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Jehovah's Witness group caned by abuse royal commission submission

TESSA AKERMAN THE AUSTRALIAN DECEMBER 1, 2015 6:31PM TESSA AKERMAN

Counsel assisting the child sex abuse royal commission has made damning submissions of 77 potential findings regarding the Jehovah's Witness organisation.

They include that the policy of shunning those who leave the organisation is in conflict with the belief that Jehovah God is a compassionate god.

In submissions published today, Angus Stewart SC said the Jehovah's Witness organisation receives three to four reports of allegations of child sexual abuse each month and since 1950 the Jehovah's Witness organisation has received allegations of child sexual abuse against 1006 of its members relating to at least 1800 victims.

He submitted in that period, the organisation has not reported a single allegation to the police or other authorities, even though 579 of those against whom allegations were made confessed to having committed child sexual abuse.

He submitted it was open for the commission to find that it is the policy and practice of the Jehovah's Witness organisation in Australia not to report allegations of child sexual abuse to the police or other authorities unless required by law to do so.

“There is therefore an element of hypocrisy in the Jehovah's Witness organisation claiming credit

for having obtained clearances for working with children for its elders and ministerial servants, but at the same time not reporting the offences of its elders and ministerial servants which would prevent them from being able to obtain working with children clearance,” Mr Stewart said.

He advised the commission could find the documented practice of the Jehovah's Witness organisation of not reporting child sexual abuse to the authorities undermined the efficacy of the working with children check system — “a system to which the organisation says it subscribes and with which it says it complies”.

Mr Stewart submitted the Jehovah's Witness organisation's policy of requiring its adherents to actively shun those who leave the organisation is cruel on those who leave and on their friends and family who remain behind.

It was particularly cruel on those who have suffered child sexual abuse in the organisation and wish to leave because they feel that their complaints have not been adequately dealt with.

He submitted the policy of shunning is not apparently justified by the Scriptures which are cited in support of it, is adopted and enforced in order to prevent people from leaving the organisation and thereby to maintain its membership.

He further said the policy is in conflict with the organisation's professed support for freedom of religious choice and the belief that Jehovah God is a compassionate God who recognises the worth and dignity of all human beings.

Submissions by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia rejected or amended almost all of the suggested findings.