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November 20, 2001

VIA FACSIMILE AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Mr. Robert C. Hawkins  
President  
Harvest House Publishers  
1075 Arrowsmith Street  
Eugene, Oregon 97402-9121

Re: ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTS AND NEW RELIGIONS by Ankerberg and Weldon

Dear Mr. Hawkins:

We write to you on behalf of the Living Stream Ministry, the Local Churches and the co-workers of Witness Lee. By now you are well aware that we are vehemently opposed to your inclusion of the Local Church in the hit list that Harvest House inaccurately refers to as an "encyclopedia." You also know from past correspondence that our protest is not based on any philosophical or theological differences between us, but upon the inflammatory falsehoods about the Church and its members that appear in Dr. Ankerberg and Dr. Weldon's book. You have been unwilling in the past to discuss these falsehoods at a face-to-face meeting. We urge you once more to meet with us. Your refusal to do so will only demonstrate that you do not care what harm you inflict and have acted with malice.

Notwithstanding our prior protests that the book is false with respect to the Local Church, and in spite of the evidence of falsity that appears on the Internet at [www.contendingforthefaith.com](http://www.contendingforthefaith.com), including the court's prior ruling, you have proceeded with a third reprinting and further distribution of the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTS AND NEW RELIGIONS. Because of your disregard for the truth or falsity of your book and for the damage it is causing us, this letter sets forth, in the clearest, simplest terms, the book's most damaging defamatory statements about the Local Church and its members primarily from a legal perspective. However, we feel that it is also important that you understand our responses to the book's misrepresentations about us in more detail, including from a Christian perspective. To that end, we have attached an Appendix that sets forth that detail. We ask that you give the Appendix careful consideration.

We begin with the book's title, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTS AND NEW RELIGIONS ("ECNR"). From this title, a reasonable reader will readily infer that the organizations profiled in the book -- including the Local Church -- are "cults." This inference is particularly reasonable since the book's introduction devotes many pages to a discussion of "cults," never defines the concept of "new religions" and draws no distinction between the two concepts. In fact, linguistics Professor Edward Finegan, of The University of Southern California, in reviewing ECNR stated:

"The clear implication to the reader is that the front matter frames each chapter. An average reader would associate the front matter with every group mentioned....and would believe all of the groups mentioned are immeasurably damaging."

According to Dr. Ankerberg and Dr. Weldon, cults engage in a variety of very bad, unwholesome and morally bankrupt practices. For example, the book alleges that cults subject their members to “physical” and “psychological” “harm”, engage in the “perversion of sexuality,” “restrict” the “independent thought” of their members, and demand “unquestioning obedience” to group “leaders.” The authors further allege that cults engage in “occult practices,” engineer “cover ups of the group’s history” or that of its “leaders,” subject members to “intimidation,” perpetrate “deception and fraud,” engage in fraudulent “fund raising,” and issue deceptive statements concerning “financial costs.” The authors go so far as to suggest that these cults practice “witchcraft” and literally cause “cancer” in their members.

Each and every disreputable practice and trait that the book attributes to the groups targeted in its pages is absolutely false with respect to the Local Church. The Local Church does not merely abstain from such practices but strongly condemns them. By falsely associating the Local Church with these activities, the book maligns the reputation of the Church and its members, while rendering its members unrecognizable as Christians.

The book does not stop there. By including a section on “occult potential” in the chapter on “The Local Church”, inaccurately stating the Church’s teachings, and utilizing misleading editing and out-of-context quotations, it imputes to the Church moral and religious beliefs that it does not hold. For example, it falsely portrays, by taking it out of context, that the quote from Witness Lee, “I am from the third heaven!”, demonstrates that Mr. Lee claimed to be some sort of deity that descended from the “heavens.” Another quote is edited to make it appear that we advocate the blasphemous idea that man becomes God in His God-head to hide the fact that we teach the opposite. These quotes, then, go far beyond mere negligent misrepresentation: there is a false attribution that is every bit as damaging as falsely attributing to the President of the United States the ideologies of Osama Bin Laden or Slobodan Milosevic. In such situations, the reader comes to associate the subject with ideas he detests and thinks less of him because of that false association.

Other passages in the book falsely suggest that Local Church leaders practice “shamanism,” speak through “demons,” and encourage believers to communicate directly with “devils.” Nothing could be farther from the truth. Plainly, these bizarre mischaracterizations of the Church are designed to discredit and marginalize the Local Church. The authors’ destructive intent and outright hostility toward the Local Church comes through clearly in these passages.

What is remarkable about the publication of the false charges and severe mischaracterizations in ECNR concerning the Local Church is that it was done in the face of a court’s ruling in which virtually identical statements about us were found to be libelous.

As you know, on June 26, 1985, the court, after hearing the testimony of several highly respected expert witnesses,<sup>1</sup> found that the Local Church does not fit the definition of a cult as “a centralized authority that manipulates social influences in order to gain control over people for devious ends.” The court also found that the Local Church does not “engage in or advocate deceptive recruiting practices,” that no one “rules the Local Church with an iron rod or with a firm hand,” that the Local Church does not “engage in mental manipulation,” that the leaders do not “control every aspect of church members’ lives,” and that the Local Church does not “isolate members from society.” The court further found no support for the suggestion that the Local Church is “teaching and advocating conduct that would allow or encourage church members to engage in immoral behavior.” The court dismissed as baseless allegations that the Local Church “publicly humiliates members” and that some members were “hospitalized for psychiatric care” as a consequence of

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. J. Gordon Melton (Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, University of California, Santa Barbara); Fr. John J. Saliba, S.J., University of Detroit (expert in the study of new religions); Reverend Dr. Eugene Van Ness Goetchius (Professor of Theology, Former Chair Philadelphia Episcopal Divinity School); Dr. Rodney Stark (Professor of Sociology, University of Washington); and Dr. H. Newton Malony (Professor of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary).

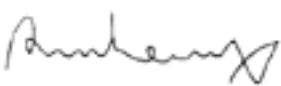
their membership. The court spurned the notion that the "Local Church members are people who conceal." It rejected characterizations that church leaders "use fear tactics or threats of reprisal in order to keep members loyal to the Local Church or to prevent them from leaving." The court also rejected the accusation that the Local Churches "were guilty of financial mismanagement." After making these findings, the court ruled that statements to the contrary, which appeared in Neil Duddy's and Spiritual Counterfeits Project's book The God-Men, were false and defamatory.

It goes without saying that these findings were made years before the publication of ECNR and that Mr. Weldon was aware of them prior to publication. A true copy of the court's ruling is attached to the Appendix hereto as Exhibit A. In the same vein, Harvest House has elected to go forward with a third reprinting of ECNR in the face of our letters protesting the falsity of ECNR, and in utter disregard of the evidence (including the Statement of Decision, the scholars' expert testimony and writings, retractions, and our own writings) of that falsity presented at [www.contendingforthefaith.com](http://www.contendingforthefaith.com). As you know, we referred you to that web site in past correspondence and urged you to review its contents. In our view, your decision to ignore accurate information that conflicts with your predetermined views concerning the Local Church is the height of journalistic irresponsibility and the strongest evidence of constitutional malice.

In closing, we reemphasize our desire to meet with you so that we can present our evidence, answer your questions and discuss a solution to this controversy. Nevertheless, you should understand that we will request that a clear and unequivocal retraction of the falsehoods and mischaracterizations identified herein be issued without delay. We will also request your assurance that you will cease distributing copies of THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTS AND NEW RELIGIONS that discuss the Local Churches and that the book will not be reprinted or distributed again until all false references concerning the Local Churches have been deleted from the text. In addition, we will also seek your written representation that there will be no other publication of the book's statements concerning the Church in any medium at any time.

Please respond to this letter no later than Friday, December 7, 2001. Your failure to do so will give us little alternative but to pursue legal action against you.

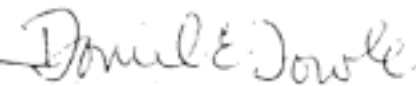
Thank you for your consideration.



Andrew Yu  
Living Stream Ministry



Richard W. Taylor  
For the Local Churches



Daniel E. Towle  
For the Co-Workers

Enclosures: Appendix with Exhibits A-E

cc: Barry Langberg, Esq.; John Ankerberg; John Weldon