

THE LOCAL CHURCHES & LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE ATTORNEYS CONFUSE FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITH ITS DELIBERATE ABUSE IN ATTEMPT TO VINDICATE HARVEST HOUSE BOOK

Living Stream Ministry and The Local Church Clarify Issues Related to Landmark Lawsuit Addressing Publishers Responsibility Beyond Right to Publish

Houston, Nov. 1, 2005 —The Rutherford Institute (TRI) recently filed an amicus brief on behalf of Harvest House Publishers, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon in their appeal, Harvest House et al vs. The Local Church, Living Stream Ministry and various local churches, of the trial court's decision to deny their summary judgment motions. The appeal was heard in oral argument in the Texas State Court of Appeals on October 27, 2005.

Both publishers involved are members of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association and should be governed by their standards, which reflect biblical principles. Regrettably, Harvest House has neglected those standards and continues to refuse to resolve the matter of including Living Stream Ministry and The Local Church in their publication of "Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions" (ECNR) outside of the realm of litigation.

This case goes beyond the freedom of speech or the right to publish to the responsibility for what is published. The Rutherford Institute's brief clarifies the limits to First Amendment rights on page two, stating that writers also must "be[ing] responsible for the abuse of that privilege." This case is not about freedom, but abuse.

The Rutherford Amicus brief and related press release mischaracterize the nature of the conflict, the facts upon which it is based and the law that governs the issues involved. What is before the court is not a question about "general definitions" written in the normal course of publication. Neither does it have anything to do with theology or religious doctrine

This litigation concerns a deliberate, systematic attempt by a Christian publisher and its authors to accuse Living Stream Ministry and the local churches of criminal behavior and abhorrent conduct – including rape, drug smuggling, child molestation, prostitution, murder and human sacrifice – without taking any responsibility for the falsity of those accusations.

Furthermore, despite repeated efforts by Living Stream Ministry and the local churches, Harvest House and their authors have steadfastly refused to meet as Christian brothers to resolve the conflict directly, according to the biblical mandate in Matthew 18. It was Harvest House, John Ankerberg and John Weldon who initiated the litigation, who brought this matter into the courts, and, at the same time, continued to republish the book.

The abuse of publication privilege in this case has been further demonstrated by the overwhelming evidence before the court. The authors testified under oath that readers could apply the “non-theological evils” of the ECNR Introduction and Appendix to the Local Church. Harvest House personnel confirmed that the language could be applied to the local churches. There is ample testimony that readers **have** related this criminal language to the local churches and Living Stream Ministry.

The trial court has already twice rejected the defendants’ motions for summary judgment, which argued that the attribution of crimes and abhorrent behavior could not be applied by a reasonable reader to the local churches. The language of the book itself is clearer than any lawyer’s argument--what is in the Introduction applies to the groups in the book. It is what the defendants intended and accomplished.

While it is clear that the publisher and authors had the local churches in mind when they wrote those horrendous charges, it is equally true that they have been completely unable to substantiate any of them. In fact they have admitted: “The Local Church...is unique among the groups in this encyclopedia. It is not a cult in the negative sense of the term, nor do the characteristics of the cults in the Introduction generally apply to them.”

The question then is why are the local churches and Living Stream Ministry in their book? One would expect that the Rutherford Institute would rather encourage the authors and publishers to publish what they have already admitted—that the local churches and Living Stream Ministry do not belong in the “Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions.”

Romans 13 tells us that government is instituted under God’s sovereign ruling to protect society from lawlessness. The law concerning defamation is well defined and has layers of protection for the free expression of writers and publishers as well as provisions to deal with the deliberate misuse of publications to harm others. Christian publications are covered under that same law.

Though it appears the Rutherford brief means to suggest that Christians should be treated differently, certainly the standard among Christians should not be lower than those for other writers and publishers. If the law determines that one set of authors and publishers have deliberately done wrong, this will not chill the freedom of all Christian writers and publishers. A more likely result will be to encourage all Christian publishers to follow the higher standards our faith demands.