the high court refused to schedule for argument several other cases involving church-state questions.

The court decided not to review a First Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that a Rhode Island law providing both public and private school students with free bus transportation outside their local school system improperly entangled state with church in violation of the establishment clause (83-158, Members of Jamestown School Committee v. Schmidt).

In another parochial busing case, the justices likewise turned aside an appeal from South Bend, Ind. parents who sought transportation for their children to sectarian schools at taxpayers' expense. The case was decided earlier on procedural rather than substantive grounds (82-1713, Frame v. South Bend Community School Corp.).

The justices also declined to disturb a ruling by the Tenth Circuit Court upholding federal and Utah laws exempting religious educational institutions in their hiring practices. The case arose when a Mormon business college refused to renew the teaching contract of a Mormon teacher who was judged to have insufficient involvement in church activities (83-92, Larsen v. Kirkham).

In a pair of church zoning cases, the justices also let stand lower court rulings that upheld a Honolulu, Hawaii ordinance banning more than five unrelated persons' living on church premises and a Lakewood, Ohio ban on the construction of a church building in virtually all of the city's residential districts. The Honolulu action was brought by members of the Hare Krishna sect, while a group of Jehovah's Witnesses challenged the Lakewood ban (82-2070, International Society for Krishna Consciousness v. Marsland); (821769, Lakewood, Ohio Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses v. City of Lakewood, Ohio).

A Cuyahoga County, Ohio court that ordered an independent Baptist congregation to defend itself in court for alleged building and fire code violations was also upheld when the justices declined to review the lower panel's findings (83-44, Solon Baptist Temple v. City of Solon).

In another action, the court let stand a New York state panel that ordered a divorced man to appear before a rabbinical tribunal. The man's former wife seeks a religious, as well as civil, divorce (82-1854, Avitzur v. Avitzur).

And finally, the justices turned aside an appeal from the Church of Christ of Collinsville, Okla. that it should not have to go to court in a damage suit brought by a former member who was dismissed for fornication (82-1950, Church of Christ of Collinsville, Okla. v. Graham).