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Abuse redress depends on God: Jehovah's



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The Jehovah's Witnesses will only compensate survivors of sex abuse if God tells them to, a royal commission has been told.

Senior church figure Geoffrey Jackson told the sex abuse royal commission that any changes the Jehovah's Witnesses made to their rules and doctrine had to be informed by God.

Mr Jackson said God's word is accessed through the Bible and



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the church's first-century interpretation of it.

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Chief Commissioner Peter McClellan asked him on Friday if the church would be willing to take part in a joint scheme with other institutions to provide financial redress to abuse survivors.

Mr Jackson told him the church would need to see that "nothing was scripturally against us doing that", but it was something that was not totally out of the "option pool".

The commission is also examining why none of the church's 1006 Australian child abuse cases in a 50-year period was reported to police.

Mr Jackson said there was a biblical underpinning to the practice on not going to police,

but the church would comply with secular law if reporting to police was mandatory.

He also quoted the Bible to defend the exclusion of women from decision-making roles in the Jehovah's and to argue that the rule of needing two witnesses to prove any wrong doing had strong scriptural basis.

He said women would never hold leadership roles in the Jehovah's Witness because the bible forbids it, quoting scripture which warns against women in the congregation becoming over excited and arguing with the church leaders.

Justice McClellan stressed it was important for women to be involved in deciding if a sex abuse allegation was true and in the support of victims.

A member of the church's New York based governing body which interprets and spreads the word to its eight million global followers, Mr Jackson said there was a possibility of considering the involvement of women.

He stopped short of apologising to those abused by elders but said it's "perceivable" the church

would apologise if there was a collective decision.

Counsel for the commission Angus Stewart, SC challenged Mr Jackson on the scriptural basis for needing two witnesses to a sexual assault.

Mr Stewart quoted Deuteronomy, a book of the old testament, which says if a woman is raped in a field and screams and there are no other witnesses it is sufficient for the man to be stoned to death.

"Is it not the case that had Jesus been asked about a case of sexual abuse he may have referred back to this part of Deuteronomy?" Mr Stewart asked.

Mr Jackson said he would certainly like to ask Jesus the question but could not at the moment.

"I hope to in the future," he said.

Mr Jackson and other church officials have told the commission the two witness rule in abuse cases was changing to take in circumstances.

The commission heard earlier the church believes the end of the world is near and only 144,000 will make it to heaven, the rest will live in paradise on earth.

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