



# Jehovah's Witnesses can hide the truth in court to protect religion

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On a Friday morning in August, one of the Jehovah's Witnesses top leaders sat before an Australian government commission investigating whether the organization hid child sexual abuse from secular authorities.

That Geoffrey Jackson, one of the seven members of the religion's Governing Body, was being grilled in public captivated a global community of former Witnesses that watched the live stream on their home computers.

During two weeks of hearings, Jackson and members of the organization's top brass in Australia gave hours of sworn testimony, but at least one big question remained: Were any of them telling the truth?

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Since the 1950s, the Witnesses have preached a doctrine allowing Jehovah's followers to deceive anyone outside of the religion if doing so protects the organization. They call it "theocratic warfare."

The policy has taken on a new significance today as Jehovah's Witnesses are coming under scrutiny across continents for enabling and concealing child sexual abusers. Top leaders are being questioned under oath as judges and investigators try to get to the bottom of a global scandal.

A 1957 [article \(https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2428460-theocratic-warfare-lg.html\)](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2428460-theocratic-warfare-lg.html) in The Watchtower magazine – named for the Witnesses' parent corporation, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York – grants permission to Jehovah's followers to hide the truth from “enemies” of the religion. The religion teaches that the world outside the organization is controlled by Satan.

“So in a time of spiritual warfare it is proper to misdirect the enemy by hiding the truth,” the article reads. “Today God's servants are engaged in a warfare, a spiritual, theocratic warfare, a warfare ordered by God against wicked spirit forces and against false teachings.”

The theocratic warfare doctrine teaches that refusing to cooperate with criminal investigations involving Jehovah's Witnesses is sanctioned by God because outsiders are not entitled to the truth.

Although the term theocratic warfare appears in Watchtower literature less and less over time, the organization's leadership still teaches that secrecy is a crucial method of avoiding the scrutiny of the justice system. And there's reason to believe it's still in practice.

For 25 years, Watchtower [policies \(https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/) have directed elders in

all U.S. congregations to hide cases of child sexual abuse from law enforcement agencies as well as their own congregations, according to confidential documents from inside the organization.

Reveal looked at more than a dozen lawsuits and discovered evidence suggesting that Jehovah's Witnesses leaders have either lied under oath or refused to cooperate with secular authorities on the hunt for abusers. In some cases, those elders remain in positions of power in their local congregations.

### **'These three brothers lied in court about this and much more'**

Three Jehovah's Witnesses elders lied under oath about their role in enabling a known child molester to continue abusing children, according to another elder who claims to have knowledge of the events.

In a 2011 lawsuit, Michael Clarke, Gary Abrahamson and Larry Lamerdin, elders in the North Fremont congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, took the stand to face questions about why they didn't report to police that one of their members, Jonathan Kendrick, had confessed to sexually abusing his stepdaughter.

Clarke and Abrahamson testified that they had brought together all of the congregation's elders and instructed them to watch Kendrick closely to make sure he did not abuse more children.

But in a series of 2013 letters

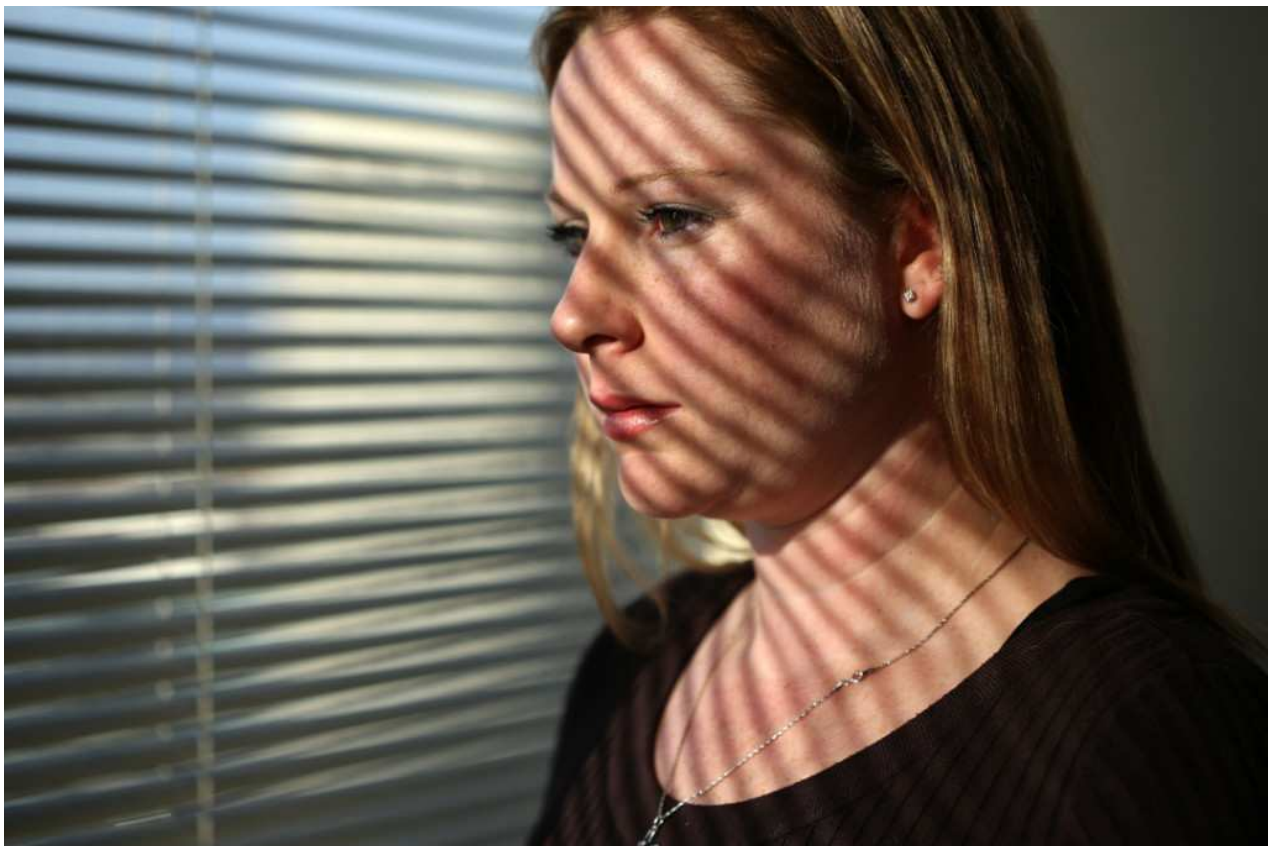
(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2428459-img-921121238-0001.html>) to Jehovah's Witnesses leaders, Rod Francis,

who was an elder in the North Fremont congregation in the 1990s when the abuse occurred, accused the three elders of lying under oath.

“None of the other elders, including myself were aware that a child sexual predator was in our midst even though the offender was in my book study,” he wrote. “Because of this the congregation and our own families were unable to be adequately protected resulting in catastrophic outcomes for other young girls and damage to my own family. These three brothers lied in court about this and much more.”

Francis declined to comment for this story. Reveal obtained his letters from a third party.

Clarke, Abrahamson and Lamerdin did not return calls seeking comment.



*Former Jehovah's Witness Candace Conti, who claimed that she was sexually abused by a congregation member in the 1990s, sued the organization in 2011. The court awarded her \$28 million in damages, a number later reduced to an undisclosed amount.*

Credit: Adithya Sambamurthy/Reveal

The 2011 case was brought against the Watchtower by Candace Conti, who claimed the Witnesses could have prevented her abuse (<https://www.revealnews.org/episodes/the-secrets-of-church-state-and-business/>) by Kendrick in the 1990s by warning the congregation that he had previously abused a child. The court awarded Conti \$28 million in damages, a number later reduced to an undisclosed amount.

Kendrick has confessed to molesting two girls but denies abusing Conti. He was never criminally prosecuted for his alleged crimes against her and remains a Jehovah's Witness in good standing.

### **Why a judge called the Watchtower's omissions 'reprehensible'**

In another California lawsuit against the Witnesses last year, one of the organization's top leaders, Governing Body member Gerrit Lösch, refused to testify.

In that case, a San Diego court looked at allegations that an elder named Gonzalo Campos had sexually abused a Jehovah's Witness boy named Jose Lopez in the 1980s.

Lopez's attorney, Irwin Zalkin, subpoenaed 17 years' worth of records collected by the Watchtower containing the names of known and suspected child sexual abusers in its U.S. congregations. The Watchtower acknowledged that the records existed but refused to hand them over.

Zalkin also subpoenaed Lösch to testify to the Governing Body's role in forming the organization's child abuse policies. On Feb. 5, 2014, Lösch submitted a sworn declaration (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2428458-img-921115847-0001.html>) explaining why he should not have to testify.

“I am not, and have never been, a corporate officer, director, managing agent, member, or employee of Watchtower,” Lösch wrote. “I do not direct, and have never directed, the day-to-day operations of Watchtower. I do not answer to Watchtower. I do not have, and have never had, any authority as an individual to make or determine corporate policy for Watchtower or any department of Watchtower.”

Although Lösch claims he has no power over any department of the Watchtower, internal Watchtower documents show that, as a Governing Body member, he oversaw one of two Watchtower departments that deal with allegations of child abuse, at least until 2014.

Lösch's declaration also directly contradicted the testimony of Watchtower officials in which they said that the Governing Body reviews and approves all Watchtower policies, including those pertaining to child abuse.

Allen Shuster, a senior Watchtower official, said as much during his testimony in the Candace Conti case. When Conti's attorney asked whether the child abuse policies came from the Governing Body, he answered, “That is an accurate statement, yes.”

Shuster continued: “On a high level, review, the Governing Body does establish policies.”

San Diego Superior Court Judge Joan Lewis, who heard the Jose Lopez case, threw the Watchtower's defense out of court for refusing to comply with court orders.

“Watchtower's actions or omissions were ‘reprehensible,’ ” she wrote in her decision.

She also dismissed Lösch's declaration that he, as a Governing Body member, had no power over the Watchtower.

“The award of punitive damages against them will hopefully send a message to Watchtower and its managing agents, the governing body of the Jehovah's Witnesses, that their handling of sex abuse cases within their congregation was absolutely reckless,” she wrote.

Lewis awarded Lopez \$13.5 million.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses are also facing pressure outside the U.S.**

The investigation

(<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-study/636fo1a5-5odb-4b59-a35e-a24ae07fboard/case-study-29,-july-2015,-sydney.aspx>) in Australia has been the most sweeping government inquiry into the Watchtower's child abuse policies to date. Prior to the hearings, investigators uncovered allegations of child sexual abuse against 1,006 Jehovah's Witnesses members in Australia since 1950. None were reported to the police.

Requests to interview Geoffrey Jackson and other Watchtower officials were denied.



The commission lacks the power to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators but has referred some cases to criminal authorities and plans to issue recommendations to the government.

During the hearings, Vincent Toole, the head of the Watchtower's legal department in Australia, was asked (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbhXL4VkPo8>) whether he was aware of the theocratic warfare doctrine.

“Well, I’ve heard the expression,” he said, “but I’m not really sure what it means.”

He was then asked whether Witnesses were allowed to lie to protect Jehovah's name.

“We are truthful,” he said. “To be a Christian, you have to be truthful.”

***Correction:*** *In a previous version of this story, a photo caption incorrectly identified the man Candace Conti accused of sexually abusing her. He was a member of the North Fremont congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The story also incorrectly stated the number of child sexual abuse allegations against Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia; investigators uncovered abuse allegations against 1,006 members in the country since 1950.*

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