



CORPORATE STATEMENT
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Harvest House Publishers and Authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon to Appeal Texas Court Summary Judgment Opinion Regarding Local Church/Living Stream Ministry Lawsuit

On March 9, 2004, Judge Kent Sullivan of the 80th Judicial District Court of Harris County in Houston, Texas, denied a motion for summary judgment submitted by defendants Harvest House Publishers, Inc. and authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon with regard to the two-year-old, \$136 million defamation suit filed by The Local Church and their publishing arm, Living Stream Ministry. This action is not a ruling against Harvest House and the authors, but simply allows the case to continue forward. In response, Harvest House Publishers, Ankerberg, and Weldon have announced they will immediately take this ruling to the Texas court of appeals.

In their lawsuit, The Local Church claimed that the *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* accused their group of criminal and immoral conduct. However, Harvest House, Ankerberg, and Weldon unequivocally contend that the book does not attribute such activity to The Local Church or its followers. Rather, they assert that The Local Church was included in the book based on their significant theological deviations from biblical, orthodox Christianity. The Local Church has attempted to argue that some general statements in the introduction about the characteristics and activities of various cults apply directly to them. But in actuality, the language of the *Encyclopedia* simply doesn't support their argument and there was never any intent for those general statements to point to any specific group. Thus the book does not defame The Local Church. A noteworthy fact is that The Local Church, in its suit, did not dispute the accuracy of the chapter in the book that comments on their beliefs.

Author John Ankerberg, president of *The John Ankerberg Show*, and co-author John Weldon, in a joint statement, said, "We stand behind what we wrote as well-researched and accurate. We had no intent to nor did we disparage The Local Church, but rather, our intent was and remains to merely point out their theological aberrations in contrast to biblical Christianity. The Local Church's assertions on one of their websites that we were out to 'hurt' them are completely unfounded, and furthermore, we did not make any defamatory, false, or malicious statements about them."

"We will appeal this case to the highest court necessary," said lead counsel Shelby Sharpe. "Freedom of expression on the written page as well as healthy debate when discussing religious subjects need to be encouraged and protected with absolute diligence. This case is crucially relevant to all print media, and especially to the members of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Indeed, Harvest House and the authors must prevail in order to prevent a serious 'chilling effect' on the exercise of First Amendment rights."

Bob Hawkins, Jr., president of Harvest House Publishers, stated, "We are, of course, disappointed with Judge Sullivan's decision, but remain very confident that the appellate court will fully vindicate us. Harvest House Publishers will continue to vigorously defend truth through the responsible publishing of biblically accurate and theologically sound material. The authors, our attorneys, and Harvest House are united in our commitment to stand strong and persevere in this case, giving God praise and glory for each step along the way. We are deeply grateful for the many who have supported us and kept us in their prayers."