

## CORPORATE STATEMENT

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HARVEST HOUSE  
PUBLISHERS

### **Appellate Court Rules in Favor of Harvest House and Its Authors, John Ankerberg and John Weldon**

On January 5, 2006, the Court of Appeals for the First District of Texas issued an opinion in favor of Harvest House Publishers and authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon, dismissing a \$136 million libel lawsuit that The Local Church and its publishing arm, Living Stream Ministry, had filed in December 2001 in relation to the book *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*.

The Appellate Court's decision, written by Chief Justice Sherry Radack, ruled that "the allegedly libel[ous] statements are not defamatory, as a matter of law," and, "We reverse the judgment of the trial court and render judgment that the [Local] church take nothing from the publisher and authors." The full decision can be read at <http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/ruling.pdf>.

In their suit, The Local Church claimed that the *Encyclopedia* accused their group of criminal and immoral conduct. However, Harvest House and the authors have contended all along that the book does not and never intended to attribute such activity to The Local Church. Rather, the authors included the 1¼-page chapter on the Local Church's teachings in the *Encyclopedia* based on the book's definition of a religious cult: "a separate religious group generally claiming compatibility with Christianity but whose doctrines contradict those of historic Christianity...."

Though The Local Church insisted this case was not about being labeled a "cult," they contended that by their mere inclusion in the *Encyclopedia*, and because the Introduction mentioned misdeeds committed by some unspecified cults, their group stood accused of any conduct that happened to be mentioned in the Introduction. Thus, they alleged, the book was libelous. But the Court pointed out that the *Encyclopedia* centers on doctrinal and apologetic issues, and "that being labeled a 'cult' is not actionable because the truth or falsity of the statement depends upon one's religious beliefs, an ecclesiastical matter, which cannot and should not be tried in a court of law."

As for the criminal conduct mentioned in the Introduction, the Appellate Court decisively ruled, "No reasonable reader could conclude that the book accuses the [Local] church...of rape, murder, child molestation, drug smuggling, etc....The allegedly libelous statements in the Introduction are not 'of and concerning' the [Local] church and are not actionable."

John Ankerberg and John Weldon, in a joint statement, said, "We are thankful that the Court saw the issues with great clarity and ruled accordingly, because throughout the case, The Local Church has persistently accused us of making horrendous charges against them and have misrepresented the contents of the *Encyclopedia*." The authors continued, "Though The Local Church clearly desires acceptance within evangelical Christianity, suing those who critique their teachings is not the way to gain it, but rather, dealing with the unorthodox teachings that exist in their publications. We care deeply about the people within The Local Church, and though we disagree with them doctrinally, we uphold their right to publish and teach as they choose."

Bob Hawkins, Jr., president of Harvest House Publishers, adds, "We hope this ruling will encourage other authors, publishers, and broadcasters to stand strong in their convictions and to continue engaging in responsible dialogue concerning controversial topics without fear of intimidating lawsuits." Hawkins went on to say, "We have been encouraged by many people who have been praying for us, and we've been humbled by the wonderful support we received from media groups and publishers who filed friend-of-the-court briefs on our behalf. Ultimately, we are thankful that we have had the opportunity to experience in profoundly deep ways the faithfulness of God."