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August 7, 2006

Via Certified Mail

The Supreme Court of Texas
Supreme Court Building
201 West 14th Street, Room 104
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: No. 06-0527, The Local Church, Living Stream Ministry, et al. v. Harvest House Publishers, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Original Proceeding, in the Supreme Court of Texas, Austin, Texas

**Brief of *Amicus Curiae* Hank Hanegraaff
in Support of the Petition for Review of The Local Church, Living Stream Ministry, et al.**

To: Blake Hawthorne, Clerk of the Supreme Court of Texas:

My name is Hank Hanegraaff and I am the president and chairman of the board of the Christian Research Institute (CRI) and host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast. CRI provides carefully researched information regarding cults and is one of the largest apologetics ministries in the world. The *Bible Answer Man* radio program is syndicated on almost 100 stations nationwide (including KLGO in Austin, KWRD/KPXI in Dallas/Fort Worth, KKHT in Houston, KELP in El Paso, KAGC in Bryan, and KDRY and KSLR in San Antonio) and available internationally through the Web and via Internet simulcast. I am also a nationally known pulpit and conference speaker and the author of numerous award-winning books in the area of Christian apologetics.

I am filing this *amicus curiae* letter brief on behalf of Christian Research Institute in support of Petitioners The Local Church, et al.'s Petition for Review, according to Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure, Rule 11.

I have paid all legal fees and costs associated with this brief. My office is located at 6295 Blakeney Park Drive, Charlotte, North Carolina 28277.

I urge this Court to grant review.

The Texas Court of Appeals ruled, "Therefore, we conclude 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 a person who has studied both the common and technical definitions of the term "cult" for the past two decades, I am compelled to submit this brief to explain why I disagree with this conclusion and my concern for its impact should it remain law.

First, a cult can be defined from both a sociological and theological perspective. From a sociological perspective the word "cult" describes a group of people who are controlled by their leader(s) in virtually every dimension of their lives potentially resulting in illegal, immoral, and anti-social consequences. In this sense, groups like the People's Temple (Jim Jones), Heaven's Gate (Herff Applewhite), and Branch Davidians (David Koresh) can legitimately be labeled cults. From a theological perspective, a cult may be defined as a modern-day movement that claims to be Christian but contradicts essential tenets of the historic Christian faith, such as the deity or bodily resurrection of Christ.

From my own direct study of and extensive interaction with the Local Church and Living Stream Ministry, I have concluded that the word "cult" does not apply to the Local Church either sociologically or theologically. While I disagree with Local Church leaders, as well as many other Christian leaders, on secondary theological issues such as eschatology and ecclesiology, these are issues Christians can and do debate vigorously without dividing over them.

Finally, to apply the sociologically charged and increasingly connotative word "cult" to the Local Church can have dramatic and dangerous ramifications. This could be particularly harmful to any group, such as the Local Church, with large constituencies in religiously intolerant societies. The Texas Court of Appeals decision establishing a legal precedent protecting the use of the word "cult" would be potentially damaging to countless innocent Christians. Therefore, it should be reviewed and reversed by the Texas Supreme Court.

I have also sent copies of this letter to the attorneys of record in this case.

Respectfully submitted,



Hank Hanegraaff
President and Chairman of the Board,
Christian Research Institute

cc. Lynne Liberato
Donald Jackson
Shelby Sharpe
Thomas J. Williams
Douglas W. Alexander
Kevin Dubose
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