

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/08/04/women-never-rule-jehovahs-church>

4 Aug 2015 - 6:28pm

Women to 'never rule' in Jehovah's church



A royal commission has heard the Jehovah's Witness Church will now report abuse directly to police. (AAP)

A Jehovah's Witness official has told the child sex abuse royal commission they will go to jail rather than break God's law.

**Source:**

AAP

4 Aug 2015 - 12:14 PM UPDATED 4 Aug 2015 - 6:28 PM

A Jehovah's Witness official says the church's stance to never let women hold decision-making roles compares to Muslim and Aboriginal people adhering to their own ancient beliefs.

Rodney Spinks, who advises church elders on how to handle child sex abuse cases, told the sex abuse royal commission on Tuesday women would never make decisions in the Jehovah's Witnesses because it would mean changing a "clear scriptural arrangement".

Commission chair Peter McClellan said the practice did not fit with current understandings of responses to child sex abuse and asked if women could become decision makers because victims often preferred to tell their intimate stories to women.

Mr Spinks said there was no possibility that would happen because the church would not adjust what it saw as "clear instructions" in the Bible.

When Justice McClellan pointed out social and political contexts had changed since the Bible was written, Mr Spinks asked: "Will Muslim people change what they believe is in the Koran, will Aboriginal people change what they believed is in their culture?"

"I think there are just some things that are so deeply a part of their faith and belief system" that they cannot be changed, he said.

Mr Spinks, who runs the service desk at Watchtower Australia - the church's legal entity, was giving evidence on the sixth day of a hearing into how the theocracy deals with sexual abuse allegations.

He and other church witnesses have faced detailed questioning on the internal practice of expecting abuse victims to confront abusers in front of a judicial panel of three elders - all men.

Mr Spinks also said where there was a conflict between the Bible and science, the Bible would prevail, because all scripture is "inspired by God".

Justice McClellan asked what would happen if the law of the country was to prescribe a mode of behaviour which conflicted with the Jehovah's Witness understanding of the Bible.

Mr Spinks: "We would apply the words in the Book of Acts, (fifth book of the New Testament) 529 to obey God as we did in the Second World War (against the Nazis)".

Justice McClellan asked if Witnesses applied St Paul's injunction to Corinthians that women should be kept silent in congregations and not permitted to speak.

Mr Spinks said the verse was being quoted out of context and women in the Jehovah's Witnesses were very outspoken at congregational meetings, but they could not teach.

Church witnesses have repeatedly referred to Watchtower publications as the source of detailed and sensitive advice to congregations on how to deal with child sex abuse victims.

Counsel for the commission, Angus Stewart SC, said the problem for the commission was trying to pin down the source of the policies was like trying to "put your finger on a ball of mercury".

The hearing continues on Wednesday with more witnesses from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia - the church's legal entity.