

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANAHEIM, CA, June 20 – A ruling this week by The United States Supreme Court electing not to grant review of a Texas Court of Appeals decision in the libel case filed by Living Stream Ministry (LSM) and the local churches v. Harvest House Publishers and the authors of the *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (ECNR) undermines a fundamental protection of the Constitution. The Texas Court of Appeals decision has already been criticized by a federal district court in Wisconsin.

This decision brings to an end a legal struggle that began December 14, 2001, when Harvest House Publishers initiated legal action against one of the local churches. The churches and Living Stream Ministry (LSM) responded by filing a suit for libel. The Harvest House suit was dismissed in district court in 2002, while the local churches and LSM's lawsuit continued forward in Texas. There, on three separate occasions, two district court judges denied the defendants' attempts to have the case thrown out.

However, without it ever going to a jury trial, the Court of Appeals in Texas overturned the decisions of the lower court, declaring the case a "religious" dispute -- despite ECNR's allegations of secular crimes. In essence, the Appeals Court ruled that if one party alleges criminal behavior against another party -- but does it in a "religious" context -- it cannot be found liable for the damages caused.

Because reviews at the US Supreme Court level are discretionary, its decision to deny review cannot accurately be considered as an endorsement of the prior Appeals Court ruling. Neither can it appropriately be viewed as a rejection of the central theme of the local churches and LSM's lawsuit. In fact, there is no court ruling at any level that has substantiated or validated any of the claims published in ECNR concerning LSM or the local churches. On the contrary, the evidence in the case, including several admissions under oath by the authors of ECNR, demonstrate that there is not, nor has there ever been, any factual basis for any of the false and defaming statements that were the real basis of the lawsuit.

In the past several years, many qualified Christian researchers and theologians have carefully investigated the teachings, practice, and history of LSM and the local churches and have expressed their belief in both the Christian orthodoxy and practice of both groups. Among these are Fuller Theological Seminary, Christianity Today, Christian Research Institute, Answers in Action, The Institute for the Study of American Religion, and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. See, for example, www.lctestimony.org

Many constitutional scholars and religious experts share the concern of LSM and the local churches that the Texas Court of Appeals' decision sets a dangerous precedent and has wrongly precluded a full airing of the facts at the heart of this litigation. The detrimental effects will not likely be limited to the local churches and

believers in the United States, but may be especially troublesome for those in countries that can be hostile toward the Christian faith—where innocent believers may suffer as a direct result of this ruling. Beyond the damage resulting to Living Stream Ministry and the local churches, if religious authors and publishers have free reign to use criminal accusations to attack ministries and churches simply because they disagree with them doctrinally, then all minority Christian groups are in jeopardy.

Living Stream Ministry and the local churches it serves remain committed to the biblical truths represented in our publications and to the oneness of the Body of Christ. We will continue to seek genuine Christian fellowship with a broad spectrum of believers eager to know the truth in love.

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